

A New Frogmouth from Groote Eylandt, Gulf of Carpentaria

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The discovery that, among specimens of *Podargus strigoides* collected by the Commonwealth of Australia/National Geographic Society/Smithsonian Institution Expedition to Arnhem Land (1948), two quite distinct subspecies were represented, has led me to examine, at the friendly invitation of Dr. Ernst Mayr, the material of this species in the Mathews Collection of the American Museum of Natural History (New York). As so often proves to be the case, even the largest collection of Australian birds available for study to-day has failed to solve a tithe of the problems posed by the species.

Since the first of numerous races of this Frogmouth named from the northern half of Australia was *Podargus phalaenoides* Gould (*Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pt. 7, March 1840, p. 142), it became necessary for me to examine specimens from its type locality, Port Essington, and Mr. Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee kindly forwarded to me from the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia the three skins from the Gould Collection believed to be the 'types' and paratypes of *phalaenoides*.

The three specimens in question are no. 22052, unsexed, from 'N.E. Coast' (wing length, 210 mm.), no. 22050, 'male' [= female?], from Port Essington (wing length, 200 mm.), and no. 22051, female, from Port Essington (wing length, 200 mm.). No. 22052 has been made a lectotype by Witmer Stone (*Austral Avian Record*, vol. 1, 1913, p. 151), with the gloss (p. 131) that "where no individual bird was mentioned in the original description, the selection has been arbitrary, and is final." The finality of Stone's decision in the present case may be judged by the fact that no. 22052, from 'N.E. Coast' (not "North-west Coast," as affirmed by Stone, *loc. cit.*), belongs to a massive-billed form, apparently perfectly distinct from that represented by nos. 22050 and 22051 from 'Port Essington,' and probably not occurring in any part of the Northern Territory. In any event, one cannot be sure that the true type of *phalaenoides* is not one of the specimens in London (cf. Gray, G. R., *List of the Specimens of Birds in the Collection of the British Museum*, pt. 1, *Accipitres*, Introduction, 1884, pp. III-VIII).

In the absence of material definitely collected at Port Essington, I am compelled to assume that the two Philadelphia skins, nos. 22050 and 22051, are at least topotypical representatives of *phalaenoides* (especially since they agree

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with published descriptions of putative topotypes), and, in that case, must consider the possibility that each of the two races in my own collection requires a name. But discretion induces me to assume for the present that specimens from Darwin would prove to be nomenclatorially inseparable from those of the Coburg Peninsula in sufficiently long series, and I shall content myself with naming only the population of Groote Eylandt, which is demonstrably different from all others known from the Northern Territory.

In honour of my friend, Lila (Mrs. W. M.) Mayo, of Brisbane, Queensland, I shall call this race—

Podargus strigoides lilae new subspecies.

Type. No. 405827, United States National Museum (eventually to be deposited in the Australian Museum, Sydney); adult male, collected at Ambukwamba ('Umbakumba'), Groote Eylandt, Gulf of Carpentaria, on May 17, 1948, by H. G. Deignan (original number 174).

Diagnosis. Separable from *P. s. 'phalaenoides'* (as represented by specimens from Darwin and Oenpelli), *P. s. melvillensis* (Melville Island), *P. s. gouldi* (Norman River, Queensland), the three forms that require especial consideration here (and, indeed, from all other Australian races), by inferior size, and, in the male, by having the basic colour of the upper parts clear silvery grey, almost free of brownish suffusion, in the female by having the upper parts an almost uniform silvery grey, but with a strong rufescent wash over the scapular region (in this character resembling the same sex of *melvillensis*).

Range. Northern Territory: Groote Eylandt.

Remarks. Wing lengths of Territorian specimens examined are shown in the following table:

Podargus strigoides gouldi, 1 male (225 mm.), 1 female (225 mm.), 1 unsexed (226 mm.).

P. s. lilae, 4 males (193-209 mm.), 3 females (188-198 mm.).

P. s. melvillensis, 10 males (198-216 mm.), 5 females (201-211 mm.).

P. s. 'phalaenoides', 5 males (213-229 mm.), 1 female (200 mm.), 1 unsexed (216 mm.).

Only *P. s. melvillensis*, another insular race, seems to approximate the small size of *P. s. lilae*, and the former is readily distinguishable, in either sex, by the much more brownish, less silvery, coloration of the upper parts.

A unique specimen (male) from Yirrkala, on the Cape Arnhem Peninsula, a mainland locality near Groote Eylandt, has a wing length of only 207 mm., but the coloration of Darwin-Oenpelli birds, with which it may be tentatively placed.

Of the paratypes, no. 405828, United States National Museum, adult male, collected at Ambukwamba, Groote Eylandt, on May 22, 1948, by H. G. Deignan (original number 201), most nearly resembles the type specimen.

Stray Feathers

A Query on Landrail Behaviour.—At the end of October, 1949, a nest of the Banded Landrail (*Hypotaenidia philippensis*) was discovered in a swamp at Bundoora, near Melbourne. It contained seven eggs. The accompanying illustration shows the situation, the herbage having been opened up in order to facilitate photography.

Being desirous of picturing the bird at the nest, if possible, I decided to construct a hide nearby and to watch to see whether the bird would return. The camera was not erected and the surrounding reeds and sedges were not greatly disturbed. It was not known how far incubation of the eggs had progressed, but proof of their freshness was soon forthcoming.

In about ten minutes' time the Landrail was heard giving its grunting call near the nest. This continued for a few minutes and then the bird crept quietly on to the nest and settled down. It looked towards the hide several times but did not appear to be unduly alarmed at its presence. We had, of course, broken down a 'sight line' through the reeds between the hide and the nest.

After sitting about five minutes the Landrail slipped silently off the eggs and immediately disappeared into the adjacent tangle of swamp growth. The question now was—should we place the camera in position, open up the nest surroundings and try our luck, or were the eggs fresh and their owner consequently unlikely to return to them readily? With birds that have precocial young the stage of incubation of the eggs is important to bird photographers. If they are well advanced there is always the chance that the eggs will hatch out overnight and the chicks be gone when the next visit is made. The best time for photography is a day or two before the young are due to appear.

We waited a few minutes and then walked up to the nest. Immediately I noticed something that supplied the answer to our query. There were now eight eggs in the nest. The bird had returned and laid another while we watched. In the circumstances we decided to leave the hide in place and to postpone photography for a few weeks. On the following day and again a few days later (a holiday) the position was unchanged—eight eggs, and, though nothing was seen or heard of the bird, the eggs were warm and a cross made with two pieces of grass and placed across them was disturbed on each following inspection.