

they had seemed bewildered and incapable of movement. A younger bird from Bruni Island did not attempt to swim. This was one of a pair of nestlings covered with down even to the flippers, and still without tail-feathers. The irises of the pair first mentioned were pale green, whilst those of the younger birds were grey, so that apparently the colour changes with age. The down on the upper surface was grey and fluffy, on the under surface dull white, and somewhat close in texture. The length of the young birds which were still clad in down was 14.25 inches. The little creatures extended their flippers and agitated them precisely in the same manner as that in which young flying birds open and flap their wings, for the muscles which in the latter case must be trained for flight must in the former case be trained for swimming. They also snapped at one's fingers and at one another, and at times uttered a sound which resembled the hiss of an angry kitten. When a Little Penguin is catching small fish it darts hither and thither through the shoal, and causes the small fry to scatter in all directions, and sometimes to leap completely out of the water in their eagerness to escape. On one such occasion a Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) was, like myself, an observer of these proceedings, and whenever the Penguin reappeared, the Gull flew quickly to the spot, as if in anticipation of a meal. If this were so, it must have been disappointed, for it obtained nothing. Once only did I observe the Penguin return to the surface with a small fish in its bill, which was thereupon quickly swallowed. Immersion lasted about half a minute, after which the bird floated on the surface for a few seconds. Numerous thorn-like protuberances on the tongue and palate are inclined slightly towards the gullet, and may assist the Penguin to hold its prey and to swallow it. In two fresh skins of adult males which I examined, the basal halves of the feathers of the throat and fore-neck were in one specimen strongly washed in the other lightly washed with black. In the same skins, when preserved, the washes of black had disappeared. Perhaps the disappearance of the grey colour might be attributable to starch, which was employed in the process of cleaning.—JAMES R. M'CLYMONT. 12/1/04.

* * *

BIRDS OF THE LAMU ARCHIPELAGO (EAST AFRICA).—Since writing to you I have spent some time amidst the ancient ruins on the many islands of the Lamu Archipelago, and made several most interesting trips up the Tana River, on the mainland, through country very little if ever trod by white man. I say ancient Lamu, for it is first known to history as a vast kingdom in the year 914 A.D., and was known to the Phœnicians B.C., but with all its antiquity, its buried cities, its vast Persian ruins, the ornithology of this Archipelago is as little known as that of Central Africa. I have lived amongst it, waded up to my waist in its swamps to collect and study its aquatic birds—result (of

course, one has to pay for everything in this climate with the pound of flesh) sunstroke, followed by fever, and with great difficulty I was brought back to Zanzibar, when, with a good doctor and good nursing, thank God! I am becoming myself again. Now to give you some little glimpse of what the feathered tribes are like which inhabit this vast collection of islands, which are separated by more or less narrow channels lined with dense masses of mangrove trees, growing up straight in many places to the height of 150 feet. There are a rise and fall of tide here from 12 to 16 feet and when the tide goes out vast banks and marshes are laid bare, or partly so, and it is now that one can study the wader family as they busily traverse the banks and shallows (where there are thousands of huge sea-slugs) for their food. Vast flocks come from the sea-shore, others from the tops of the stunted mangroves, where they have been awaiting the going out of the tide. Most conspicuous amongst these birds are the Sea-Curlews—one of giant proportions, and the other species seems almost identical with our own Australian bird. Their shrill call is heard at all times during the day as they fly up or down the channels, and in the quiet of the night their shrill note cuts the atmosphere like a whistle. A bird associating with the last is one that by observation through powerful glasses was evidently our common Greenshank. Unfortunately they were very shy, and no matter what ruse I played I could not get within decent range. I collected four varieties of Sandpipers. Some of the smaller species were in great numbers. Tall and stately Cranes (Egrets) of a pure white, yellow bills and legs, could easily be distinguished amidst the merry throng. Then there is a Crane 4 feet high, jet black, with very long white neck; a slate fellow very much like our White-fronted Heron of Australia; and last, but not least, great numbers of the pretty little White Egret. I am told by the natives that there are three species of Duck, but I only saw, and shot, one species, with a white face—a very elegant bird, and fairly good eating. I may add here that on some of my trips through the channels I have seen small islands on which stunted mangroves grow quite white with the Little Egrets, which get up like a white cloud, without a sound. Leaving the water and taking to the island of Lamu, we find it sandy and covered very thickly with cocoanut trees, but still there are vast thickets of tangled vines and shrubs, also dwarf fan palms, and in these thickets are many birds. First I must mention the small Vulture, which finds its way into the narrow streets of the villages and is exceedingly tame, the natives never molesting these birds, for they are such great scavengers. The White-breasted Raven also helps in the work, and one becomes quite accustomed to its dismal croak. The little black Crow is not such a bold bird, and although he is met with on the outskirts of the villages he is not nearly so trustful. A very familiar bird on the islands is a little black Shrike (Drongo?) with forked tail; it has rather a pleasing note, and is to be seen on the

borders of an open glade, and early in the morning on the top of a dead branch, and seems to be the first bird in the morning to make a stir, for his voice is heard long before any other, and strange to say, like our Australian Black and White Fantail, on moonlight nights I have often heard its soft note up in the thick foliage of some huge mango tree. Of Kingfishers there are three which came under my notice—one a very elegant bird, somewhat larger than our *Halcyon sanctus*, throat and chest pure white, abdomen rich chocolate, wings most lovely shade of blue Prussian, black tail, same coloured blue also back, back of the head same bright blue, bill and feet coral red. One is a pied species, the third a small and sombre-coloured one. I found amongst the brushwood a very elegant Thrush, resembling the Olive Thrush of the Cape, but much more richly marked. Sun-Birds are very numerous; a very handsome jet-black variety is one of the most conspicuous. The little orange-bellied one was very numerous. Of *Merops* there are two species—one small and sombre-coloured, but the larger species is a most handsome bird. Their habits and even their notes are identical with the Australian *M. ornatus*. The Finch tribe is very strong here, as in every part of Africa. The Weaver Finch here is quite a different bird from the one on Zanzibar Island; it is of a saffron-yellow, with black back and tail, and the entrance to its dome-shaped nest is much more elongated and made more neatly, being woven closer and of finer material. There is a most elegant little scarlet variety, and a blue one with long tail; again a very small black one, but I have shot this bird at Zanzibar. A very large brown species with a massive bill draws one's attention, for it is always chattering, and moves about in large families. I am much interested in this Finch family, for the numbers of species I have collected over Africa (I mean in the South and on East Coast and islands) is wonderful. Guinea-Fowl are very plentiful in the thick undergrowth, also a brown hen called Spur-Fowl, on account of the spur on the wing like our Spur-winged Plover. Nocturnal birds are not at all plentiful, and I did not see one single species of the Owl family. The only bird I saw, and shot, was one of the Nightjars. There are three species of Swallows—a small brown one, a large Swift, and a very pretty little one with white breast with black band and steel-blue back. This is but a brief sketch of the birds of Lamu, for I have made many notes and specimens, from which later on I may be able to give you a more detailed record. I am hoping that this sun-stroke will not prevent my visiting Madagascar this trip.

I forgot to mention a very fine Fish-Hawk which is often to be seen perched quite motionless on a mangrove tree overhanging one of the channels. It has white head, neck, back, and breast, wings rich brown. Another Hawk which is very familiar up the coast is a small brown one which hovers over the waters of the bays like a Gull, and picks up any refuse thrown from the ship.

I met with two species of the order Columbæ—one a fine large

Pigeon, which I saw twice, but unfortunately was not able to get a specimen; the other was one of the small Doves, and I feel sure it is the bird Woodward describes as *Chalcopelia afra*, and as having met it down the coast to the south. I found them very sparsely distributed over the Archipelago in pairs, and I not only procured specimens, but took their eggs, which are deposited on a few twigs, like all the Dove family, and are of a dirty-white colour. The nest is generally placed in an acacia tree, about 6 feet from the ground. The birds seem to keep to the thick undergrowth.—(CAPT.) S. A. WHITE. Zanzibar, East Africa, 24/9/03.

From Magazines, &c.

The Victorian Naturalist, vol. xx., pp. 133–139 (February, 1904) contains some “Ornithological Notes on the Grass-Wrens (*Amytis*)” by Mr. G. A. Keartland. His personal field observations on *A. textilis*, *A. striatus*, and *A. modesta* (of which he was the discoverer) are very interesting and valuable.

* * *

MAGPIES AS WEATHER PROPHETS.—It is noted as a remarkable fact that these birds are this year building their nests on the ground instead of on the limbs of trees as formerly. The statement is vouched for by several old residents, who add that there used to be a tradition among the blacks that when Magpies built in this manner it was a sure sign of a phenomenal visitation of wind in the spring.—*Hamilton Spectator*, 5/9/03.

* * *

PROTECTION TO BIRDS OF PARADISE.—Sportsmen in British New Guinea, whenever they see a Bird of Paradise, shoot at it. The Lieutenant-Governor of the territory has issued a notice prohibiting the destruction of these birds in most portions of the possession, so that they may not become extinct. Very few feathers taken from the Bird of Paradise are imported into Australia from New Guinea. It is stated that they are sent to Paris, treated there, and then forwarded to the Commonwealth if required.—*Argus*, 1/10/03.

* * *

BIRD “CHARMED” BY SNAKE.—Mirboo North.—A miner at the Iron Syndicate’s mine was standing outside his hut, when he noticed a bird on the roof whose actions he thought rather peculiar. The bird dropped almost at his feet. On looking down he saw a big snake making all manner of contortions with its body, and its movements seemed to hold the bird spell-bound. When in the act of seizing the bird the snake reared itself up, and, seeing the man, made towards him. The snake seemed to charm the bird by its contortions and movements, and not, as is generally supposed, by its eyes. On being killed it proved to be a 4-foot tiger snake.—*Age*, 29/1/04.



White, Samuel Albert. 1904. "Birds of the Lamu Archipelago (East Africa)." *The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 3(4), 238–241.
<https://doi.org/10.1071/mu903233n>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/36066>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1071/mu903233n>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/379122>

Holding Institution

American Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

Sloan Foundation

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

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>.