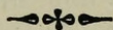


# JOURNAL

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VI.—*On specimens of two Mauritian Birds in the collection of the Asiatic Society.*—By F. FINN, B.A. F.Z.S., Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Museum.

[ Received March 26th ; Read April 2nd, 1902. ]

### I. ON A SPECIMEN OF THE MOORHEN FROM MAURITIUS.

In Blyth's catalogue of the Birds in the Museum of the Asiatic Society, p. 286, one of the specimens of *Gallinula chloropus* is noted as follows:—G. Var. ? From the Mauritius. Presented by Willis Earle, Esq.

This specimen is still in existence, but as it is in poor condition, having lost many feathers, and the remainder being loose in places, I have deemed it well to have it figured, as it presents certain points of interest which make its appearance worthy of record. (See Plate IV).

Being a stuffed specimen it is not easy to measure exactly with regard to length, but with a tape I make it out to be 1 ft.  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches from tip of bill to end of tail, a fair average length judging from the measurements given by Dr. Sharpe in the British Museum Catalogue of Birds. The wing, however, is only about 6·1 inches, and although its feathers are much abraded, it could never have been more than about 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, whereas Dr. Sharpe gives 7·3 inches as the length of wing for a bird measuring only a foot and half an inch in length, *i.e.*, about the size of this one. The tail of the Mauritius birds is 2·5 inches in length, whereas the British Museum specimen alluded to has the tail 2·9.

The most remarkable point about the present bird however is its powerful bill and feet. The beak, with frontal shield, measures 1·65 inches ; in thickness, at the proximal end of the nostril, it is ·45 of an inch, whereas the biggest-billed Old World bird in the Indian Museum



Collection, a Kashmir specimen, has a bill and frontal shield of 1·6 inches, with the depth of bill measured in the same place, of ·4 only. The wing of this bird measures 6·3.

The left shank of the Mauritius bird, measured from the upper end of the tarso-metatarsus to the setting-on of the front-toes, is 2·2 inches, as against the 1·8 of the Kashmir bird; but the thickness of the shank across the front, midway down its length, is ·2 in the former as against ·15 in the latter. I have not measured the shanks from front to back, so as to avoid any error from the insertion of wires into the legs of the Asiatic Society's specimen. The middle toe and claw of the Mauritius bird only exceed those of the Kashmir specimen by about ·1 of an inch, so that in the insular specimen the toes have decreased in relative length. Another remarkable point about the Mauritius bird is that it has the frontal shield, which is very large, truncate behind even more markedly than in the American *Gallinula galeata*; that is to say, judging from our two specimens of the latter, which show so much variation in this character as to suggest that those authors who only allow the New World birds the rank of a subspecies are correct. The differences in the frontal shields will be easily be apparent from the full-sized figures given in Plate V. It will be seen that the Mauritius bird has as long a bill as the Lake St. Clair example of *G. galeata*, whose wing measures 7·4 inches.

To sum up, the present specimen of *G. chloropus* from Mauritius, when compared with normal specimens, exhibits an increase of the size of the bill and feet, and a shortening of the wings, tail, and toes, which show that it has progressed some way in the direction of the flightless forms of *Gallinula* separated in the British Museum Catalogue as *Porphyriornis*. In colouration it does not differ from *G. chloropus*; it is true that the under-tail coverts are cream-colour instead of white, but this is probably due to the age of the specimen. Professor A. Newton's *G. pyrrhorhoa*, described from Mauritius, has these ochreous under-tail-coverts; but the tinge has been shown by Dr. R. B. Sharpe (Cat. Birds, B.M., Vol. XIII, p. 173), to exist in English specimens, and one in the Indian Museum collected by Colonel C. T. Bingham in the Shan States also exhibits it. Another character given by Professor Newton is the yellowness of the legs of *G. pyrrhorhoa*; but from an old specimen like the present one it is quite impossible now to say of what colour the legs originally were.

It seems to me, therefore, that the Moorhens of Mauritius need re-examination; if they normally present the stoutness of build and brevity of wing and tail characteristic of the present specimen, they certainly constitute a recognizable race, which might well bear the name

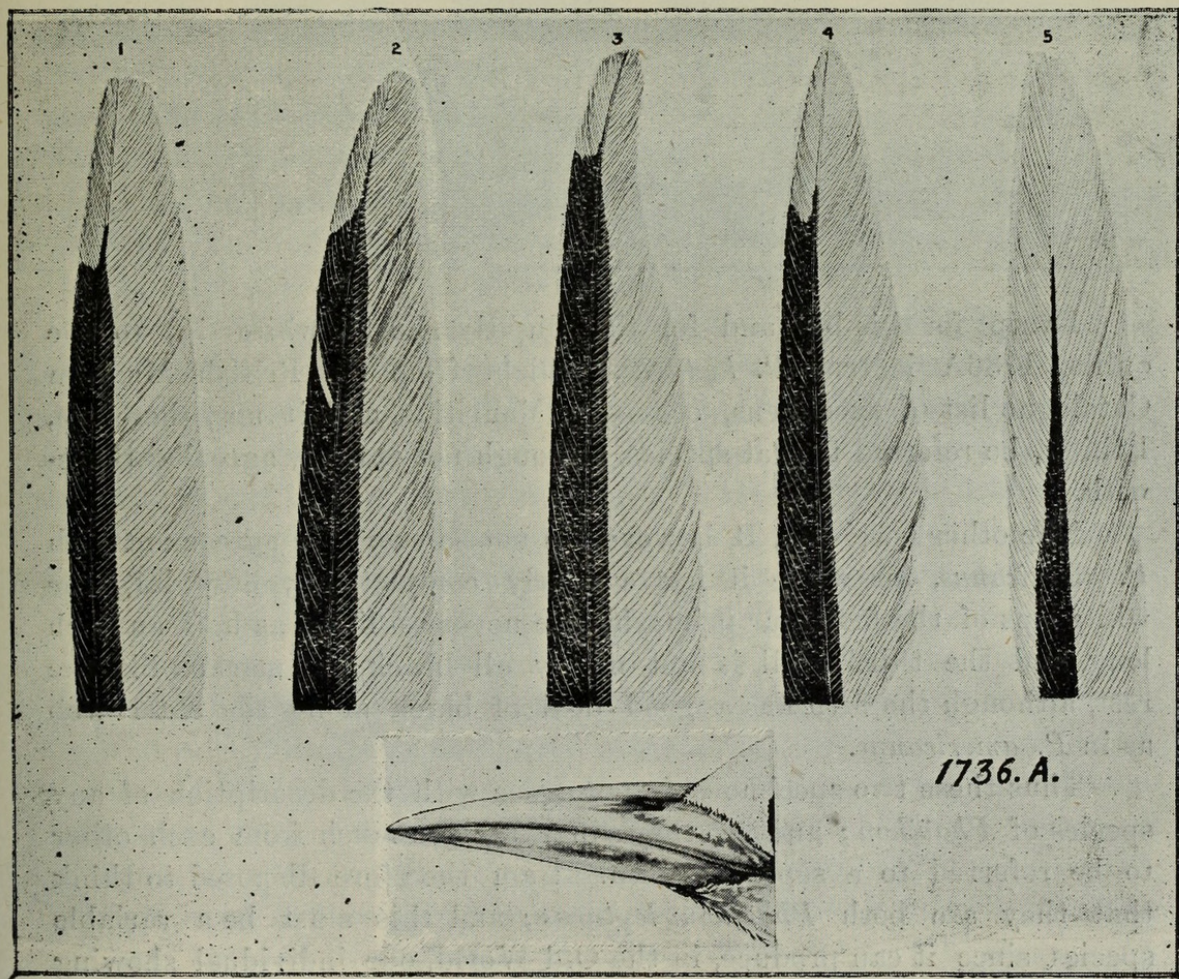


bestowed by Professor Newton, since that ornithologist expressly mentions a large frontal shield as one of the characteristics of *G. pyrrhorhoa*.

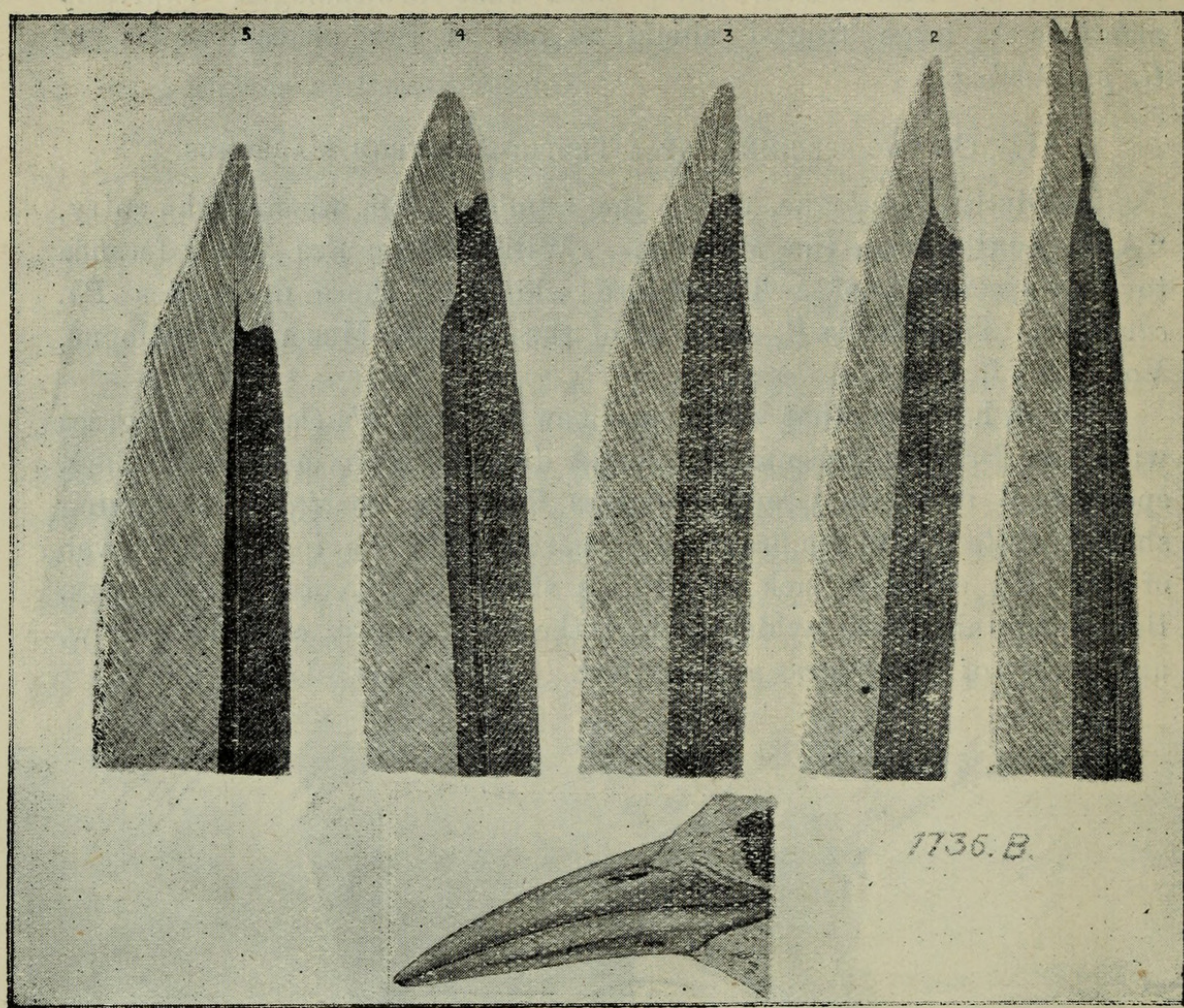
## II. ON TWO SPECIMENS OF A TROPIC-BIRD FROM MAURITIUS.

In Blyth's Catalogue, under the number 1736, we find the entry, "A.B., Adults, from the Mauritius. Willis Earle, Esq.," in reference to two specimens of a Tropic-bird which he there designates *Ph. candidus*. This is the *P. lepturus* of the British Museum Catalogue, Vol. XXVI, p. 454.

I find, however, that while specimen A of Blyth's Catalogue agrees with the British Museum Catalogue description in most particulars, specimen B is distinct, and resembles *Phaëthon americanus* in having shorter white tips to the first four primaries, and in having the outer web of the fifth entirely black to within a short distance of the extremity. Both birds also have evidently had the bill almost entirely yellow, unlike that of *P. lepturus* as described. (See figures below).







Except for this bill and for the slightly shorter white tips to the quills, 1736A is true *P. lepturus*, which, from the British Museum Catalogue list of specimens, occurs at Mauritius, and it may therefore, I think, be referred to that species, although not entirely agreeing therewith.

The other specimen, B, however, is not so nearly in agreement with *P. americanus*, for while it has a nearly completely yellow bill, the white tips of the first four primaries are never so little as half an inch long, and the third quill is not nearly all black, but marked like the rest, although the fifth has a good deal of black along the outer web as in *P. americanus*.

Thus these two specimens do not agree with the description of any species of *Phaëthon*; and yet they differ far too much from each other to be referred to a separate form. I am therefore disposed to think that they are both *Phaëthon lepturus*; and this must be a variable species, since it can produce, in the Old World, one individual showing a considerable approximation to the American *P. americanus*, in the



colouration of the bill and quills; and another which approaches the American form in the colouration of the bill only. It is, of course, just conceivable that a specimen of *P. americanus* strayed at one time to Mauritius and interbred with the local birds; but the distribution of the form renders this unlikely, and I should be rather inclined to put down the peculiarities of these birds to simple variation.

VII.—*On hybrids between the Guinea-fowl and Common fowl.*—By  
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[ Received March 26th; Read April 2nd, 1902. ]

A good account of this cross, which is not by any means common, has been given by Dr. Juan Vilaro, in the Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. IX. (1897), p. 225.

The hybrid, as represented in the plates accompanying Dr. Vilaro's papers has a very characteristic appearance, its general form and carriage being intermediate between the Fowl and Guinea-fowl, and its head devoid of the comb and gular wattles of the one and rictal wattles and casque of the other. I was thus easily enabled to recognize as Guinea-fowl hybrids three curious fowls received by the Calcutta Zoological Garden from Mr. A. T. Blewitt, of Kalka, early in 1899.

They had been caught in a wild state, but this is not surprising as the tame-bred hybrid between the domestic Muscovy Duck and Common Duck is known to become feral at times.

These birds all resembled Common fowls in colour, the largest being splashed with white and red-brown, and the other two (one of which is figured on Plate VI) being red-brown with black necks and fine black pencilling on many of the feathers. The characteristic spotting of the Guinea-fowl was altogether absent. All had bare flesh-coloured faces, and a pendulous dewlap, most marked in the large white-spotted specimen. There was no comb, although a bare median area at the base of the bill above seemed to indicate a rudiment; and the rictal wattles of the Guinea-fowl were just indicated at the gape; of the horn of the Guinea-fowl and gular wattles of the fowl there was no trace at all. The specimen figured was a male, the testes being about the size of haricot beans; of the others, which have also died and been transferred to the Museum, the brown specimen has been preserved entire in spirits, and the other made into a skeleton. The taxidermist who prepared it states that it was a female, which I should certainly not have suspected from seeing the three birds alive. All were larger than a Guinea-fowl or ordinary Indian fowl, and had particularly strong



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