

## Taxonomic Notes on the Birds of Lord Howe Island

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In his admirable report on the birds of Lord Howe Island (*Emu*, XL, July, 1940, pp. 1-86) K. A. Hindwood, unfortunately, employs the nomenclature of G. M. Mathews, a nomenclature based on obsolete principles. The tendency towards "a genus for every species" has already been criticized in a recent number of *The Emu* (XXXIX, April, 1940, pp. 311-313) and I do not need to go into that point again. However, apart from that, there are some points in Mr. Hindwood's nomenclature and taxonomic ideas which require discussion.

(1) Lord Howe Pigeon.—As doubts have been expressed as to whether Raper's bird really refers to a Lord Howe Island bird, or, as some have suggested, to a specimen of *Columba vitiensis* subsp., painted at some other locality visited during the voyage of the *Sirius*, it would have been important to gather the evidence that the Lord Howe bird was a member of the *Columba vitiensis* group (*Ianthænas*) and not, let us say, a race of *Ducula pacifica* or something else. Peters has placed Mathews' name *godmanae* in the synonymy of the New Guinea race (*halmaheira*) of *C. vitiensis* (*Checklist Birds of the World*, vol. 3, p. 70).

(2) *Tricholimnas sylvestris*.—Hindwood writes: "Its generic relationship to the flightless Woodhen of New Caledonia is evidence of a former land connection between the two places." Such a statement is not in the least justified. First of all, it is not definitely known that the New Caledonian bird is flightless. Secondly, it is known that rails lose their power of flight apparently very rapidly. There are a number of instances known where flightless rails are barely more than subspecifically distinct from flying species. Rails occur on nearly all of the larger oceanic islands, and, even where they are flightless, as *Atlantisia* (Inaccessible Island) or *Rallus wakensis* (Wake Island), they are merely proof of the marvellous colonizing faculties in this family, and not of any former land connections, which are not confirmed by the geologist.

(3) *Porphyrio porphyrio albus*.—I referred to this form in earlier papers (*Amer. Mus. Nov.*, no. 486, p. 8, 1931; no. 1007, p. 11, 1938), and suggested that it is nothing but a partly-albinistic population of the widespread Purple Gallinule, and Hindwood has accepted that interpretation. We disagree, however, in the interpretation of the normal-coloured *Porphyrio* also observed and collected on Lord Howe Island. Hindwood assumes them to be stragglers of *melanotus* from Australia. To me, however, it seems very much more likely that they are normal-coloured birds in a

dimorphic population. Such assumption is strengthened by the fact that some birds of this population are partly white, partly bluish. Furthermore, white individuals also occur in other neighbouring populations (*P. p. stanleyi* from New Zealand). Besides, nothing is known of such extensive migrations in *P. p. melanotus* that would carry it repeatedly from Australia to Lord Howe. If this bird had such a migration it would surely have turned up in other places besides Lord Howe Island. I would suggest that the normal-coloured birds from Lord Howe be carefully compared with a series of *melanotus* to see whether there are not any differences.

Nothing is known about the colour of the downy young and juvenile plumage in the white phase. To judge by other dimorphic species with a white phase, we would expect that the bird was white from the first plumage. The statement of the artist (pl. 5, *Emu*, XL, 1940) that a blackish and a blue bird were younger stages of the white one, is obviously an assumption, because he surely did not raise them. It is now unknown how common was the white phase, but it is quite possible that it always was a rarity. White birds have ever attracted the collector and it is, for example, quite impossible to obtain an accurate idea of the composition of a population of the Heron, *Demigretta alba* (a similarly-dimorphic species), by using museum specimens. The only New Caledonian bird of that species in the Verreaux collection was in the white phase, although that phase occurs on New Caledonia only about once in three hundred birds. The birds in the conspicuous white phase of *Porphyrio p. albus* probably became an easy victim of the early settlers of Lord Howe, whilst the blue phase, aloof and retiring, managed to survive until the present day. Although *melanotus* and *bellus* in Australia are birds of the swamps, other races of *Porphyrio* are forest birds in most of the localities where I have encountered them. In the Solomon Islands they are particularly common in secondary growth and in native gardens (cf. also Hamlin on the birds of Rennell Island, *Amer. Mus. Nov.*, no. 488, p. 5, 1931).

(4) *Notophojx novæ-hollandiæ*.—I know of no valid subspecies of this species.

(5) *Circus approximans*.—The name *juxta* used by Hindwood is a complete *nomen nudum* and, therefore, not valid.

(6) *Cuculus optatus*.—The correct name is *Cuculus saturatus* (see Peters, *Checklist Birds of the World*, vol. 4, pp. 19-20).

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The following are for sale: Gould's *Handbook*, Campbell's *Nests and Eggs*, Spencer and Gillen's *Across Australia*, Lane's *Creature Life in Australia*, White's *Warunda Creek*, *Emu*, vols. 1-30 (1-7 bound, 8-30 unbound). All are in splendid condition. Submit offers for all or any to Hon. Editor, who will communicate with owner.