

XXVII.—On a rare Passerine Bird from New Guinea.

By P. L. SCLATER, D.Sc., F.R.S.

(Plate IX.)

MR. WALTER ROTHSCHILD has kindly lent me, from the treasures of the Tring Museum, a pair of the very curious little Passerine form which was described by Mr. De Vis in 1894 under the name *Eulacestoma nigropectus*, and I hope that the figures of both sexes of this rare bird, drawn by Keulemans, and the few remarks that I am able to offer upon them, will result in making the species better known to ornithologists.

The original specimens of this bird, now in the Queensland Museum at Brisbane, were obtained by Capt. Armit and Mr. Guise during their expedition up Mount Maneao, in British New Guinea, in February 1895. An account of the route of this expedition and of the adventures met with, drawn up by Mr. Guise, will be found in the 'Queensland Annual Report on British New Guinea' for 1893-94*, of which there is a copy in the Zoological Society's Library. A most valuable and interesting series of birds was procured on this occasion, and was described by Mr. De Vis in an Appendix to the Report. Amongst the novelties was a new Passerine form, which is referred by Mr. De Vis to the family Laniidæ, and named *Eulacestoma*†, from the much compressed and plough-shaped form of the bill. As Mr. De Vis's "report" is not of easy access, I will reprint his description:—

"EULACESTOMA, n. g.—Bill much shorter than head, much compressed: the depth twice the breadth and equal to the length of the culmen. Culmen moderately arched; gonys arched more strongly. Nostrils oval? exposed. Nasal and rictal bristles short and feeble; a large wattle depending from the rictus. Wing rather pointed, tip formed by primaries 3-6; first primary more than half the length of

* Report by R. E. Guise, Esquire, on the Expedition despatched from Collingwood Bay to the Main Range. Queensl. Ann. Report on British New Guinea, 1893-94. Brisbane, 1894.

† 'Ευλάκα = a ploughshare—an obsolete Greek word.

second; secondaries long. Tail of ten feathers, rounded. Legs robust. Anterior tarsal scute almost entire.

“*Eulacestoma nigropectus*, n. s. Male at 5,650 feet: iris dark-grey, April 22nd.—Upper surface olive-green; the feathers of the back, rump, and upper tail-coverts edged with greenish-yellow, which is almost yellow on the sides of the mantle; chin and upper throat pale yellow; lower throat and breast black; flanks, abdomen, and under tail-coverts pale olive-green; wing-coverts black, the greater with olive-green margins. Wing fuscous-brown; primaries edged with olive-grey, secondaries with rufous-olive. Tail brown, the feathers edged with olive; head olive, lores black, broadly tipped with greenish-yellow; ear-coverts and face olive; wattle pinky brown (in life pink). Wings and tail beneath pale slate-brown; axillaries greenish-grey; under wing-coverts grey, near the metacarpal edge blackish; legs dark-brown; bill brown-black. Length, 110 mm.; wing, 65; tail, 55; culmen, 9; tarsus, 17.”

This is a fairly accurate description of the male of the pair, belonging to the Tring Museum, now figured (Plate IX.), and I have no doubt that they have been correctly referred to Mr. De Vis's *Eulacestoma nigropectus*.

Both the specimens were obtained at Avera, on the Aroa River, British New Guinea, by Mr. A. S. Meek (or his collector), on May 31st, 1903. The Aroa River is situated north of Redsar Bay and north-west of Port Moresby*.

They may be shortly diagnosed as follows:—

♂. Suprà oleagineo-viridis; fronte et interscapulii margine exteriore flavescentibus, loris et alis nigris; remigum primariorum et secundariorum necnon tectricum marginibus externis oleagineo-viridibus, dorso concoloribus: subtus oleagineo-viridis, scuto magno pectorali et ventre medio nigris; subalaribus pallidè cinereis; caudâ nigricante, rectricibus externis viridi angustè marginatis; carunculâ rictali utrinque elongatâ brunneâ (in avivâ rubro-carneâ): rostro nigro, pedibus violaceo-nigricantibus. Long. tota 4·3, alæ 2·7, caudæ 1·8 (poll. et dec. Angl.).

* See Nov. Zool. x. p. 435 and xi. p. 310.

♀. Suprà fuscescenti-oleaginea, alis caudâque brunneis, remigum et rectricum marginibus externis rufescentioribus: subtus dilutior, flavescens; lateribus et ventre inferiore saturatioribus, viridibus; subalaribus et remigum marginibus externis pallidè rufescentibus: rostro nigricante, pedibus pallidè brunneis; carunculâ rictali nullâ.

The male is labelled "Iris reddish brown, feet dark violet, bill black"; the female "Iris light brown, feet lavender; bill black, light at base of under mandible."

Besides Mr. Rothschild's specimens I have examined two skins, apparently referable to this species, in the British Museum.

The first of these, received in 1891, was obtained by one of Emil Weiske's collectors on the Aroa River, at a height of 6000 feet, in January 1890. It is labelled "♀: iris brown; feet and bill green." This specimen agrees very fairly with the female now figured, but has a somewhat stronger bill, and is rather more whitish beneath. I have no doubt that it is a female of this species.

The second specimen in the British Museum is from a small collection from Mount Albert-Edward, in S.E. New Guinea, obtained through Messrs. John Blyth and Co. in May 1898. It is generally similar to the first, but has a rather shorter and smaller bill, and the greater and lesser wing-coverts are broadly tipped with chestnut-rufous. It appears to me to be a younger female of the same species*.

As regards the exact position of *Eulacestoma* in the Passerine series, it is obviously a very distinct form, easily recognised by its excessively compressed bill (which is somewhat like that of the Neotropical form *Cyclorhis*) and the curious rictal wattles of the male. In his 'Handbook' (vol. iv. p. 314), Dr. Bowdler Sharpe has placed *Eulacestoma* in the subfamily Pachycephalinæ of the family Laniidæ, and this, I think, is not far wrong. The Australian Shrike-Tit (*Falcunculus*), which is arranged by Dr. Sharpe in the same subfamily, is probably one of its nearest allies.

* Cf. Grant, Bull. B. O. C. viii. p. x (1898).





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