

MENURA ALBERTI, *Gould.*

Albert Lyre Bird.

Menura Alberti, Gould in Proc. of Linn. Soc., February 5, 1850.—Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 215.—Jard. Cont. Orn., 1850.

THE dense, luxuriant, and almost impenetrable brushes which skirt along the eastern coast of Australia from Sydney to Moreton Bay, are, as might be supposed, tenanted by many forms both of mammalia and birds peculiarly their own; many of these districts are very partially known, and some of them may be said to be as yet untrodden, hence it is not surprising that an additional species of this extraordinary form should have been there discovered. I must fairly admit, however, that I was not prepared for the acquisition of so remarkable a bird within the limits of the colony of New South Wales.

I have great pleasure in naming this species *M. Alberti*, in honour of His Royal Highness Prince Albert, as a slight token of respect for his personal virtues, and the liberal support he has rendered to my various publications.

The specific differences between the present bird and the older known species, *M. superba*, are very apparent; they consist in the rufous colouring of the plumage, and in the total absence of the brown barrings of the lyre-shaped tail-feathers, which, moreover, are much shorter than the other feathers of the tail, while in *M. superba* they are the longest; they are "composed," says Sir William Jardine, who has carefully compared the specimens of the two species in my possession, "of very broad webs, loose but not separated. The next six feathers on each side are similar in structure, having wide separated barbs, but they are finer and shorter than in *M. superba*. The two centre feathers are also of the same structure, and cross each other at the base; but the inner webs are broader, the outer rudimentary barbs stronger and placed more thickly; the entire tail considerably shorter."

The first specimens of this bird that came under my notice were sent to me by Mr. Strange of Sydney; my friend Dr. Bennett also forwarded to me almost simultaneously a fine example belonging to the Museum, which the Directors with their wonted liberality, had at his request permitted to be sent to England for illustration in the present work.

"I have often seen this new species of *Menura*," says Dr. Bennett, "but always regarded it as a young male of *M. superba*, until Dr. Stephenson residing at York Station, Richmond River, (who accompanied Sir Thomas Mitchell on his last expedition,) informed me that he believed it to be new, which on comparison I found to be the case. I cannot, perhaps, do better than send you the following extract from Dr. Stephenson's letter, dated Sept. 20, 1849:—"In a collection of birds made in the year 1849 on the Richmond, are two specimens of a nondescript *Menura*, one of which I present to you for examination and description. You will perceive a very close affinity between it and the *superba*, except in the tail, which is very different. Since the idea of its being distinct occurred to me and to my friend Augustus A. Leicester, Esq., I have made every possible inquiry respecting the bird amongst the sawyers and others, all of whom agree that it is distinct; some of them had shot specimens of the *M. superba* at Camden Haven and other localities to the southward, but had never seen the present bird further to the south than the Nambucca River; they also state that the new bird is not so timid as the old one, and is consequently more easily shot. The locality it frequents consists of mountain ridges not very densely covered with brush; it passes most of its time on the ground, feeding and strutting about with the tail reflected over the back to within an inch or two of the head, and with the wings dropping on the ground. Each bird forms for itself three or four 'corroborating places,' as the sawyers call them; they consist of holes scratched in the sandy ground about two feet and a half in diameter by sixteen, eighteen or twenty inches in depth, and about three or four hundred yards apart or even more. Whenever you get sight of the bird, which can only be done with the greatest caution and by taking advantage of intervening objects to shelter yourself from its observation, you will find it in one or other of these holes, into which it frequently jumps and seems to be feeding, then ascends again and struts round and round the place, imitating with its powerful musical voice any bird it may chance to hear around it; the note of the *Dacelo gigantea* it imitates to perfection; its own whistle is exceedingly beautiful and varied. No sooner does it perceive an intruder than it flies up into the nearest tree, first alighting on the lowermost branches and then ascending by a succession of jumps until it reaches the top, whence it instantly darts off to another of its play-grounds. The stomachs of those I dissected invariably contained insects, with scarcely a trace of any other material."

Mr. Strange informs me that he met with the bird "in the cedar brushes which skirt Turanga Creek,