

## Note on the Dark Thornbill (*Geobasileus hedleyi*), with Description of its Nest and Eggs.

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*Geobasileus hedleyi* winiamida, F. E. Wilson.

Type description, female, *Emu*, Vol. XVI., p. 169 (1917).—Male taken Winiam, Vic., Aug. 29, 1923.

Upper surface dark greyish olive, becoming olive on rump; forehead crescents light buff, each feather with blackish base and dusky fringe; upper tail coverts clay color; wings fuscous with outer webs lighter; tail black with fuscous base, some white on tips of three outer feathers; lores, olive buff; ear coverts fuscous with olive buff centres; under surface dark olive buff generally, with tendency to whitish on throat, with dark fleckings, and cream buff on abdomen; eyes creamy; bill and legs black. Length, 3.7in.; bill, .3in.; wing, 1.9in.; tail, 1.5in.; tarsus, .8in.

Mr. Wilson, in describing this Thornbill, which is the only addition to Victorian species for some years, makes comparison between it and *G. tenuirostris*,\* Zietz, from South Australia. Therefore, G. M. Mathews, in *Birds of Australia*, Vol. IX., places it as a synonym, or a sub-species.

Previously, Mr. Mathews had described a new species—*Acanthiza hedleyi*—from Meningie, near the mouth of the River Murray, S.A. (see *Aus. Avi. Rec.*, Vol. I., p. 78, 1912). This is figured in *Birds of Australia*, Vol. IX., pl. 453, top figure (1922). It thus would appear that *hedleyi* and *winiamida* are one and the same species. There is unlikely to be any difference between the two, seeing they inhabit open, sandy moorlands in adjacent portions of South Australia and Victoria, known as the Coorong Desert, to the west, and the Little Desert, at the eastern extremity.

The bird above described differs specifically from *G. tenuirostris* in the different tone of the back, having smaller crescents on forehead, and less white on tail, while the under surface is very much darker. (See A. G. Campbell, *Emu*, ante, p. 30.)

The prominent feature of the throat and breast is that the faint dusky fringes to the feathers noticed in many *Geobasileus* become so pronounced and prominent that they assume the appearance of distinct fleckings or striations, after the manner of the Striated Thornbill (*Acanthiza lineata*).

The bird differs from *G. reguloides*, the next nearest relative, by not having the base of the tail buff like upper coverts.

The bird's call is "teow-teow," with a sharp "tsis-tsis," when alarmed. We found the species shy and wary.

It is interesting to record that the Buff-tailed Thornbill (*G. reguloides*) is common at Winiam, near Nhill, but it has a

\*A pre-occupied name; now *G. irredalei* Mathews.—Eds.

in captivity at the Van Diemen's Land Co.'s settlement at Circular Head (now Stanley), about 52 miles west of Emu Bay (now Burnie); but there seems to be no record as to what became of them.

In the *Tasmanian Mail* of Nov., 1922, there appeared some notes by Mr. B. R. Dyer, of Battery Point, Hobart, in which he says that his recollections extend back 65 years, and include the remembrance of two Tasmanian Emus on Mr. R. C. Kermode's estate, in front of the mansion at Mona Vale, in the Tasmanian Midlands; one of these knocked him down and trampled on him, until he was rescued by Mr. Kermode. Another of these island-natives was kept in a paddock in front of the women's quarters at the New Norfolk asylum. Mr. Dyer says that they were never plentiful, *a few on the plains of the North-West Coast, near Emu Bay*, and some at New Ground, near Marlborough, a few miles beyond New Norfolk.

If these captive birds of 1859 were undoubted island-natives, they must have been the last of the race, as the majority seem to have been killed off by 1850. The two skins in the British Museum collection (Ronald Gunn, collector) bear date 1845, and none of the Colonial Museums seems to have specimens. It is very remarkable that no efforts appear to have been made to preserve the remains of the Mona Vale and New Norfolk captives; although it must have been known that the species was on the point of extinction.

Our island bird is said to have been a little smaller and much darker than the mainland form.

In looking through James Fenton's *Bush Life in Tasmania Fifty Years Ago*, I have just come across another reference to our extinct species. It seems that Henry Hellyer, chief surveyor to the Van Diemen's Land Co., actually saw the birds themselves, as well as their footprints. He had gone into the totally unexplored country south-east of Circular Head, had ascended and named St. Valentine's Peak (14th February, 1827), discovered a river, and named the Surrey and Hampshire Hills. The natives had been burning large tracts of grass, and native huts were found, with several trees from which bark had been taken to cover them. On 15th February he writes:—"A brook runs across from the peak in a south-easterly direction, the banks of which are green with trefoil. About sunset, having routed some Emus, we fired at them without impeding their progress." Fenton comments:—"It is a very singular fact that those Emus have all disappeared from *some unknown cause*. I never saw any, and only heard of one being seen near the Leven, in 1839." As Fenton knew this coast in 1838, the birds must have suffered a very early extinction.