

May 1, 1888.

Professor Flower, C.B., LL.D., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

Col. Irby, F.Z.S., exhibited, on behalf of Lord Lilford, a specimen of *Aquila rapax* from Southern Spain, being, as he believed, the first positively authentic specimen of this species of Eagle obtained within the limits of the Peninsula.

Prof. Flower, C.B., LL.D., F.R.S., exhibited and made remarks on a specimen of a Japanese Domestic Cock, with enormously elongated tail-coverts, the longest of which measured nine feet in length. The specimen had been presented to the British Museum by Mr. F. D. Parker.

The following papers were read :—

1. General Remarks on the Zoology of the Solomon Islands, and Notes on Brenchley's Megapode. By C. M. WOODFORD, F.Z.S.

[Received April 30, 1888.]

The Solomons are a group of large islands situated about 500 miles east of New Guinea, and are included by Wallace in his Austro-Malayan subdivision of the Australian Region. Zoologically they are most interesting, as they form the extreme eastern limit of the extension of Marsupials.

As might be expected, the group is not particularly rich in Mammals; but several species of frugivorous and insectivorous Bats occur. Many of these are peculiar to the group, my own collections having added three new genera and five species to the list, besides three new species of *Mus*. Marsupials are represented by one, and perhaps two, species of *Cuscus*, *Cuscus orientalis* being common. I was once told by a native, who had been to Queensland, and who consequently should have known Wallabies when he saw one, that Wallabies are to be found in the mountains of Guadalcanar; but I am inclined to doubt the information, and my offer of a very large amount of "trade" for the whole or any part of a Wallaby from that island met with no response.

The Birds of the Solomons are extremely interesting. Several species of fruit-eating Pigeons and of the smaller *Ptilopus* occur commonly. The wide-ranging Nicobar Pigeon (*Caloenas nicobaricus*) is frequently met with, and is not afraid to venture considerable distances from land. On my last visit to the group one flew on board and settled for some seconds, when we were distant forty miles to the westward of Rennell Island—an outlying island that can

be hardly said to belong to the Solomon group at all. I have noticed, especially on the island of Malayta, that the Pigeons leave the mainland of the large islands and resort at night in thousands to roost on the small detached islands off the coast. I can only account for this fact by the supposition that they find themselves free from the attacks of the large Monitor Lizards, which would not be so plentiful there as on the mainland.

Among Parrots the wide-ranging *Eclectus polychloros* is common, and several Lories, the handsome *Lorius cardinalis* not being found elsewhere, while the minute *Nasiterna* of two or three species is occasionally met with. These most interesting little birds creep about on the trunks of the large trees like tree-creepers, their tails being furnished with pointed feathers for the purpose. It is an extremely interesting fact that the Cockatoo peculiar to the Solomons (*Cacatua ducorpsi*) does not extend to the island of San Christoval and smaller islands adjacent; and the same is the case with the Hornbill (*Buceros plicatus*), the island of Guadalcanar being consequently the most eastern limit of the extension of these two genera.

At a certain time of the year, when the bright red flowers of the coral-tree (*Erythrina*) are conspicuous among the bright green foliage of the forest, the Lories resort to them in large numbers, and the natives spreading fine nets near the trees catch them in considerable quantities. I have had as many as fifty of different species brought me in one day, the neck being invariably broken by their struggles in the net.

On Guadalcanar I was fortunate enough to discover a new Crow (*Macrocorax woodfordi*), but I believe it to be extremely local, and confined to a part only of that island. I did not meet with it or hear of it at other places that I visited, nor have other collectors met with it. At Aola, on Guadalcanar, where I made my headquarters for six months, it was extremely plentiful.

One of the most interesting birds I met with was the *Megapodius brenchleyi*—a bird allied to the mound-building Talegalla of Australia. This species was first described from a fresh-hatched specimen brought home by the late Julius Brenchley, and figured in his 'Voyage of the Curaçoa.' This bird, although only about the size of a large pigeon, lays an egg bigger than that of a duck. It is commonly distributed throughout the group, and allied species are, I believe, found on the groups to the east and south-east; but it is upon the island of Savo that it is found in the greatest abundance. Here the eggs form an important item in the daily food-supply of the natives, and I have bought, when calling there, as many as ten eggs for one stick of tobacco, value about three farthings. The Savo natives have a curious legend connected with this bird. They hold the Shark in great veneration, and say that their island was made by the Shark, who brought the stones together and placed upon them a man, a woman, the yam-plant, and the Megapode. Things went well for a time, and the people increased, and so did the Megapodes. At last the people went to the Shark and complained that the Megapodes made much havoc among the yam-patches by digging holes

to lay their eggs; so they asked the Shark to take the Megapodes away. This was done; but now the natives missed the Megapodes' eggs, so they asked the Shark to bring the Megapodes back but to confine them to one spot. This request was also complied with, and the result may now be seen. The Megapodes lay their eggs on two large cleared sandy spaces, and nowhere else on the island. Upon these no weeds or grass can grow, as the sand is constantly being turned over by the birds when digging holes to lay their eggs, and by the natives when in search of them. The sandy spaces are fenced off into plots which belong to different owners.

I met with one of these Megapodes' laying-yards at Aola, on Guadalcanar, and was fortunate enough to be able to photograph it. The first photograph gives a general view of the yard, which was nearly half a mile in length and about fifty yards wide, with the fences dividing it off for different owners. The second photograph shows a closer view of a portion of the yard, with the holes scraped in the sand by the birds. All over the yard may be noticed the tracks of the tails of the large Monitors, as though a stick had been drawn along the sand. I expect they take a pretty severe toll of the eggs. The eggs, which are buried from a foot to two feet in the warm sand, receive no further care from the birds, but the young shift for themselves from the time of hatching, and can fly at once, or very soon after leaving the egg. The natives are quite indifferent as to the condition of the eggs when they eat them—whether they are newly laid or well advanced towards hatching being all the same to them. From experience I can say that they are excellent food.

The laying-yards are always made where the soil is loose and sandy, the birds require no other inducement. An open space being of course essential to allow the rays of the sun to warm the ground, it would evidently be quite useless for the birds to lay in the thick forest, or under the shade of trees. It is easy to imagine that before the natives constructed and cleared these laying-yards for the birds, they would be likely to lay in the yam-patches and garden clearings, and where they were plentiful would prove a serious inconvenience, as alleged in the Savo legend.

The birds do not build a mound, but, as will be seen from the second photograph, make a hole from a foot to two feet deep. The sand afterwards falls in and covers the egg. The ground is consequently full of depressions, reminding one forcibly of the pitfalls of the ant-lion on a large scale.

Among the Butterflies this group of islands appears to be the limit of range of the genus *Ornithoptera*, which, curiously enough, as in the case of Cockatoos and Hornbills, does not extend to San Christoval. Two species occur—the somewhat wide-ranging *O. duvilliana* and the remarkable and local *O. victoriae*. This latter is, so far as I know, confined to the islands of Guadalcanar, Florida, and part of Malayta.



Woodford, C. M. 1888. "General Remarks on the Zoology of the Solomon Islands, and Notes on Brenchley's Megapodc." *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 1888, 248–250.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7998.1888.tb06703.x>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/99299>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7998.1888.tb06703.x>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/72955>

Holding Institution

Natural History Museum Library, London

Sponsored by

Natural History Museum Library, London

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.