

AN EXTINCT BIRD IS ADDED TO STUDY COLLECTION

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY that we add another species of extinct bird to our collection. But we did one day in April. Not through an expedition, not through long correspondence, local collection, or exchange, but by accident we found a specimen sitting on a shelf, overlooked, in a corner of a Museum workshop.

It's a specimen of the huia, from New Zealand, one of about three species of wattled starling-like birds that comprise a family, Callaeidae, restricted to New Zealand. Recently I'd made a hurried review



SURPRISE ACQUISITION

Dr. Austin L. Rand with a fine specimen of the extinct huia found unexpectedly in the Museum.

of the family and found that we had two of the species but that the huia was missing from our collections and that it was extinct. I resigned myself to the thought that probably we'd never get one of them. Then, on this April morning, while seeing to a bird exhibit, I noticed, standing in a dark corner with some miscellaneous material awaiting preparation for exhibition, a dark, pigeon-sized bird with a long, curved bill and an orange mantle at the corners of its mouth. It could only be a huia.

I got it down. It was a well-mounted bird on a polished mahogany stand of the type so popular years ago, with a Ward's Natural History Establishment label on it that bore the correct scientific name, *Heteralocha acutirostris*. Presumably it was among the first birds the Museum received. Probably it was exhibited for a time and then, put aside to be incorporated into our collection, forgotten. Now it goes into our study collection, where under its family and species name it will remain filed, readily available for comparison and study.

Not only is the huia interesting as completing our representation of an obscure family from the antipodes, but it has unique features also. The male and the female have

different types of bills—the male a straight bill some $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, the female a curved bill some 4 inches long (our bird is a female). These birds were insect eaters, specializing in wood-boring grubs. But the two sexes go about getting them in different ways suited to their differently shaped bills. The male, with his straight short bill digs into rotten wood for the grubs burrowing there. The female probes into existing cracks and crannies for them. Sir Walter Lawry Buller, writing of a pair he had captive, says that one day a male excavating a grub found the wood too hard to excavate sufficiently to reach his prey. The female, investigating, was able to reach in with her slender bill and get it. This looks like co-operation, but Buller writes that the female ate all of the grub secured by the combined efforts of the pair.

The finding of a rarity, long overlooked, in an obscure corner of a museum, is not without precedent. It doesn't happen often, or it wouldn't be a rarity. Also, it happens less and less often because museums have fewer and fewer obscure corners—they try to utilize space to the full. But sometimes, with a decision postponed, a change put off, or work delayed, something may be put aside for a time that lengthens considerably. The best known case of such a rediscovery is that of Dr. J. P. Chapin of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. While working in the Congo Museum at Tervueren in 1936 he found a mounted pair of strange gallinaceous birds sitting on a cabinet in a corridor. They had come to the museum in 1914. They turned out to represent an undescribed genus and species of African bird—the Congo peacock that Chapin later named. Truly, the ornithologist's material is where he finds it.

Daily Guide-Lectures

Free guide-lecture tours are offered at 2 P.M. daily except Sundays under the title "Highlights of the Exhibits." These tours are designed to give a general idea of the entire Museum and its scope of activities.

Special tours on subjects within the range of the Museum exhibits are available Mondays through Fridays for parties of ten or more persons. Requests for such service must be made at least one week in advance.

Summer Programs for Children

The summer series of free entertainments for children, presented annually by the Raymond Foundation, will begin on Thursday, July 10, and continue for six successive Thursdays, including August 14. Information about the programs, which usually are motion pictures but sometimes include other features, will be in the July BULLETIN. Two performances of each program will be given, at 10 A.M. and 11 A.M., in the James Simpson Theatre of the Museum.

GIFTS TO THE MUSEUM IN PAST MONTH

Following is a list of the principal gifts received during the past month:

Department of Botany:

From: Dr. Henry Field, Washington, D.C.—11 fungi, Florida; E. P. Killip, Big Pine Key, Fla.—143 phanerogams, Florida; Dr. Earl E. Sherff, Chicago—142 prints and negatives of phanerogams

Department of Geology:

From: W. F. Kohler, Seattle—a slab of fossil foliage (*Metasequoia occidentalis* Chaney), Cook Inlet, Alaska

Department of Zoology:

From: Arctic Health Research Center, Anchorage, Alaska—two wolf skulls, Alaska; Chicago Zoological Society, Brookfield, Ill.—a bird skin (rhea); Dr. B. E. Dahlgren, Chicago—36 bats, Cuba; D. Dwight Davis and Robert F. Inger, Chicago—4 lizards and a snake, Texas; Dr. Henry Field, Washington, D.C.—153 insects and their allies, 57 snakes, and 4 gars, Iraq, Iran, and Florida; General Biological Supply House, Chicago—a catfish, Uganda; Harry Hoogstraal, Cairo, Egypt—1,384 insects and their allies, North Africa and Yemen; Ruth Johnson, Chicago—a salamander, Missouri; Dr. James Kezer, Columbia, Mo.—54 salamanders and a frog, United States; David Kistner, Chicago—2 insect paratypes, New Jersey; Peter Letang, Chicago—a block of reef coral, Florida; R. Earl Olson, Rockford, Ill.—3 snakes, Illinois and Minnesota

Henry F. Ditzel, 1880-1952

Henry F. Ditzel, who served as Registrar of the Museum for more than thirty-eight years, died May 21 at the home of one of his daughters, Mrs. Dorothy Ditzel Allen, in Oak Park, Illinois. News of his passing was received with regret at the Museum, where many of his associates are still members of the staff. Mr. Ditzel was in his seventy-second year. He joined the staff of the Museum in 1905 and retired on pension in 1944. He was responsible for maintaining important record systems of the institution and served as an aide to all the Directors the Museum has had, beginning with the first, Dr. Frederick J. V. Skiff.

Paleontologist in Austria

Dr. Rainer Zangerl, Curator of Fossil Reptiles, left for Europe recently. He will investigate an alpine formation of Triassic age (about 190 million years old) in western Austria to determine its content of vertebrate fossils.

Austrian Educator Visits Museum

Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, of Vienna, chief of education for the Kunsthistorisches Museum and other Austrian state art collections, visited Chicago Natural History Museum on May 1. He was entertained by members of the staff.



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