

NOTES ON THE NESTING-SITE OF *GERYGONE*

*PERSONATA*, Gould.

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(Plate lvii.)

Among the animal kingdom, birds, owing usually to their non-combative habits, and lack of powers of retaliation, appear to be highly endowed with instinct enabling them to resort to many stratagems and devices to secure protection, either from an enemy when threatened by danger, or during the usually anxious period of the breeding season. Birds that deposit their eggs on the grassy sward, or nearly bare earth, would appear to stand more in need of a protector than any others, but strange as it may seem, the bare and exposed situation in which the eggs are laid, affords them the very best protection. Take, for instance, the eggs of the Southern Stone Plover (*Burhinus grallarius*) and the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobivanellus lobatus*), how closely in colour do they resemble their surroundings; or the eggs of the Black-faced Dotterel (*Egialitis melanops*), the surrounding pebbles on the margin, or in the dried up bed of a creek or river. The eggs too of the Pratincole (*Stiltia isabella*), so frequently deposited on a sun-baked plain, and as the wheel marks show sometimes right in the centre of the track, how hard they are to distinguish even in their apparently unprotected state. Again the eggs of the Red-capped Dotterel (*Egialitis ruficapilla*) deposited on sandy dunes and sea-beaches, with only a few small pieces of gravel to keep them from rolling away, how closely do they assimilate to their surroundings, and how very difficult they are to discover by the untrained eye. The actions of the birds alone are frequently the only means of discovering them, by their feigning a broken wing or leg. This is where instinct is at fault, for to anyone but a novice it is the most fatal mistake the birds could make, and is a sure indication that either eggs or young are near at hand. Some birds, however, to me appear to be endowed with a certain amount of reasoning powers, for why will the Red-kneed Dotterel (*Erythrogonys cinctus*) when