

MENURA SUPERBA, *Davies.*

Lyre-Bird.

Menura superba, Davies in Linn. Trans., vol. vii. p. 207. pl. 22.—Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxi.—Collins, New South Wales, vol. ii. pl. in p. 93.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 313.

Le Parkinson, Vieill. (Ois. Dor.) Ois. de Parad., pls. 14, 15, 16.

Megapodius menura, Wagl. Sys. Av., sp. 1.

Menura Lyra, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 577.—Vieill. Gal. des Ois., pl. 192.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, p. 71.

Menura Novæ-Hollandiæ, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxi.—Temm. Man., tom. 1. p. lvii.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 478. pl. 88.

Parkinsonius mirabilis, Bechst.

Menura vulgaris, Flem.

Menura paradisea, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 351.

Superb Menura, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 271.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 159. pl. cxxiv.

Pheasant of the Colonists.—Beleck, Beleck and Balangara of the Aborigines.

WERE I requested to suggest an emblem for Australia among its birds, I should without the slightest hesitation select the *Menura* as the most appropriate, being not only strictly peculiar to Australia, but, as far as is yet known, to the colony of New South Wales.

Perhaps no bird has more divided the opinion of ornithologists, as to the situation it should occupy in the natural system, than the one here represented; and although more than fifty years have now elapsed since the bird was first discovered, little or no information has been hitherto published respecting its economy and habits, as ornithologists have had only its external structure to guide them in their opinions. Aware of this fact, I paid considerable attention to the subject while in Australia; and after a minute observation of the bird in a state of nature, I am decidedly of opinion, that it has not, as has been very generally considered, the most remote relationship to the *Gallinaceæ*; but that it forms, with the American genera *Pteroptochos*, *Scytalopus*, and their allied groups, a family of the Insectorial Order, to which *Troglodytes*, *Amytis*, *Stipiturus*, *Malurus*, *Dasyornis* and *Psophodes* closely assimilate in their habits, and of which they will in all probability be hereafter found to form a part. Notwithstanding the great size of *Menura* and the extraordinary form of its tail, in almost every other point it presents a striking resemblance to its minute congeners: like them, it possesses the bristles at the base of the bill, but to a less extent, the same unusual mass of loose, flowing, hair-like feathers on the back and rump, the same extraordinary power of running, the like feebleness of flight; all which will, I trust, render it evident that there are sufficient grounds for the opinion I have here expressed. Many intervening genera will, doubtless, yet be discovered to complete the series of affinities: at all events, if, as I am informed is the case, the young of *Menura* are helpless and blind when hatched, it cannot with propriety be placed with the *Gallinaceæ*.

In the structure of its feet, in its lengthened claws, and in its whole contour, the Lyre-bird presents the greatest similarity to the *Pteroptochos megapodius* of Kittlitz. Another singular circumstance by which their alliance is rendered still more evident, is the fact that *Pteroptochos* differs from the other families of the Insectorial Order in having fourteen feathers in its tail, and that *Menura* also differs in the same particular in possessing sixteen. The immense feet and claws of these two birds admirably adapt them for the peculiar localities they are destined to inhabit; and the same beautiful modification of structure is observable in the other genera, equally adapting them for the situations they are intended to fulfil. Thus *Menura* passes with ease over the loose stones and the sides of rocky gullies and ravines, while the *Maluri* trip over the more open and even ground, and the *Dasyorni* with equal facility thread the dense scrubs and reed-beds.

As I have before stated, the great stronghold of the Lyre-bird is the colony of New South Wales, and from what I could learn, its range does not extend so far to the eastward as Moreton Bay; neither have I been able to trace it to the westward of Port Philip on the southern coast; but further research can alone determine these points. It inhabits equally the brushes on the coast, and those that clothe the sides of the mountains in the interior; on the coast it is especially abundant at Western Port and Illawarra, and in all probability over a great portion of the unexplored intervening country: in the interior the cedar brushes of the Liverpool range, and according to Mr. George Bennett, the Mountains of the Tumat country are among the places of which it is a denizen. Of all the birds I have ever met with, the *Menura* is by far the most shy and difficult to procure. While among the brushes I have been surrounded by these birds, pouring forth their loud and liquid calls, for days together, without being able to get a sight of them; and it was only by the most determined perseverance and extreme caution that I was enabled to effect this desirable object; which was rendered the more difficult by their often frequenting the almost inaccessible and precipitous sides of gullies and ravines, covered with tangled masses of creepers and umbrageous trees: the cracking of a stick, the rolling down of a small stone, or any other noise, however slight, is sufficient to alarm it; and none but those who have traversed these rugged, hot and suffocating brushes, can fully understand the excessive labour attendant on the pursuit of the *Menura*. Independently of climbing over rocks and fallen trunks of trees, the sportsman has to creep and crawl beneath and among the branches with the utmost caution, taking care only to advance when the bird's attention is occupied in singing, or in scratching up the leaves in search of food; to watch its actions it is necessary to remain perfectly motionless, not venturing to move even in the slightest degree, or it vanishes from sight as if by magic. Although I have said thus much on the cautiousness of the *Menura*, it is not always so alert: in some of the more accessible brushes through which roads have been cut it may frequently be seen, and even on horseback closely approached, the bird apparently evincing less fear of those animals than of man. At Illawarra it is sometimes successfully pursued by dogs trained to rush suddenly upon it, when it immediately leaps upon the branch of a tree, and its attention being attracted by the dog which stands barking below, it is easily approached and shot. Another successful mode of procuring specimens, is by wearing a tail of a full-plumaged male in the hat, keeping it constantly in motion, and concealing the