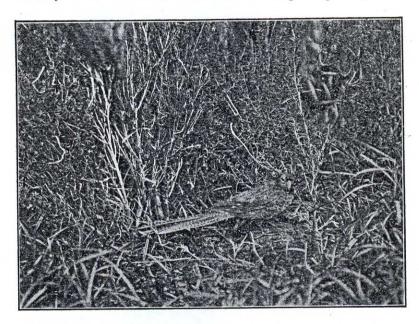
The Ground-Parrot (Pezoporus formosus). By A. H. E. MATTINGLEY, C.M.Z.S.

These beautiful birds are to be sought where the wind goes alternatively sobbing, soughing, whistling, and sighing through the harsh herbage, which renders the bird's light-timbred call difficult of segregation. This separation from other bird-calls and subsequent fixture of the position of the Ground-Parrot's voice is a requisite essential to successful observation and the discovery of the bird and its place of abode without its being startled by being forced to fly up to disclose itself, which act is contrary to its desire and usual habit of comporting itself.



The Ground-Parrot.

PHOTO, BY A. H. E MATTINGLEY, C.M.Z.S.

This interesting bird is local in habit, and can usually be found in the same area of country—moorlands or coastal plains. To seek out a bird one should requisition the services of a well-trained pointer or setter, which can help one considerably to find and flush the bird when desired, or to "point" it out. These birds have a "scent," and dogs can readily "pick up" their trail, run them down, and "set" them. As they go singly or in pairs, and are sparsely distributed, a dog that "ranges" well will soon indicate their presence or absence.

In selecting its home, the Ground-Parrot naturally frequents a type of country that affords a close covert as a protection from observation from above, and in harmony with its own colour;

and as well it chooses a class of growth that permits of the free exercise of its habit of running rapidly through it, but free from observation; and a place which also contains it's food supply, consisting mainly of the seeds of grasses and shrubs and tender

shoots of plants.

The Ground-Parrot has been occasionally encountered in swampy places on uplands, and has also been found on open plains and swampy areas on mountains. Like its congener, the Night-Parrot (Geopsittacus occidentalis), the Ground-Parrot is doomed to early extinction on the mainland of Australia, especially in those parts whereon the foxes are encroaching, in the course of the next few years, as will be shown later on.

The call of the Ground-Parrot is issued in a somewhat warbling fashion, harmonious withal, but conveying a sense of sadness well befitting the nature of its environment. On windy days the note is rarely heard, no doubt on account of its want of fulness and carrying capacity. It appears to be used solely in calling to its mate. As far as could be ascertained, it uses its call as infrequently as possible. The following is the call set to music, and is repeated softly by the bird two or three times generally:-



The notes, therefore, of the last remnants of the *Pezoporus* are not

easily detected.

Ground-Parrots lead a terrestrial life solely, and are never found in trees. I have seen a bird, however, climb up to the height of about one foot on a shrub after some seeds growing thereon. When flushed they fly rapidly away, somewhat after the whirring manner of a Quail, but not so direct, since they zigzag in their course. No fright screech is uttered either when rising from the ground during flight or on capture. When handled the birds bite savagely in defence of their liberty. When flushed they mount up in the air about 4 or 5 feet—usually a foot or two above the herbage-and proceed from 30 yards to even as far as 200 yards should the intervening ground flown over be too open or otherwise unsuitable to alight on as a covert. The late Mr. A. J. North records that on one occasion he noticed birds that he had flushed alight on a fence.

I am informed by an old Quail-shooter who lived by hunting that his retriever dog used, years ago, when the Parrots were plentiful, to run down these birds and frequently capture them. This evidences the fact that it is a difficult matter to flush the birds. I have noticed, once birds have been flushed, if there be plenty of cover available, the Ground-Parrot will not flush again, expose itself, and fly away, but it prefers to trust to its powers of running to place itself beyond danger. They sleep on the

ground at night, and are therefore easily caught by prowling foxes, since the strong scent emitted by them attracts the wily animal. As they nest on the ground, the fox and other predatory creatures, such as domestic cats gone wild, dingoes, native cats, snakes, and lizards have little difficulty in obtaining their eggs or young.

An old correspondent of mine, Mr. Percy Peir, a well-known aviculturist, of Sydney, has kept a pair of these Parrots alive for some years in an aviary where the conditions were more suitable than in the ordinary bird-cage, and where they could run about

on the ground.

Ground-Parrots are exceedingly active and graceful in contour, and the colour of their plumage is as distinctive as the livery of many other Australian Parrots is gaudy. The adult plumage of both sexes is similar, being dark grass-green, or, to be more correct, a bright Rinnemann's green, barred alternately with black and yellow, on the upper surface, and a yellowish-green, barred also alternately with black and yellow, on the lower and abdominal surfaces. The forehead is surmounted with a distinct scarlet-tinged nopal red patch. The feet (which are somewhat large, and have four toes) and legs, adapted for running, are of a fleshy-pink colour tinged with blue-black.*

Their food consists largely of grass-seed, such as that of kangaroo-grass (Anthistiria), fruit of the tea-tree (Melaleuca), wattle (Acacia) seed, and tender shoots of grasses. I am informed by a Quail-shooter that the flesh of the Ground-Parrot is excellent

eating, and equal to that of Quail.

The breeding period ranges through the months of September, October, and November. The eggs usually number three or four to a clutch, are round in form like most Parrots' eggs, and of a glossy white colour, with a shell of fine texture. It is somewhat remarkable that the eggs are not coloured, like those of most ground-nesting birds. Coloured eggs afford some modicum of protection from the prying eye of an enemy. This fact is all the more noticeable when we know that the nest of the Ground-Parrot is simply a somewhat deep hollow in the ground. The nest, which is composed of grasses, is placed in a grass tussock or in a mixture of heath and coarse grass, which, overlapping as a rule, forms an overhead canopy.

Three varieties or sub-species of the Ground-Parrot are recorded for Australasia, viz.:—P. formosus, Latham—range, South Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia; P. flaviventris, North—range, Western Australia; P. leachi,

Mathews-range, Tasmania.

^{*}Little seems to be recorded with reference to the immature plumage of *Pezoporus*. The red patch on the forehead is missing in the immature birds during their infancy, but is represented as they develop by a small dull yellow patch, visible in both sexes. The plumage of the ventral surface generally is more suffused with yellow, whilst the dark marking of the feathers of the throat is much more pronounced.