

STRIGOPS HABROPTILUS, G. R. Gray.

Kakapo.

Strigops habroptilus, G. R. Gray, in Gray and Mitchell's Genera of Birds, vol. ii. p. 427. pl. cv.—Strange in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xv. p. 50.—G. R. Gray in Ibid. p. 61.—Lyall in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xx. p. 31, Aves, pl. xlvi. fig. 3, egg.

I HAVE no hesitation in giving a figure of this extraordinary Night Parrot in the Supplement to my work on the "Birds of Australia," since the two species of *Apteryx*, the *Notornis* and other remarkable birds from New Zealand, the native country of the *Kakapo*, have already appeared in its pages.

Long before 1845, when a skin of this bird was for the first time sent to Europe, we had conclusive evidence of the existence of the species, from the circumstance of plumes made of its feathers being worn by the Maories. It is somewhat strange, however, that such a lengthened period should have elapsed after the discovery and possession of New Zealand before so singular a bird should have found its way to Europe. At no very distant date it doubtless inhabited alike all the islands of the New Zealand group; but it probably no longer exists in the northern island, its extirpation from whence being doubtless attributable to a variety of causes: it is that portion of the country in which the natives have always chiefly resided, and the introduction since the visit of the celebrated navigator Cook, of the Pig, the Dog, the Cat, and that universal pest the brown or Norway Rat, has doubtless tended greatly to produce such a result; for the three latter having now become wild, we may reasonably infer that they have played no inconsiderable part in the destruction, not only of this comparatively helpless bird, but of many others; the time is probably not far distant when these marauders will obtain a footing in the middle and southern islands, the result of which may be anticipated by what has already occurred.

I have always entertained the opinion that the present bird, the *Notornis*, the *Apteryx*, the *Neomorpha* and the *Nestor* are only remnants of a bird fauna of a very distant period now all but extinct; a fauna in my opinion peculiar to New Zealand, Norfolk Island and other adjoining islets, which themselves are probably the remains of a submerged continent, for it can scarcely be imagined that the huge *Diornis*, *Palapteryx* and other allied genera were formed to dwell on islands so small as those in which their remains are now found.

The first published account of this singular bird is that given by Dr. Lyall, R.N. in the Part of the "Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London" above referred to, and which I beg leave to transcribe.

"Although the *Kakapo* is said to be still found occasionally on some parts of the high mountains in the interior of the north island of New Zealand, the only place where we met with it, during our circumnavigation and exploration of the coasts of the islands in H.M.S. Acheron, was at the S.W. end of the middle island. There, in the deep sounds which intersect that part of the island, it is still found in considerable numbers, inhabiting the dry spurs of hills or flats near the banks of rivers, where the trees are high, and the forest comparatively free from fern or underwood.

"The first place where it was obtained was on a hill nearly 4000 feet above the level of the sea. It was also found living in communities on flats near the mouths of rivers close to the sea. In these places its tracts were to be seen resembling footpaths made by man, and leaving us at first to imagine that there must be natives in the neighbourhood. The tracks are about a foot wide, regularly pressed down to the edges, which are two or three inches deep amongst the moss, and cross each other usually at right angles.

"The *Kakapo* lives in holes under the roots of trees, and is also occasionally found under shelving rocks.