

Birds Collected by Captain Sturt in 1830 on the "Banks of the River Murray"

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One hundred years have now elapsed since Charles Sturt discovered the Murray River and sailed down it to the sea. His discovery solved a problem which had exercised the minds of more than one of the Colonial Governors of that period: the problem of what became of the rivers, such as the Darling, the Lachlan, and the Murrumbidgee, which were known to flow to the west or south-west in the back-blocks of New South Wales.

As this year Australia is commemorating the centenary of Sturt's discovery in the modern fashion by the issue of postage stamps bearing Sturt's likeness, it may not be out of place to publish, for the information of those who are interested in Australian ornithology, a list of the birds brought back by the intrepid explorer from his adventurous journey between the "banks of the River Murray." This list, I believe, has never been published, and at the present day is more of historical than scientific interest, though it includes one bird new to science in 1830, and which, fortunately, being the type of the species, is still in existence.

Sturt's birds arrived in the Museum of Edinburgh University about the end of 1830 or the beginning of 1831. The old University Register, in recording their arrival, merely states: "Three cases of Birds, Corals and Sponges from New South Wales, under the care of Dr. Boyter, presented by Colonel Lindsay [*sic*]," and gives no further information.

It may appear strange that these birds should be sent to Edinburgh, but the explanation is very simple. As is well known, Sturt was a captain in the 39th Regiment, which regiment in 1830 was on service in Australia. His commanding officer was Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Lindesay, a friend of Robert Jameson, Professor of Natural History and Lecturer on Mineralogy in the University of Edinburgh. Any scientific materials from "New Holland" were then desiderata in European Museums, and Lindesay on two occasions, once in April, 1829, and again in April, 1830, had sent specimens to his friend the Professor. On Sturt's return to Sydney in May, 1830, Lindesay appears to have obtained his birds, and sent them off to Scotland at the first opportunity.

As can well be imagined, very few of these birds have now retained their identity, inefficient labelling being chiefly

responsible; but the recent discovery by accident of Lindesay's original lists, which accompanied his consignments, enable us to say that in the third consignment there were 18 birds. As some of these birds are not recognisable by their names in the list, the document is here given *in extenso*. It is in two different handwriting: the first portion, the list and the sentence following, has probably been written by a clerk; the second portion, commencing "collected," was probably written by Colonel Lindesay himself. "List of Birds for Edinburgh Museum. Sydney, 5th Aug., 1830:—

1. Wild Goose (Iris, Brown); 2. Musk Duck (Iris, Hazle); 3. Glossy Ibis (Iris, Brown); 4. Pair Pink-Breasted Cockatoos (Iris, Brown); 5. Small White Cockatoo (Iris, Black); 6. Pair Yellow King Parrots (Iris, Yellow); 7. Yellow Lowry (Iris, Brown); 8. Rosalie Parrot (Iris, Brown); 9. Small Brown Parrot (Iris, Grey); 10. Pair Crested Doves (Iris, Brown); 11. Mountain Bee-Eater (Iris, Red); 12. Bee-Eater (Iris, Grey); 13. Bee-Eater (Iris, Brown); 14. Diamond Mannikin (Iris, Hazle); 15. Barn Owl (Iris, Black).

"From the banks of the River Murray in the interior of New South Wales. Collected by Captain Sturt, H.M. 39th Regiment, and presented by Col. Lindesay, of the same corps, August 5, 1830, to the Museum of the University of Edinburgh.

"6 eggs of the Emu.

"2 eggs of the Ostrich from the Cape of Good Hope.

"7 specimens of Sponge found on the seashore of the eastern coast of New South Wales.

"4 specimens of Coral, ditto, ditto, ditto."

Of these 18 birds, representing 15 species, three still bear on their labels "Banks of the River Murray." They are:—

1. *Threskiornis spinicollis*, "Glossy Ibis." *Ibis spinicollis* Jameson, *Edin. New Phil. Journal*, xix., p. 213 (1835). This, the type specimen, has at one time been mounted; it is now dismounted and is in excellent condition.

2. *Licmetis tenuirostris*, "Small White Cockatoo." This has also at one time been mounted. It is in poor condition. This bird is mentioned by Sturt in Vol. II. of his book of "Travels."

3. *Ocyphaps lophotes*, "Crested Dove." This is also a dismounted specimen and in poor condition. It is figured in Vol. I. of Sturt's book, and is several times mentioned as the "Crested Pigeon of the Marshes."

Regarding the remaining birds, the finding of the original list has enabled me to make a search for possible skins of this third consignment from Lindesay, and the following

may, I think, with a fair amount of confidence be considered as having come from the banks of the Murray:—

Polytelis anthopeplus, "Yellow King Parrot"—the skin of a bird in female plumage. This is the *Palæornis melanura* of Sturt's book, wherein the male is figured.

Cacatua roseicapilla, "Pink-breasted Cockatoo."

Neophema elegans, "Yellow Lowry."

Glossopsitta pusilla, "Small Brown Parrot."

Anthochaera chrysoptera, "Bee-Eater" (?)

I can find no trace of either *Pomatostomus temporalis* or *P. superciliosus*, which are figured by Sturt, but two specimens of *Sericornis lathamii*, male and female, appear from their make to have been skinned by the same man who did those mentioned above. A perusal of Sturt's book would lead one to think that his companion, Mr. George MacLeay, had probably a good deal to do with the birds brought back. He came of a family which had a strong bias towards natural history, and Edinburgh University Museum received in 1822-23 forty birds from a gentleman of that name—a gentleman who, I think, was Sturt's companion's father, the Colonial Secretary.

The Yellow-faced Honeyeater.—The Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Meliphaga chrysops*) is a moderately common species inhabiting the eastern coast of Australia, and at the present time its pleasant, care-free "chirrup" is frequently heard in the forest and heath country around Sydney. I vividly recall a delightful experience with a pair of these birds that built their home among the outer foliage of a banksia tree at Gundamaian, National Park. So trustful was the hen bird that I was able to lift her from the nest gently and peer at the two diminutive, down-covered babes lying in the pendent cradle. To secure a photograph I held her in my hand, but when released she instantly darted back to her recently hatched young. Ordinarily, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters sit so low in the nest that only the bill and tail show above the rim. Obviously, it is impossible to secure a photograph when the bird is in this position.

The homes of these birds are perhaps the neatest of any of the Honeyeaters—generally, a nest is barely two inches across, and of a like depth, with the rim securely woven around a thin forked branch. The body of this finely-built, cup-shaped home is often so gauze-like that the eggs are visible through the wall of the nest, the outside of which is generally covered with small pieces of bright green moss. The two eggs of this pair of birds hatched on September 21 of last year (1929), on which day the photograph was taken.—K. A. HINDWOOD, R.A.O.U., Willoughby, N.S.W.