

The Eyrean Grass-Wren (*Amytornis goyderi*) A Third Specimen

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The Eyrean Grass-Wren (*Amytornis goyderi*) has never been recorded in the field since six examples were collected in 1874. Until recently only the two specimens in the British Museum (ex Gould Collection) were known to be in existence; they are the types of the ♂ ? and the ♀ ? of the species as described in 1875 by Gould (1). It is from these two skins that Gould (2) figured the Eyrean Grass-Wren in 1876. A reproduction of Gould's plate was published in *The Emu* (3) in 1923, together with a brief note by A. J. Campbell.

Gould received his two skins in 1875 from F. G. Waterhouse, Curator of the South Australian Institute Museum. They were obtained by F. W. Andrews, collector and naturalist of the Lake Eyre Expedition of 1874-5, dispatched by the South Australian Government, under the command of J. W. Lewis.

While examining the type specimens of birds in the Australian Museum, Sydney, recently, I noticed a third specimen of the Eyrean Grass-Wren. This skin came into the possession of the Museum when the 'Dobroyde' collection was purchased in 1896. Thus it has remained in obscurity, unhonoured and unsung, for nearly fifty years. The 'Dobroyde' collection was formed by Dr. E. P. Ramsay principally between the years 1860-1890. Two labels in the handwriting of Dr. Ramsay are attached to the skin. They read—

- (a) '*Amytis goyderi*, Gld. co-type of the sp. fr. F. G. Waterhouse, Adelaide, S.A. 1865,' and on the reverse side, 'Ex Dobroyde Museum, co-type of the species, from Mr. Waterhouse, E.P.R.'
- (b) '*Amytis goyderi*, Gld. Lake Eyre Exp. North Australia, A.M.C. no. d, ad. ♂,' and on the reverse side, 'Co-type of the sp. . . . ad. ♂, Lake Eyre, North Austr. Lat. 27° 4' S.'

An error in the above date is apparent as the birds were not collected until December, 1874, and the specimen sent to Ramsay could not have been received by him earlier than 1875 because the Expedition did not return to Beltana, S.A. (365 miles north of Adelaide by rail), until July, 1875. Lake Eyre is in the central part of South Australia, not 'North Australia.' Latitude 27° 4' S., is slightly north of any part of the Macumba River where the specimens are believed to have been procured. The same latitude is given in the *British Museum Catalogue of Birds* (4), wherein the longitude is listed as 145° 1' 23" E., almost that of Melbourne, an obvious mistake. Gregory M. Mathews remarks (5) that the two specimens in the British Museum have 'Macumbra [sic] Lat. 27° 41' 23"' written on the

labels. This latitude is given on the map accompanying Lewis's published report (6) and is the site of 'Camp 21, Brackish waterhole, Macumba River, 18th December, 1874' of the Expedition. J. Sutton remarks (7) that it "is without doubt the camp near which the specimens were secured."

The letters 'A.M.C. no. d' may mean Australian Museum collection, no. d. of a series, or Adelaide Museum collection, though the Museum at Adelaide was at that time known as the South Australian Institute Museum. Six specimens were collected by Andrews; if we suppose that these were numbered alphabetically, no. d would represent the fourth of the series.

Mr. J. S. P. Ramsay of Sydney has in his possession a letter written to his father, Dr. E. P. Ramsay, from F. G. Waterhouse, dated 'Adelaide, 31st September, 1877.' In this letter Waterhouse, apparently in reply to an enquiry from Ramsay, states—

I much regret that I am unable to give you so much information as I could wish as to the localities of the birds collected on the Lake Eyre expedition which in reality was only for the purpose of reporting on country for pastoral purposes. I will try and get a map of that part of the country from the Surveyor General's office and send it. In my last I think I omitted an old Missionary Station at Kopperamanna near the Lake South side where most of the birds were collected and all the letters I received from the collector were from there. As the Lake is not large I think Lake Eyre would answer for the Locality of the birds in the collection. . . . *Melithreptus laetior*, *Amytis goyderi* and *Pardalotus rubricatus* were all from Kopperamanna which I think is near the Macumba Creek but this you will seek when you receive the map.*

In an informative and very interesting article in the *South Australian Ornithologist* J. Sutton (7) details the history of the Lake Eyre Expedition and gives a list of the bird specimens collected, together with extracts from Lewis's journal describing the type of country near where the six specimens of *A. goyderi* were obtained. Included also is a reproduction of portion of the original map showing the area around the northern end of Lake Eyre and along the Macumba. Sutton further remarks—

It is with regret that I have to add that none of these specimens [including the six skins of *A. goyderi*] are now in the collection of the South Australian Museum. The natural history specimens had been so neglected that the Curator reported on 30th June, 1882, that most of them would have to be destroyed, and in the report of 30th June, 1885, the Acting Director stated that 'they had previously been destroyed.' Against that, however, it is to be mentioned that for some years (including the above period) a dishonest employee sold much material from the Museum to European collectors, and the specimens referred to in the list may have been disposed of.

*Macumba River lies generally to the north-west of Lake Eyre and enters the Lake on its north side. Apparently Waterhouse was in error in stating that most of the birds were collected on the 'Lake South side.'

The registered number of the specimen of *A. goyderi* in the Australian Museum is O.18596, ad. ♂, ex 'Dobroyde' collection; it is a co-type of the species and apparently the only male definitely known, as Gould was not certain of the sex of his two skins. Its importance, both historically and ornithologically, cannot be overstated. The male (?) figured in Gregory M. Mathews' *Birds of Australia* (5), based on the specimen in the British Museum, agrees with the male in the Australian Museum in not having the reddish patches on the sides of the body; such markings are thought to be characteristic of the female.

It is of interest to note also that the Australian Museum possesses a co-type of *Melithreptus laetior* collected by Andrews during the Lake Eyre Expedition and named by Gould at the same time as *A. goyderi*. The registered number of this specimen is O.18567.

REFERENCES

1. Gould, John. *Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist.*, ser. 4, vol. xvi, p. 286, Oct., 1875.
2. Gould, John. *The Birds of New Guinea*, vol. III (pt. 2, Jan., 1876), pl. 8.
3. Campbell, A. J. 'The Long-Lost Eyrean Grass-Wren,' *The Emu*, vol. 23, pt. 2, Oct., 1923, p. 81, pl. 14 (col.).
4. Sharpe, R. Bowdler. *British Museum Catalogue of Birds*, vol. VII, 1883, p. 109.
5. Mathews, Gregory M. *The Birds of Australia*, vol. x, pt. 3, Jan., 1923, p. 207, pl. 471.
6. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, no. 114, of 1875.
7. Sutton, J. '*Amytornis goyderi*, Eyrean (formerly Goyder's) Grass-Wren, etc.,' *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. IX, pt. 4, Oct., 1927, pp. 111-131, and map.

Extension of Recorded Range of Rufous Fantail.—In December, 1944, a pair of Rufous Fantails (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) were located on one of the small streams—Pannikin Creek—running into the Glenelg River at a point about 40 miles upstream from its mouth, and approximately 20 miles from the South Australian border. I understand this is their furthest westerly record—the Otway Ranges being the limit reported previously.

The nest was typical. Built of fine strands of bark and cobwebs, it was attached to the slender curving branch of a 'prickly coprosma' bush—the 'tail' extending along one of the small branchlets—immediately above the tiny creek and about two feet above the water. Long blades of sword grass hung round and over it. The birds were very tame and were busy brooding two eggs when we left the district.

Since returning to Melbourne, I have been told that the birds have been seen in the vicinity of Portland for many years, though I have not recorded them there myself.—

I. WATSON, Jolimont, Vic., 14/2/45.