

From Magazines, &c.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRDS.—Mr. W. R. Ogilvie-Grant is well known by repute to students of ornithology, and his first critical notes on Australian birds are welcomed.

These notes appear in *The Ibis* (October, 1909) under the title "On a Collection of Birds from Western Australia, with Field Notes by Mr. G. C. Shortridge." The collection is representative, having been made in the South-Western, Central, and Western divisions of the State, and was presented to the British Museum by Mr. W. E. Balston. Mr. Ogilvie-Grant has "discovered" several novelties in the "Balston collection," which he has named respectively *Certhionyx occidentalis*, *Zosterops shortridgei*, *Z. balstoni*, *Climacteris wellsi*, *Malurus bernieri*, and *Sericornis balstoni*, a beautiful coloured plate being devoted to the two last-mentioned species.

Some of Mr. Ogilvie-Grant's novelties—notably *Certhionyx* and the two *Zosterops*—have passed through Australian hands, but not sufficient difference was detected to warrant separation from the accepted species. However, it is anticipated that Mr. Gregory M. Mathews will carefully weigh all possible evidence before he admits climatic or other variations in form as distinct species into his new standard work on "The Coloured Figures of the Birds of Australia."

Mr. Ogilvie-Grant has suggested an amalgamation himself regarding a common species, one of the "Magpies" or Crow-Shrikes. Mr. Shortridge's field note (p. 670) states that "The Long-billed Magpie (*Gymnorhina longirostris*, Milligan) is not uncommon on the Gascoyne River, where it takes the place of the *G. dorsalis*, Campbell, of the South-Western and Central divisions." Mr. Ogilvie-Grant proceeds to treat the latter species as synonymous with *G. leuconota*, Gray, of Eastern Australia, notwithstanding his critical description of the Western skins does not apply to those of the Eastern form. Mr. Ogilvie-Grant also does not think it possible to distinguish the Eastern from the Western form of the Scarlet-breasted Robins—*Petræca leggei* and *P. campbelli*.

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THE BIRDS OF LORD HOWE AND NORFOLK ISLANDS.—In *The Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*, vol. xxxiv., part 4, 27th October, 1909, Mr. A. F. Basset Hull, Sydney, has published an interesting and valuable treatise under the foregoing sub-heading.

There have been many fragments published of the birds of Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, but nothing so completely written as the treatise under review, which has the advantage of being interwoven with the author's own observations. Mr. Basset Hull visited Lord Howe Island from the 3rd to the 17th

October, 1907, and Norfolk Island from 8th October to 15th November, 1908, his primary object being to see the immense flocks of Terns and other sea-birds during their breeding season, and at the same time to glean some information respecting land-birds.

About 80 species, the majority Australian, are dealt with systematically, with references to previous literature, habitat, and field observations, while the descriptions and dimensions of eggs enhance the oological value of the article. Particularly interesting are the remarks written under the heading of the "Big Hill Mutton-Bird" of Norfolk Island, whether it is *Æstre-lata neglecta*, Schlegel, or *Æ. phillipii*, Grey.

"With every possible deference to the authorities who have merged *Æ. phillipii* into *Æ. neglecta*," writes Mr. Basset Hull, "I am of opinion that the birds represent two distinct species. Further information as to the description and habitat of *Æ. neglecta* may be anticipated from the investigations of Messrs. T. Iredale and party, who spent nearly the whole year 1908 on the Kermadecs."*

The following table of Mr. Basset Hull shows a marked dissimilarity of the four kinds of birds, their habits, and their breeding seasons :—

Species.	Bird.	Nest.	Egg.	Breeding Season.
Lord Howe Petrel.	Uniform in colour.	At end of a burrow.	...	July-August.
Norfolk Island Petrel.	"	"	2.14 × 1.62	January.
<i>Æ. neglecta</i> (Sunday Island).	Very variable in colour.	In the open.	2.44-2.6 × 1.67-1.85.	October-November.
<i>Æ. neglecta</i> , var. (Meyer Island).	"	"	2.47 × 1.62-1.86.	April-May.

There certainly appears to be at least two species or varieties of birds—those uniform in colour of Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, which lay in burrows, and those variable in colour of the more southerly Kermadecs, which lay in the open, except it be that in the case of the birds nesting in the open—the only Petrel known to do so, consequently differing from other Petrels, that breed in darkness underground—their environment may cause the particoloured offspring, similar to the Biblical statement of the patriarch of old and the "ring-straked, speckled, and spotted" cattle.

Mr. Basset Hull's remarks on the familiar Mutton-Bird

* The result of Mr. Iredale's investigations appears in this issue of *The Emu*, pp. 13-15.—EDS.

(*Puffinus tenuirostris*) are also exceedingly interesting, and the reader can contrast a "rookery" on Lord Howe Island in a beautiful palm-glade, where the interlacing foliage excludes the sun's rays, with a "rookery" in the open on some grassy island in Bass Strait. Of interest, too, is his chapter on the snow-white Tern (*Gygis alba*), that lays its single egg on the bare bark or knot-hole of the limb of a tree.

Six excellent photo.-reproductions of nests and eggs accompany the article.

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NEW ZEALAND BIRD NOTES.—Interesting notes on New Zealand bird-life may always be looked for in the Nature Study column which Mr. James Drummond, F.L.S., F.Z.S., conducts for the *Lyttelton Times*. In a recent issue Mr. Drummond quotes extensively from a letter written by Mr. P. J. O'Regan regarding a visit to the Inangahua Valley, West Coast. "It is absolutely certain," writes Mr. O'Regan, "that our ground birds will disappear in a few years unless we have them placed in sanctuaries, preferably some islands adjacent to New Zealand. Once, when I was a member of Parliament, I tried to have a clause inserted in the *Animals Protection Act*, making it a punishable offence to introduce cats, weasels, and similar animals on to any island near the New Zealand coast, but my attempt failed, I don't know why. It is certain that something should be done in earnest before it is too late. I do not know if there are any ground birds on the Auckland and other southern islands; if not, you ought to get up an agitation to have Wekas, Kiwis, and other birds placed there."

"On this occasion," says Mr. Drummond, "Mr. O'Regan spent three weeks in the Inangahua Valley. He heard a Kiwi only three times, and he did not either see or hear a Weka once. Yet these birds, until quite recently, were as plentiful as in the days of the first settlers. Everybody with whom he discussed the position told him that the Weka had disappeared as completely as if the countryside had been swept by fire. There is no doubt in his mind as to the cause of this extermination. He blames the stoats and weasels, which are plentiful in all places, from proximity of settlement to the virgin bush, and which destroy the eggs and young birds. Rivers are not often insuperable obstacles to the pests, and no locality seems to be safe from their ravages. A settler told him that two years ago a weasel's nest, found in the Motupiko Valley, contained no fewer than 30 young birds—Tuis, Robins, Sparrows, Tomtits, Parrakeets, and others. Things that Mr. O'Regan saw and heard of during his holiday lead him to dissent from Mr. Mackenzie's statement that the Weka is able to fight the stoat and weasel; he believes that no native bird is immune from the danger the presence of these creatures implies.

"In recent years, in all parts of the West Coast, there has been a notable decrease in the numbers of the Pigeons and the Kakas, and Mr. O'Regan is more firmly convinced than ever that this has

resulted mainly from the presence of vast flocks of berry-eating Starlings, Thrushes, and Blackbirds, which eat the berries even before they are ripe, and leave little for the luckless native birds. He makes stoats and weasels share the blame in regard to the Pigeons and the Kakas, as several bushmen told him that the vermin attack the nests of all birds, whether they are in trees or on the ground. His observations show that the general decrease in numbers does not apply to the 'Morepork' Owl, the Kingfisher, and the Fantail. The Fantail, indeed, is probably more plentiful now than it ever was before. The Tui is holding its own fairly well. He saw no Blue Ducks during his visit. He was told that this native is still seen in remote mountain streams, but he cannot understand how it can combat an enemy which has defeated the Weka. He admits that there may be cases in which a Weka, which is a game and powerful fighter, and is accustomed to dealing with rats, has successfully fought a weasel, but he points out that there is no doubt that, during the past five years, the Weka has disappeared from forests where it had flourished for years. 'To anyone who is acquainted with the West Coast as I am,' he says, in concluding this part of his letter, 'it was a painful experience to spend three weeks in the bush without hearing a Weka.' "

In another issue are some excellent notes on the Huia, as follow : —" Mr. Gregor M'Gregor, of Wanganui, knew the Huia in the early days of settlement, when this bird was fairly plentiful in parts of the Rimutaka, Tararua, and Ruahine Ranges, and was found, in fact, over the whole of the country drained by the Manawatu, Rangitikei, and Hautapu Rivers. He has seen dozens of Huias on occasions when he made his way through the forests. He states that they come readily when their whistle is imitated by a human being. They have a very acute sense of hearing, and will come from a distance of over 100 yards. They do not usually fly down, but run or hop along the ground, usually coming down the open slope of a hill. He has never seen Huias singly ; they have always been in pairs. They are snared, but always on the ground, and never on a tree. They are more in evidence on foggy or wet days. In the summer time they go high up the ranges ; in the winter the snow on the mountain-tops drives them down to lower altitudes. There is usually a great deal of rimu, maitai, and birch timber in their forest haunts. Many large rimu trees fall to the ground and decay, and offer homes to huhu grubs, for which the Huias have a marked weakness. At one time, Mr. M'Gregor adds, Huias were very plentiful near Taihape. He feels strongly that determined efforts should be made to catch some for liberation on the bird sanctuaries. The female lays up to three, four, or five eggs in a season, four being quite common, and he is convinced that the birds would thrive well on the sanctuaries, where they would be protected from all natural enemies, including man—the most relentless of all."

A note on the White-eye (*Zosterops cærulescens*):—" The White-

eyes, apparently, made their appearance on the Chatham Islands about the same time as they came from Australia to New Zealand. Mr. A. Shand, who has lived on the islands for 55 years, states that he saw these birds for the first time about a year after his arrival. They were strangers to the Chatham Islands Maoris, who were greatly interested in the new arrivals. The Hauhau prisoners from Poverty Bay, who were placed in custody on the islands in 1868, caught large numbers of White-eyes for food. The favourite method was by the use of eel baskets. These baskets are made with a very narrow opening, arranged half-way down the length of the basket, the reeds sloping up from one end to the entrance. The birds, like the eels, entered the baskets to get the bait, but could not find the end of the entrance again, and were captured."

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A COLLECTION OF SUB-FOSSIL BIRD AND ANIMAL REMAINS FROM KING ISLAND, BASS STRAIT.—In the *Memoirs of the National Museum*, Melbourne, No. 3 (February, 1910), Prof. Baldwin Spencer, C.M.G., and Mr. J. A. Kershaw, F.E.S., have collated some interesting material concerning the species of Emu once inhabiting King Island, but now extinct. With the assistance of a local resident, Mr. Kershaw, in November, 1908, and again in January, 1909, collected a large number of vertebrate remains among the sand-dunes of South Point. These included many Emu bones. The writers are further indebted to the Tasmanian Museum authorities for specimens, and the whole collection under notice comprises :—

1. Sixty-four femora.
2. Forty-one tibio-tarsi.
3. Seventy tarso-metatarsi.
4. Four pelves of which the total length can be measured, and parts of sixteen others.
5. Parts of six skulls.
6. One pectoral arch.
7. Portions of three sterna.
8. Fourteen fibulæ.
9. Ribs.
10. Vertebral bodies.
11. Toe bones.

These remains were chiefly distributed over the sand-dunes on the extreme southern portion of the island. The area covers some 300 acres in extent, and the sand is constantly moving and sifting out the bones, which then are to be picked up in the troughs. Wallaby remains are the most numerous, but mixed up with them are parts of Emus, wombats, and dasyures, in a fair state of preservation, with here and there portions of skeletons of both seals and sheep (these latter are apparently later additions).

The first Emu remains from King Island were procured by Mr. A. G. Campbell, in November, 1902 [see *The Emu*, vol. iii., (1903), p. 113], and were presented to the National Museum. They were a thigh-bone and a pelvis, and were found on the margin of the Martha Lavinia Lagoon, near the north end of the island. They were taken to be small specimens of the Australian mainland species (*Dromæus novæ-hollandiæ*). The more complete series of bones obtained later by the Tasmanian Museum enabled Prof. Spencer to definitely describe a new species, to which the name of *Dromæus minor* was given [see *Victorian Naturalist*, vol. xxiii. (1906), p. 140].

In the following table are given the measurements of bones of six specimens of *Dromæus novæ-hollandiæ*, of the large series of the King Island form (*D. minor*), and the measurements of the one skeleton extant of *D. peroni*,* the extinct Kangaroo Island Emu. In the case of the King Island form three series of measurements are given—the minimum, the maximum, and those between which lie the great majority of the measurements :—

—	<i>D. novæ-hollandiæ.</i>	<i>D. minor.</i>	<i>D. peroni.</i>
	mm.	mm.	mm.
Skull, length	90-91	58-62	80
„ width	75-76	54-56	66
Femur	217-243	140, 150-180, 186	180
Tibio-tarsus	415-446	265, 270-320, 363	342
Tarso-metatarsus	335-411	216, 220-280, 292	290
Pelvis, length	440-442	249-292	340
„ width in front	80-105	64	75
„ width behind	105-113	78-84	92

It is not, therefore, a matter for surprise, judging by what has taken place in insular differentiation of Ratite birds in New Guinea and the islands adjacent to the north of Australia, that King and Kangaroo Islands, and Tasmania† as well, should each possess its own species of Emu.

From the large series of remains a diagnosis is then given :—

DROMÆUS MINOR.

Size varying considerably, but always much smaller than that of *D. novæ-hollandiæ* ; not exceeding that of *D. peroni*, but of more robust build. Tibio-tarsus rarely exceeding 330 mm., most usually from 270 to 320 mm., in greatest length. Tarso-metatarsus rarely exceeding 280 mm., most usually from 220 to 280 mm., in greatest length. Frontal region of skull decidedly

* In Paris Museum.

† See *The Emu*, vol. vi. (1907), p. 116.

dome-shaped. Length of skull from frontal suture to occiput not or only slightly exceeding 60 mm. Greatest width of skull not or only slightly exceeding 55 mm.

Habitat.—King Island, Bass Strait. Now extinct.

It is very interesting to know that the remains of eggs were frequently met with, either in small fragments in the loose sand or in patches embedded in the firmer soil beneath. In one or two instances fully half the shell was found completely flattened out and fractured into small fragments, with the surface more or less removed by the action of the driving sand.

The original discovery of an Emu on the islands of Bass Strait was made in 1802. In December of that year Baudin, in his exploring ships, *Géographe*, *Naturaliste*, and *Casuarina*, visited Kangaroo Island, from which they carried three Emus alive to Paris. A little later four naturalists of the expedition were left stranded at Sea Elephant Bay, King Island, while the ships stood out to sea, owing to bad weather. They were fortunate in reaching a sealers' camp, the chief man among whom, Cowper by name, entertaining the Frenchmen in his quarters. An account is published of the naturalists seeing two "Casoars" hanging in the larder, and closely questioning Cowper, who said he had killed over 300 birds, his dog being specially trained for the purpose. It is singular that the naturalists did not procure any specimens of the bird, though the descriptions accurately fit an Emu. They may have considered it identical with the Kangaroo Island bird. It is a matter of great regret that in the early days of Australian exploration so few specimens of the fauna of these islands were preserved.

This "Memoir" is well illustrated with eight large photo-plates.

Reviews.

[“Ornithologists at Warunda Creek.”]

CAPTAIN S. H. White, of South Australia, has issued, under the above title, a neat little *brochure*, which is a pleasantly written "Record of the A.O.U.'s Expedition to Eyre Peninsula, October, 1909, with Notes on Ornithology, Botany, and Entomology." The "Record" may be taken as supplementary to the official report of Mr. Robert Hall, C.M.Z.S., which appeared in *The Emu*, vol. ix., p. 123, and contains an interesting narrative and independent bird observations. Capt. White has added the Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) and the familiar Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*)—its most westerly recorded range—to the list of birds, while he holds that the *Strepera* observed was not *melanoptera*. Mr. J. W. Mellor has since described the bird as *fusca* (see present issue of *The Emu*, p. 34).



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