

## NOTE ON A TASMANIAN "ACANTHIZA"

(BUSH TIT).

[BY COLONEL W. V. LEGGE, F.Z.S., late F.L.S.].

Gould has figured in his work three species of *Acanthizas* from Tasmania, viz: the two common and well-known birds, *Acanthiza chrysorrhæa*, and *A. diemenensis*—the "Yellow tail" and "Brown tail"—and a third, *A. ewingi*, Ewing's *Acanthiza*. This latter species, figured on Plate 35, vol. iii., B. of Australia, is stated to differ from *A. diemenensis* in being a slenderer bird, with a proportionately longer tarsus, and in having a rufous band on the wing, formed by the basal portion of the outer ribs of the primary feathers. It has, however, been expunged from modern treatises on Australian Avifauna, for Mr. Sharpe, in his "Catalogue of Birds," vol. vii., p. 295, unites it with *A. diemenensis*, and Dr. Ramsay has omitted it from his "List of Australian Birds." That there are, however, two species of "Brown tail" in this island is, I am of opinion, tolerably certain, but being closely allied and a sufficient series for comparison not being extant in the national collection at the British Museum, Mr. Sharpe failed to recognise their distinctness. For many years past but little attention has been paid to the smaller species of Tasmanian birds, and comparatively little scientific work done among them. There is, unfortunately, no carefully formed collection of Tasmanian birds in the skin existing in the colony, and very few field notes have been made on the smaller species of forest birds, save in the direction of oology. The consequence is that such points as the specific distinctness, or otherwise, of two little noticed species like these in question is more than likely to have been passed over.

Last December, when visiting an out-of-the-way settlement on the Elephant Hill, near St. Mary's, situated about 1,500 feet above sea level, I met with a solitary bird hopping about the scrub and bushes, on the edge of a clearing, and being attracted by its peculiar note, I procured it, having by chance my gun with me. It proved to be a small *Acanthiza*, very similar to the common "Brown tail," or Tasmanian *Acanthiza*, but differing in having the forehead pale rufescent grey, instead of rufous, and the throat and foreneck with the markings much less pronounced than in the last-named species; in fact the colouration of that part is almost uniform, the centres of the feathers being also slightly darker than the rest of the web. At the base of the outer webs of the primaries there is a narrow rufous band, similar to that shown in Gould's figure, which, however, has the markings of the throat more pronounced than in my specimen, owing to the absence of throat markings. I was inclined to look on

the bird as an immature male of the common Brown Tail, particularly as the month was that in which so many young birds are procurable, but the actions and note of this individual were so totally different from that of the Tasmanian *Acanthiza* that no doubt is left in my mind as to its distinctness. The common species is gregarious, nearly always being found in little parties, which flit about with great zest and activity, uttering in unison their peculiar little note, which may be syllabised, *zit, zit, zit, whoorl*, the latter being somewhat guttural. The note of my new species resembles, *tit, tit, too, woo*, the latter syllables being soft and melodious.

The dimensions of this example were as follow:—

Length, 4.0 inches; wing, from carpal joint, 1.9; tail, 1.9; tances, 0.75; bill, to gape, 0.45. Iris light red (paler than in the common species); bill, brown, slaty at the base; legs and feet dark olive brown. The contents of the stomach were small ants and minute coleoptera, mixed with some curious globular masses, resembling hard seeds. There can be little doubt that this bird is, in reality, the *Acanthiza ewingi* of Gould; which should, therefore, be reinstated in the Tasmanian avifauna.

#### NOTE ON THE VORACITY OF THE KELP FISH.

While fishing for crayfish recently, on the East Coast, I caught a couple of so-called "Kelpfish" in the net. This fish, belonging to the family *Labridæ*, is a favorite bait with fishermen for the crayfish caught in hand nets, and is found in moderately shallow water, sometimes, and at others in deep pools, but always in beds of kelp. On opening the individuals I caught I was surprised to find their stomachs full of the small white, conical, and calcareous shells which cover the tops and sides of rocks, which are covered at high water; but among these were also moderately large limpet shells swallowed whole, the fish, in some instances, being still attached to the shell. Enclosed are some of these shells from the stomach of one of the fish, which was about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lb. in weight. I examined its strong, circular teeth, and found one tooth gone at the point of each jaw, evidently wrenched out by the force of grasping such a strongly attached shell-fish as the limpet. But great as the strength required to detach a limpet, it must be nothing to the grinding, gnawing motion required to tear off the small, scarcely protuberant calcareous shells first mentioned, and with which the stomachs were pretty well filled.

It is a singular trait in the economy of this fish, which leads it to subsist on such an apparently unappetising mass as had formed the meal of these examples just prior to my catching them.