

CASUARIUS BENNETTI, Gould.

Bennett's Cassowary.

Casuarius Bennetti, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xxv. p. 269, pl. 129.—Gray in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part. xxvi. p. 271, pl. 144.—Dr. Bennett in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xxvii. p. 32.
Mooruk, Aborigines of New Britain.

Who would have supposed the former existence of an extensive group of Struthious birds of great magnitude and comprising many species? and what naturalist would have imagined that so much of the bony structures of these birds would have been brought to light—that not only their generic but their specific characters may be accurately described, and even their entire skeletons mounted in our museums? Yet these things have been realized within the last few years, the indefatigable zeal and careful study of an Owen having enabled him to determine and arrange the semi-fossilized remains of numerous species of a great family of birds which formerly existed on our globe, and of which some few remain to testify as to the character of their plumage and their economy of life. It is a living representative of this almost extinct group that forms the subject of the present paper, and the discovery of which must be hailed with interest, tending as it does to throw a light on the history of those huge birds of remote antiquity—the *Dinornis* and its allies. Professor Owen considers this new bird and the Cassowary (*Casuarius galeatus*) to be the most nearly allied living types of his genus *Palapteryx*; and if this opinion be correct, we may infer that the habits and economy, as well as the kind of plumage and the character of country inhabited by the extinct birds, were very similar. I have always considered the Cassowary to belong to a totally different group to the Ostriches, which are adapted for roaming over vast plains and open country during the day-time, and to feed upon berries, fruits, mollusks and small animals generally; while the Cassowary, the Mooruk, and the Apteryx are partially or wholly nocturnal, living reclusely in the gullies and humid parts of dense forests, feeding upon the roots of ferns and other plants peculiar to such situations. The hair-like character of their feathers bespeak these habits and mode of life, as much as the plumes of the Ostriches do their adaptation for open plains and savannahs. Having premised thus much, I now proceed to state that it has been a source of much gratification to myself, that I have been enabled, through the kindness of Dr. Bennett of Sydney, further to add to our knowledge of this group by making known the existence of an entirely new species of *Casuarius*; I mention my gratification, because I consider this to be one of the most important additions to ornithology I have ever had the good fortune to bring before the notice of the scientific world. It is true that the same remark might be made with regard to *Baleniceps*, the *Menura Alberti*, and many other extraordinary birds I have had the pleasure of naming; but the present species and the *Apteryx Oweni* are members of a nearly extinct family of birds, the remnants of a group which played an important part in the economy of nature in periods long gone by. How much, then, does science owe to Dr. Bennett for having secured and sent this bird to London! and how much does the Society in whose possession this valuable donation is deposited, owe to him for his liberality! Three examples of this fine bird, a splendid adult male and two younger specimens, grace the Gardens of the Zoological Society of London, where they live side by side with the Ostrich, the Rhea, the Emeu, the Apteryx, and its allied congener, the Cassowary. All are in good health; and such a display of great Struthious birds was never before seen, and probably never will be again, and ought alone to be a sufficient attraction for visitors to this justly popular establishment.

On the arrival of the first Mooruk, I was somewhat sceptical as to its being specifically distinct from the common Cassowary; but as the bird increased in size, and the helmet became more developed, this suspicion was dispelled from my mind; and now that the bird is fully adult, it is apparent that no two species can be more distinct. Compared with the Cassowary, the Mooruk is a smaller and shorter bird, and has much thicker legs; and the helmet, instead of being in the form of an elevated casque with a short rounded ridge, rises high at the base, and then branches out into two overhanging lobes, the horny part which unites them being lowest in the centre—the back part of this elevated double crest being flat and rising rather obliquely from the head near the occiput. This feature has been carefully depicted in the accompanying Plate, which represents the head of the size of life; its form will therefore be more clearly perceived by a reference to the Plate than by any description, however accurate and minute. The colouring of the Mooruk, when it first arrived in England, was rufous mixed with black on the back and under part of the body, and raven-black about the neck and breast; the loose wavy skin of the neck was beautifully coloured with iridescent tints of bluish purple, pink, and an occasional shade of green; and the feet and legs were of a pale ash-colour. The body has now become generally darker, the bare skin of the fore part of the neck of a more uniform smalt blue, and the legs of a somewhat darker tint. I am much indebted to my friend, G. F. Angas, Esq., of Sydney, for a very accurate drawing of the young state of this bird; and I cannot too strongly express my thanks to him for the great trouble he has taken in making these correct delineations, as well as for several others that have reached me: it is pleasing to find a gentleman who has the power, willing to aid science in this way.

Dr. Bennett, after whom I have named the bird as a just compliment to one who has ever manifested the greatest love for Natural History, besides presenting the living birds to the Zoological Society, has enriched the volumes of their "Proceedings" with some interesting details as to the habits of the bird while living in