

*RAPERIA GODMANÆ.*A NEW BIRD FROM LORD HOWE ISLAND, NOW  
EXTINCT.

BY GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

REFERRING to the early British settlements in New South Wales many books were published, and these were all prepared by different members of the same expeditions. Much of the matter is repeated, of necessity. One of the striking items was the discovery of Lord Howe Island, when one of the ships was on voyage between Sydney and Norfolk Island. The first publication was probably that entitled, "The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay," dated 1789.

On p. 86 we read: "A small island, but entirely uninhabited, was discovered by Lieutenant Ball in his passage to Norfolk Island. In his return he examined it, and found that the shore abounded with turtle but there was no good anchorage. He named it *Lord Howe Island*." This was on February 17th, 1788.

On the 6th of May we read (p. 108): "The 'Supply' sailed to Lord Howe Island for turtle," and on the 25th (p. 111), "The 'Supply' tender returned from Lord Howe Island, but unfortunately without having been able to procure any turtle."

On p. 177, Chapter XVII. commences with an account of Rio de Janeiro, Norfolk Isle and Lord Howe Isle: "The following particulars respecting those places have very obligingly been communicated to the editor by Lieutenant Henry Lidgbird Ball." On p. 182, regarding Lord Howe Island, is written: "On the shore there are plenty of ganets, and a land-fowl, of a dusky brown colour, with a bill about four inches long, and feet like those of a chicken; these proved remarkably fat, and were very good food; but we have no further account of them. There are also many



very large pigeons, and the white birds resembling the Guinea-fowl, which were found at Norfolk Island, were seen here also in great numbers. The bill of this bird is red, and very strong, thick and sharp-pointed."

On p. 255 in Lieutenant Watts' narrative a more detailed account of the bird-life is given, but the lines I wish to emphasize at this time read: "Very large pigeons were also met with in great plenty: likewise beautiful parrots and parroquets."

Page 250 records how the Scarborough transport, also in May, 1788, called for turtle at Lord Howe Island and found none, but "they brought off a quantity of fine birds, sufficient to serve the ship's crew three days; many of them were very fat, somewhat resembling a Guinea-hen, and proved excellent food."

On p. 273 the White Gallinule is described from "Lord Howe's Island, Norfolk Island and other places" and a plate given, but with regard to the "very large pigeons" I find "no further account of them."

The next book to be published was the Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales, by John White, which appeared early in 1790. White was very interested in Natural History, and writing of the discovery of Lord Howe Island stated: "They also found on it, in great plenty, a kind of fowl. . . . These not being birds of flight, nor in the least wild, the sailors, availing themselves of their gentleness and inability to take wing from their pursuits, easily struck them down with sticks. There were also many birds of the Dove kind, as tame as the former, and caught with equal facility. Some of them were brought alive to this place."

Many birds are figured, among them being the White Fulica described on p. 238 and named *Fulica alba*, but nothing more is given in connection with the Pigeon.

Search through other narratives and accounts has revealed no more mention of this Pigeon and it has passed entirely into obscurity. As a matter of fact I had doubted its existence, as the accounts quoted above are all second-hand, and Pigeons



were common at Norfolk Island and I suspected confusion had occurred on this account. That this was a reasonable conclusion is evident from a study of these early descriptions where Norfolk Island birds were localised as from Sydney, and the "Norfolk Island Pigeon" so named by Latham is the Sydney bird and not the Norfolk Island species.

Dr. Godman has brought to my notice a book of paintings in his possession made by Mr. George Raper who went to Sydney in the "Supply" and returned in the "Waaksamheyd." These paintings are of great interest as supplementing those given in the narratives published, but most interesting of all is a magnificent painting of the Pigeon of Lord Howe Island. The other paintings of birds, animals and fishes are beautiful and exact and consequently this picture must be so.

Dr. Godman has given me permission to reproduce the painting, which will give a better idea of the bird than a detailed description.

In coloration it will be seen to be very different from any living species and it is impossible to exactly allot it to any known genus. It is referable to the group of large Fruit-Pigeons, but has no near relationship with *Hemiphaga*, the extinct Pigeon of Norfolk Island, which was only subspecifically separable from the existing New Zealand Pigeon. It recalls much more the New Caledonian *Phænorhina*, and consequently is of much greater value than might at first be anticipated. The relationships of Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island have long been a source of inquiry, and I have already noted in this Journal, Vol. I., p. 121, 1912, my intention to fully discuss these, but there indicated that the avian element of Lord Howe Island was more certainly of New Caledonian origin than Neozelanic. This newly-discovered painting is confirmatory evidence of an immensely strong character that my views were correct. It certainly has no claim to Neozelanic origin, while its nearest living relative seems to be a New Caledonian bird. As noted above, it is impossible to place it in any known genus or species, and I therefore propose

RAPERIA, gen. nov.



Mathews, Gregory Macalister. 1915. "Raperia godmanae. A new bird from Lord Howe Island, now extinct." *Austral avian record; a scientific journal devoted primarily to the study of the Australian avifauna* 3, 21–24.

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