

BULLER'S NEW ZEALAND SPECIMEN OF GREY HERON

By KENNETH C. PARKES

ABSTRACT

The Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was placed on the Suspense List of the 1970 OSNZ Checklist, as the Checklist Committee could not confirm the existence of an 1898 specimen reported by Buller. Buller's "third collection," including this heron, is in Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. The Grey Heron should be readmitted to the main New Zealand list, but under the name *A. c. jouyi* Clark rather than *A. c. rectirostris* Gould.

The Asiatic Grey Heron was listed in the 1953 Checklist (OSNZ 1953: 31), under the name *Ardea cinerea rectirostris* Gould, on the basis of one specimen record and two sight records. In the 1970 Checklist (OSNZ 1970: [75]) the species was removed to the Suspense List. Criteria for inclusion in this list were "(a) old records, some of which are unique, and no longer verifiable either because no specimens were obtained, or because specimens said to have been obtained are no longer traceable; (b) recent records of rare vagrants which are unsupported by adequate evidence . . ." (OSNZ 1970: 9). Mr F. C. Kinsky, Convener of the Checklist Committee of the OSNZ, confirmed (letter of 18 October 1973) my suspicion that the specimen of Grey Heron mentioned in the 1953 Checklist belonged to category (a) and the sight records to category (b).

The specimen record cited was that of Buller (1905, I: [193]), who stated: "We have now to include New Zealand in the range of this noble bird, Mr A. Waley having obtained in Auckland the skin of one which was caught on board a schooner off the east coast, the authenticity of its capture being beyond all doubt. It was carefully stuffed by Mr Spencer, of Queen Street, Auckland; and, on Mr Whaley's collection becoming dispersed in London, it came into my possession [discrepancy in spelling the collector's name as in Buller]." The members of the Checklist Committee, being unaware that this specimen still existed, considered it to fall under the "no longer traceable" criterion of category (a) of the Suspense List.

New Zealand ornithologists seem generally to have overlooked Buller's account of the disposition of his collections, as it appears on the last text page (167) of his Supplement (Buller 1905, II) under his account of *Glaucopsis wilsoni* [now *Callaenas cinerea wilsoni*]. Why there? Buller was in a reminiscent mood as he completed his Supplement. The first birds he ever collected, at the age of twelve, were

four "*Glaucopsis wilsoni*," which "a devoted mother, who had never skinned a bird before, succeeded, with infinite trouble, in converting . . . into four beautiful cabinet specimens." At the end of the species account, Buller mentions that these four specimens were ". . . the foundation of a collection which in after years assumed important proportions, and was, on the publication of my first edition, in 1872-3, presented by me to the Colony, when it straightway became the 'Type Collection' in the Colonial Museum. . . My second collection was sold by me, on the publication of my second edition, in 1888, to the Hon. Walter Rothschild, for the Tring Museum [as is well known, the Rothschild Collection is now at the American Museum of Natural History, New York] . . . and my third collection, on the completion of this 'Supplement,' to the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, U.S.A. . . ."

The New Zealand specimen of *Ardea cinerea* belonged to this "third collection," and is still at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, where it bears catalogue no. 24467. The only data on the label are "Australian straggler: shot off N.Z. coast. 1898." There can be no doubt that this is the specimen about which Buller wrote. The skin is in reasonably good condition, but is badly stained. From the nature and position of the staining, I suspect its origin to be the substance with which the skin was poisoned against insect pests. Many Nineteenth Century taxidermists had secret formulas for poisoning and preserving skins, formulas they guarded as Twentieth Century cosmeticians guard theirs. Unfortunately, some of the ingredients of these mixtures ultimately had detrimental effects on the specimens, including the blackish staining typified by the Grey Heron skin.

Buller's specimen is a first-year bird, with no sex indicated. The name *rectirostris* Gould, used in the 1953 Checklist, is now generally considered to be a synonym of *cinerea* Linnaeus, as Grey Herons from India (the restricted type locality of *rectirostris*) are barely different from those of Europe (see Mees 1971, for details and references). The name *jouyi* Clark (type locality Korea) is therefore used for Grey Herons of the eastern Orient. In spite of its stained condition, the New Zealand specimen shows the pale dorsal colour of eastern birds when compared with European *cinerea* of the same age class. Mees has described as *altirostris* the apparently resident Grey Herons of Java and Sumatra, separating them from *jouyi* on the basis of deeper and (usually) longer bills. His series of *jouyi* was quite inadequate; even the two breeding males I have measured suffice to show that overlap in bill size is far greater than indicated by Mees. Whether or not *altirostris* is valid, however, the New Zealand specimen (assuming that the bills of year-old birds are full-sized) falls well below the bill measurements of Java and Sumatra birds and may safely be identified as *A. c. jouyi*.

On the basis of Buller's specimen, the Grey Heron can be readmitted to the New Zealand list under the name *Ardea cinerea jouyi*. I note that (unlike the present custom in North America) English

names are given to subspecies in the New Zealand Checklist. I suggest that *A. c. jouyi* be called "Oriental Grey Heron" rather than "Asiatic Grey Heron," as the boundary between western and eastern races shifts well to the east when *rectirostris* of India is considered inseparable from *cinerea*.

Following a suggestion by Mr Kinsky, I hope to prepare for publication a full list of the Buller specimens at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, to make this information available to New Zealand ornithologists. The collection includes a number of rare or extinct forms; some of these specimens were overlooked by Greenway (1958).

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Dr Kenneth C. Parkes

*Carnegie Museum of Natural History
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213 U.S.A.*