

MEGACREX INEPTA, *D'Albert. & Salvad.*

New-Guinea Flightless Rail.

Megacrex inepta, D'Albert. & Salvad. Ann. Mus. Civic. Genov. xiv. p. 130.—D'Albert. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1879, p. 218.

CONSIDERABLE interest attaches to the discovery of the present species, as adding another flightless bird to the number already known in the world. Irrespective of the large Struthious birds such as the Ostrich, the Rheas, the Cassowary, and the Apteryges, there are several Rails, from New Zealand, New Caledonia, and the islands to the east of Australia, which only possess the power of flight to a very limited extent; and now Signor D'Albertis has discovered a species belonging to the last-named family in South-eastern New Guinea, thus extending the habitat of the flightless Rallidæ, and adding a new genus to the family. Five specimens were obtained by him on the Fly River—four males and a female, the latter being described as exactly similar to the males collected, but a little smaller. Count Salvadori remarks with truth that *Megacrex inepta* bears considerable resemblance in its coloration to the South-American genus *Aramides*, forming therefore, with the large Harpy Buzzard (*Harpyopsis nova-guineæ*) and the Papuan Tiger Bittern (*Tigrisoma heliosylos*), which are also closely allied to South-American forms, another remarkable link between the neotropical region and the far distant islands of the Papuan subregion. It is quite possible, as it has always seemed to me, that a comparison of South-American genera with some of the Old-World forms would prove that the former are not so far distant from the genera of Africa and Australia as most ornithologists seem to believe.

Unfortunately we have at present no account of the habits of this new Rail, as is often the case on the discovery of a new species, when explorers, carrying their lives in their hands in a new country, cannot do more than preserve specimens of the species which come under their notice. Signor D'Albertis merely remarks that the *Megacrex* frequented ditches in the neighbourhood of the Fly River which had water in them during the dry season, that it ran swiftly, and appeared incapable of flight.

The following is a translation of the original description given by the two naturalists in the work above quoted:—

“Head and neck dusky brown; the forehead more ashy; the sides of the head ashy grey, the lores dusky, the throat whitish; the sides of the neck pale vinaceous in the middle, below brownish olive; back olive-greyish; rump and upper tail-coverts brown, as also the tail, which is very short and concealed; fore neck, upper part of breast, and sides of the latter rufescent; middle of breast and abdomen white, slightly tinged with rufous; the sides olivaceous; lower abdomen and thighs greyish vinous, the sides of the abdomen and under tail-coverts brown; wing-coverts greyish olive, uniform with the back; quills brownish olive; bill yellowish green; feet black; iris dark blood-red.

My figure represents the species nearly the size of life, and is drawn from one of the typical specimens kindly lent to me by Signor D'Albertis.