

## ON TWO EARLY AUSTRALIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS.

By ALFRED J. NORTH, C.M.Z.S., Ornithologist.

(Plate xxvii.).

### JOHN WILLIAM LEWIN.

John William Lewin was the author of the first work published on Australian Birds. He arrived in New South Wales in 1798 by H.M.S. "Buffalo," and is thus referred to by the Duke of Portland in a communication to Governor Hunter, under date 6th February, 1798. "Mr. Lewin is a painter and drawer in natural history, and being desirous of pursuing his studies in a country which cannot fail to improve that branch of knowledge, you will allow him the usual Government rations during his residence in the settlement."<sup>1</sup> In 1801 Lewin accompanied Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony, and others in an exploring expedition up the Hunter and Paterson Rivers, the latter previous to the visit being known as Cedar Arm Surgeon Harris, writing from the Hunter River on 25th June 1801, to Governor King remarks: "The Colonel says he has found several new plants here, and Mr. Lewin also says he has met with new birds. If so, they are above my comprehension, as I see nothing new about them, one hawk excepted, and that only in colour being red with a white head."<sup>2</sup>

In the same vessel which conveyed most of the party during these explorations, the "Lady Nelson," a brig of six guns, Lieutenant Murray, R.N., in February of the following year, discovered and entered Port Phillip.

Probably Lewin obtained the specimens from which his descriptions and figures of the "Scarlet-back Warbler" were taken, during his exploration of these rivers, for in the 1822 edition of his work it is stated that this species "inhabits forests near the banks of Patterson's River." Dr. R. B. Sharpe refers this figure to the Northern and North-western Australian species *Malurus cruentatus*, Gould, but it is unquestionably applicable to the New

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<sup>1</sup> Bladen—Hist. Rec. N. S. Wales, iii., 1895, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Bladen—*Loc. cit.*, p. 417.



South Wales' bird, as is shown by Lewin's remarks. In 1808 Lewin's "Birds of New Holland" was published, the plates being engraved and coloured by the author in the Colony. With the exceptions of the plates in Lewin's "Insects of New South Wales," published by the same author in 1805, these plates were the earliest engravings produced in Australia.

Lewin referred to this edition of his work as "The Birds of New South Wales," and not "The Birds of New Holland," the latter a title it must have received in London, where the letterpress was printed. In *The Sydney Gazette*, of Sunday, November 20, 1808, is the following advertisement:—

"Mr. J. Lewin begs leave to acquaint the Officers, Civil and Military, and their Ladies who honoured with their Names the List of Subscribers to his intended Work, entitled 'The Birds of New South Wales with their Natural History,' that he has received advices promising the Transmittal, by the next arrival, of the Copies of the first volume subscribed for here.

This work, which Mr. Lewin has for many years laboured to render as perfect as he was able, will comprise several Volumes painted, engraved and described from the birds as soon as taken. Each Volume will contain Eighteen Plates with one or more birds on each Plate; many of which are new, beautiful, and some of new genera.

The copies, which will be elegantly printed on an Imperial Quarto, will be delivered as soon as they are received, with every respectful Acknowledgement to those who were kind enough to patronise his exertions in the Colony.

No. 44 Chapel Row."

Four years later, in *The Sydney Gazette*, of Saturday, August 1, 1812, is the following:—

"A CARD.

Mr. J. W. Lewin, begs leave to inform his friends and the Public in general, that he intends opening an Academy for Painting on the Days of Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from the hours of 10 to 12 in the Forenoon."

In the National Art Gallery, Sydney, there is a water-colour by Lewin, entitled "Sydney in 1808." On the 25th April, 1815, Lewin, as painter and naturalist, accompanied Governor Macquarie on his tour over the Blue Mountains.<sup>3</sup> In the Appendix to Wentworth's "Description of the Colony of New South Wales"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> O'Hara—Hist. N. S. Wales, 1818, p. 440.

<sup>4</sup> Wentworth—p. 437, 1819.



is a List of Civil Establishments and Public Institutions in the Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies. Among the Committee of the Police Fund of the Police Establishment at Sydney, the name of Mr. Lewin appears as Coroner.

Lewin died in 1819, and was buried in the Devonshire Street Cemetery, his remains, with others buried there, being transferred a few years ago to the northern shore of Botany Bay, to make room for the new metropolitan railway station at Redfern. The inscription on Lewin's tomb in this cemetery, which is mid-way between Botany and La Perouse, is as follows :—

“ Here Rests  
the Body of J. W. LEWIN, Esq.  
Coroner  
who departed this Life  
the 27th of August, 1819  
Aged 49 Years  
After a severe Illness  
which he bore  
With Christian Fortitude  
Leaving a disconsolate  
Widow and Son  
to Lament his Loss  
a Loss  
also felt by his few Friends  
who knew him.  
In him the Community has been  
Deprived of an honest Man  
and this country of an  
Eminent Artist  
in his Line of  
Natural History Painting  
In which he excelled.  
He is gone  
Depending upon the Mercies  
of his God  
through an atoning Saviour  
Who Writes  
‘ Our Virtues on Adamant  
Our Vices on a Wave.’  
A Friend  
has given this Tribute  
To his Memory.”



About a mile farther on, at La Perouse, the remains of P  re le Receveur are buried, and a memorial erected to his memory. He was one of the naturalists in the French Expedition, under the command of the illustrious, but ill-fated La Perouse, and died on the 17th February, 1788.

Three years after Lewin's decease a re-issue was published in London, in 1822, entitled "A Natural History of the Birds of New South Wales, collected, engraved, and faithfully painted after Nature, by John William Lewin, A.L.S., late of Parramatta, New South Wales." It contained twenty-six plates, being eight more than in the original edition published by Lewin in 1808. The watermark on the plates of the 1822 edition is J. Whatman 1822, and on the paper of the accompanying letterpress the same maker's name, with date 1821. All the species are described under vernacular names only. There is a copy of this edition in the Australian Museum Library, also one purporting to be of the same issue and date, but the watermark on the plates is 1875! Attention has already been drawn to this issue in circulation in a bookseller's descriptive catalogue. The Museum copy of the 1822 edition could never have been "painted after nature" by Lewin, for the base of the forehead and sides of the head of the Crested Shrike are painted yellow, where they should be white.

A second re-issue bearing the same title was published in London in 1838, nineteen years after Lewin's death. A copy of this work has been kindly lent me for examination by the Hon. Dr. Jas. Norton, M.L.C. Below the title is as follows: "New and improved edition, to which is added a list of the 'synonymes' of each species, incorporating the labours of 'T.' Gould, Esq., N. A. Vigors, Esq., J. Horsfield, M.D. and W. Swainson, Esq." The plates are far more accurately coloured than in the genuine 1822 edition, and bear the watermark of 1838. The watermark on the explanation of plates is 1821. Although two pages of synonyms compiled by Eyton follow the title pages, all the species appear under Lewin's vernacular names. In the "Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum,"<sup>5</sup> Dr. H. Gadow gives a reference "*Certhia fulvifrons*, Lewin, Bds. N.S.W., pl. 22 (1838)." This reference cannot be attributed to Lewin, who had been dead for so many years. Both in the 1822 and 1838 editions this species is referred to in the Explanation to Plate xxii. as the "White-breasted Honey-sucker," and by Eyton in the 1838 edition as *Glyciphila fulvifrons*. Moreover, Lewin is not the authority for the specific name of *Glyciphila fulvifrons*, but Vigors and Hors-

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<sup>5</sup> Gadow—Cat. Birds Brit. Mus., ix., 1884, p. 210.



field, who described this species in the "Transactions of the Linnean Society," in 1826, under the name of *Meliphaga fulvifrons*.

Although I have never heard of one, there may be copies of Lewin's original work in private libraries in Australia, more especially in New South Wales, the early settlers in Sydney subscribing between them for sixty-seven copies. Only six copies were subscribed for in London. The Melbourne and Adelaide Public Libraries, I have been informed by their respective Librarians, do not possess a copy. With a manuscript title-page bearing the date of publication as 1813! and without an index, there is one in the Sydney Public Library, presumably an authentic copy of the original edition. It has, however, been reduced in size, both in the letterpress and the size of the plates, the latter eighteen in number, the same as in the first issue, being cut off close to the tinted background, doing away at the same time with the engraver's name and date. The numbers on the plates are marked in with pencil, and the accompanying letterpress is under the vernacular names only. The plates are crudely coloured and the watermark thereon is G. Ansell 1809. The male of *Pachycephala gutturalis*, which is figured under the name of "Orange-breast Thrush," has the throat erroneously coloured yellow instead of white, a glaring mistake which could hardly have been perpetrated by Lewin.

Mr. J. J. Fletcher, the Secretary of the Linnean Society of New South Wales, to who I am indebted for some early references to Lewin, has also kindly brought under my notice three original drawings of Lewin's in the possession of the Society. They were the property of the late Sir William Macleay. The species figured are *Origma rubricata*, *Pachycephala rufiventris*, and *Pachycephala gutturalis*. All are under vernacular names only, and the watermark on the paper on one of the m.s. explanations of the plates is "A. Stace 1798."

#### JOHN GILBERT.

(Plate xxvii.).

The labours of John Gilbert are so well known, and so closely interwoven in connection with those of John Gould in the latter's great work on "The Birds of Australia," that it is unnecessary to enter into but few details relative to the accompanying plate. Gilbert had been for many years in the employment of the Zoological



Society of London, and had there worked under Gould. After Gould determined to visit Australia to procure material for his new work, he appointed Gilbert his assistant, who made valuable field notes and large collections of bird skins, principally in the Northern and Western portions of the continent. Gilbert returned to England in 1841 and revisited Australia in the following year, procuring more information and specimens in South-western Australia. He continued the good work in 1844 and 1845, while accompanying Dr. Leichardt and his party on their overland expedition from Moreton Bay towards Port Essington, and where, during the journey, he treacherously met his death at the hands of the natives. The following account of the tragic occurrence was sent to Gould by Mr. John Roper, one of the members of the expedition, after his return to Sydney, and was published in the "Proceedings of the Zoological Society" in 1846.<sup>6</sup> As the early volumes of the Society's Proceedings are accessible to only a comparatively few students of Australian ornithology it is here fully transcribed.

"Sydney, 12th May, 1846.

Dear Sir,—As I was one of the party that journeyed from Sydney to Port Essington, and not knowing whether you had been made acquainted with the full particulars of poor Gilbert's death, by Dr. Leichardt or any of the party, thinking the details of his melancholy fate would be read with interest, I shall offer no apology for addressing this to you.

As Mr. Gilbert's log, which has been sent home to you, fully narrates all particulars up to the eventful 28th of June [1845], I shall offer no remarks of my own. At the most northerly point we reached on the east side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, in Lat.  $15^{\circ} 57'$ , and about fifty miles from the coast, we encamped for the night at a small shallow lagoon surrounded by low tea-trees, the country around beautifully open. Having partaken of our usual meal of dried meat about 3 p.m., Gilbert, taking his gun, sallied forth in search of something new—he procured a *Climacteris* and a Finch, which he skinned before dinner; our scanty meal was soon despatched; poor Gilbert was busily employed plaiting the cabbage tree, intending to make a new hat, which, alas! he never lived to finish. The shades of evening closed around, and after chatting for a short time we returned to our separate tents—Gilbert and Murphy to theirs, Mr. Calvert and myself to ours, and Phillips to his; the Doctor and our two black-

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<sup>6</sup> Roper—Pro. Zool. Soc., 1846, pp. 79-80.



fellows slept around the fire, entirely unconscious of the evil designs of the natives ; having always found those we had passed so friendly and well disposed, we felt in as great security as you do in the midst of London, lying on our blankets, conversing on different topics. Not one could have closed his eyelids, when I was surprised by a noise as if some persons were throwing sticks at our tent ; thinking it must be some trick played on us by our companions, I sat up and looked out ; another volley of spears ; a terrific yell, that will ring in my ears for ever, was raised, and pierced with spears, which I found it impossible to extricate, I sunk helpless on the ground ; the whole body rushed upon us with their waddies, and how it is that our brains did not bespatter the ground, is to me miraculous. These rascals had crept on us under cover of the tea-trees, the tent where Calvert and I were being first in their road, the whole body attacked us ; poor Gilbert, hearing the noise, was rushing from his tent with his gun, when a spear was thrown at him, pierced his breast, and penetrating to his lungs caused internal hæmorrhage ; the only words he spoke were these, "Charlie take my gun, they have killed me," when pulling out the spear with his own hands he immediately dropped upon the ground lifeless. Little Murphy, who was by his side at the time he was speared, fired at the black-fellow who had speared him ; Brown fired at the mob beating Calvert and myself, and they immediately retreated, howling and lamenting. Mr. Calvert was pierced with five spears, myself with six, and our recovery is to be attributed to the abstemious way in which we lived. After having the spears pulled out, you may imagine our feelings when we heard Charlie exclaim, "Gilbert is dead"—we could not, would not believe it. Alas ! the morning brought no better tidings—poor Gilbert was consigned to his last and narrow home, the prayers of the Church of England were read over him, and a large fire made upon his grave for the purpose of misleading the blacks, who we thought, would probably return and search the camp upon our departure. It is impossible to describe the gloom and sorrow the fatal accident cast upon our party. As a companion none was more cheerful or agreeable ; as a man none more indefatigable or more persevering ; but it is useless for me to eulogize one so well known to you—one whom you will have cause to regret, and who will ever be remembered by,

Sir,

Yours most truly,

JOHN ROPER."

Although Gilbert was buried in a lonely grave in North Queensland he was not forgotten, "unhonoured, unwept, unsung."



In the historic S. James Church of England, Sydney, built during Governor Macquarie's time in 1820, a mural tablet was erected to his memory by the colonists of New South Wales.<sup>7</sup> Among others, many tablets adorn its walls to perpetuate the memory of different persons closely associated with the early history of the colony. Next to Gilbert's is a tablet erected by the Executive Government to the memory of Edmund Kennedy, Explorer, who was killed by the natives on the 13th December, 1848, and of his nine companions who perished during the exploration of York Peninsula. Among the latter, was Thomas Wall, Naturalist, brother to the first Curator of the Australian Museum. There are also tablets to the memory of William Wentworth, William Sharp Macleay and Alexander Macleay, the latter a member of Committee of the Australian Museum from its first commencement in 1836, until his decease on the 19th July, 1848.

The accompanying plate is reproduced from a photograph taken with the kind permission of the Rev. W. I. Carr-Smith, Rector of S. James Church.

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<sup>7</sup> A slight error occurs in the date, Gilbert was speared on the 28th, not the 29th of June, 1845.





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