

December 9, 1851.

W. Yarrell, Esq., in the Chair.

The following papers were read :—

1. ON SOME BONES OF DIDUS. BY A. D. BARTLETT.

(Aves, Pl. XLV.)

The history of the Dodo having been recently the subject of so much inquiry, and the exertions made by Mr. Strickland, Dr. Melville and others, having succeeded in bringing together so many important facts, it might appear that there was little more to be said upon the subject; this, however, I believe is far from being the case. A few facts established upon a subject which was before obscured in doubt and error will, I trust, always act as a charm, and induce us at every opportunity to investigate that subject still further, in the hope of learning the truth. On the present occasion I am desirous of calling attention to a few bones upon the table. In so doing I beg to say, that in the year 1830 a collection of bones arrived in Paris, which attracted the attention of the scientific world. These bones came from the island of Rodriguez, but on account of their being incrustated with stalagmite, little has been done with them; they were, however, the cause of search being made for more in the same locality, and two collections were made in the year 1831 by the late Mr. Telfair. One of these collections was forwarded to the Andersonian Museum in Glasgow, the other to the collection of this Society, and at the evening meeting, March 12, 1833, the bones sent by Mr. Telfair were laid upon the table.

I will here read an extract from the Society's Proceedings :—"Dr. Grant pointed out that they were the bones of the hinder extremity of a large bird, and the head of a humerus. With reference to the metatarsal bone, which was long and strong, Dr. Grant pointed out that it possessed the articulating surfaces for four toes, three directed forwards and one backwards, as in the foot of the Dodo preserved in the British Museum, to which it was also proportioned in magnitude and form."

I beg now to read a paragraph from Mr. Strickland's book. At page 52 we find: "The bones sent by Mr. Telfair in 1833 to the Zoological Society have met with some unfortunate fate. Three or four years ago, Mr. Fraser, the late Curator of that Society, made, at my request, a diligent search for these specimens, but all his endeavours to find them were fruitless: he found the identical box sent by Mr. Telfair, but, alas! the bones of the Solitaire, apterous as it was, had flown away, and the only bones that remained belonged to tortoises."

In the month of July last an opportunity was afforded me by the Secretary of renewing this search, and I had the good fortune to

find what I believe to be all the specimens sent to the Society by Mr. Telfair.

Upon my informing Mr. Mitchell of my success, that gentleman, knowing the trouble and interest I had taken to recover them, granted me permission to examine, compare, and describe them, and to bring the subject before the Society.

In the first place, we are led to believe (and I think without the slightest doubt) that these bones came originally from the island of Rodriguez. There cannot be any doubt, also, that Rodriguez and the neighbouring islands were at one period inhabited by several species of large birds. Whether any of the same species of these birds inhabited different islands, or whether each island was inhabited by distinct species, is a question to which I beg most particularly to call your attention: the most recent publication by Mr. Strickland and Dr. Melville would lead us to believe that the true Dodo (*Didus ineptus*) was solely confined to the island of Mauritius, and another species, known as the Solitaire, was said to be its representative on the island of Rodriguez. If this be true, I should have the pleasure of introducing to your notice the bones of at least two new species of birds from that island: I do not however myself feel justified in so doing, but believe some of the bones sent here by Mr. Telfair belong to the true Dodo (*Didus ineptus*). There are also in the collection (I think without doubt) bones of two other species, one of these of much larger size than the Dodo, the other considerably smaller. The bones in question having all the usual and well-known characteristics of those of adult birds, we cannot therefore suppose the differences which they present to be such as might arise from age; and on the other hand, you will perceive that the proportions are too dissimilar to allow of our regarding them as having belonged to different sexes of the same species. There often exists great difference of size in the bones of the opposite sex, but I have never noticed any very evident difference of proportion. These are to me satisfactory reasons for considering them specifically distinct. But to return to the question,—Was the Dodo found on the island of Rodriguez? Sir Thomas Herbert says *it was*; and his evidence appears to me of much importance, considering the number of years he spent travelling about, visiting these islands, and collecting rare and curious things; having also repeatedly described the Dodo, and very probably brought one to England. I am therefore inclined to regard the assertions made by Sir Thomas Herbert with more respect than they have elsewhere received. It may appear at first sight impossible that the same species of birds which were destitute of the power of *swimming* or *flying* could inhabit islands so far from each other; but, were these islands always in the state in which we find them? may they not at some distant period have been united and formed part of the same land? In endeavouring in this manner to account for the existence of the Dodo upon the island of Rodriguez as well as at Mauritius, it has been remarked that this argument would not hold good, as the islands in question were of volcanic origin: if this be the case, to account for its existence at either place appears to me equally difficult. I am

fully aware it has been the practice of late to consider the animals obtained from localities remote from each other specifically distinct; they may be so; but unless we have some certain means of distinguishing them, I do not think we ought to regard them as such.

I now venture to introduce to your notice what I believe to be the *tibia* of the Dodo (*Didus ineptus*): its agreement with the foot in the British Museum struck me as being exceedingly remarkable and conclusive: its size and proportions, as compared with the metatarsal in question, are exactly what I should have expected upon the supposition of their belonging to the same species: they fit each other so perfectly, that one might think they belonged to the same individual. With this evidence before me, I cannot for one moment hesitate in considering the *Dodo of the Mauritius to be identical with the Dodo of Rodriguez*. There are also in this collection two other bones, which, from their size and form, I believe to belong to this species: the most remarkable is the head of the *humerus*, which would indicate by its magnitude and broad attachments that it belonged to a bird of large bulk, while the sudden reduction in the size of its shaft clearly indicates a bird with small wings. The great thickness and consequent weight is sufficient to cause us to suppose that this bird had not the power of flight.

The next bone to which I will call your attention is a right metatarsal, which appears to me to have belonged to a bird known to Leguat as the Solitaire, and described by him during his residence on the island of Rodriguez. I beg to read Leguat's description, in order to point out to you its near agreement in point of size and form with the Turkey, with which bird Leguat compared the bird he called the Solitaire:—

“Of all the birds in the island, the most remarkable is that which goes by the name of the *Solitary*, because it is very seldom seen in company, though there are abundance of them. The feathers of the male are of a brown-grey colour: the feet and beak are like a Turkey's, but a little more crooked. They have scarce any tail, but their hind part covered with feathers is roundish, like the crupper of a Horse; they are taller than Turkeys. Their neck is straight, and a little longer in proportion than a Turkey's when it lifts up its head. Its eye is black and lively, and its head without comb or cop. They never fly, their wings are too little to support the weight of their bodies; they serve only to beat themselves, and flutter when they call one another. They will whirl about for twenty or thirty times together on the same side, during the space of four or five minutes. The motion of their wings makes then a noise very like that of a rattle, and one may hear it two hundred paces off. The bone of their wing grows greater towards the extremity, and forms a little round mass under the feathers, as big as a musket-ball. That and its beak are the chief defence of this bird. 'Tis very hard to catch it in the woods, but easie in open places, because we run faster than they, and sometimes we approach them without much trouble. From March to September they are extremely fat, and taste admirably well,

especially while they are young ; some of the males weigh forty-five pounds.

“ The females are wonderfully beautiful, some fair, some brown ; I call them fair, because they are of the colour of fair hair. They have a sort of peak, like a widow’s, upon their breasts (*lege* beaks), which is of a dun colour. No one feather is straggling from the other all over their bodies, they being very careful to adjust themselves, and make them all even with their beaks. The feathers on their thighs are round like shells at the end, and being there very thick have an agreeable effect. They have two risings on their *craws*, and the feathers are whiter there than the rest, which livelyly represents the fine neck of a beautiful woman. They walk with so much stateliness and good grace, that one cannot help admiring and loving them ; by which means their fine mien often saves their lives.”—*Leguat’s Voyage to the East Indies*, 1708, p. 71.

You will perceive this bird was said to be larger and taller than a Turkey. A comparison of this metatarsal bone with the metatarsal bone of the Turkey I think will satisfactorily show the accuracy of Leguat’s description, and at the same time justify our conclusion that this metatarsal bone belonged to the Solitaire of Rodriguez, to which the name of *Didus solitarius* has been applied. I trust I shall be pardoned for avoiding the use of the new generic term adopted by the authors of ‘The Dodo and its kindred,’ for in a group so little known, and at present so limited in species, it seems to me so much to increase the trouble and difficulty of those who endeavour to study such subjects, that I cannot help expressing my belief that many of the new names so often introduced serve only to impede and embarrass us, and I therefore regard them as much worse than useless.

I have now remaining the bone of a bird which when alive was much *larger, heavier, and more powerful* than the *Dodo*. For further examples of this bird’s bones, I must refer to the plates in the work before alluded to, by Mr. Strickland and Dr. Melville : plate xv. fig. 2, the metatarsal bone of the large species in the Andersonian Museum, Glasgow ; fig. 3, a metatarsal bone in the Parisian collection. A glance at these specimens will, I imagine, convince any one that this bird was of gigantic size, and probably double the weight of the *Dodo*. I am sure it cannot be supposed (after what has been said) that Leguat was describing this great bird when he wrote his beautiful description of the Solitaire. Another important fact will, I think, set this question at rest. Leguat states, that some of the males of the Solitaire weigh *forty-five pounds*. Now we know the weight of the largest Turkeys to be considerably less, rarely reaching *thirty pounds*, while the weight of the *Dodo* is stated to have been at least *fifty pounds*. It cannot, therefore, be supposed, had Leguat seen birds nearly double the size of the *Dodo*, he could have made the statements or comparison he has made between the Solitaire and Turkey.

I have before expressed my great dislike to an unnecessary increase of names : I feel, however, the necessity of finding an appropriate

name for this large bird, and therefore propose one somewhat familiar to all who have paid any attention to the subject, and apply the name of *Didus Nazarenus* to this the largest species of the genus. In doing this, I may remark that Mr. Strickland, in his work before alluded to, has considered the *Didus Nazarenus* to be a phantom species, which he says has haunted our systems of ornithology from the days of Gmelin downwards.

The conclusions which I have arrived at from the examination of the bones to which I have just called your attention are these:—That there existed formerly three distinct species of Apterous birds in the island of Rodriguez; namely, one which is apparently identical with the *Dodo* (*Didus ineptus*) of the Mauritius; a second, which was well described under the name of *Solitaire*; and a third, which was much larger than either of the above.

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2. DESCRIPTION OF TWO NEW SPECIES OF MAMMALIA OF THE GENUS ANTECHINUS. BY JOHN GOULD, F.R.S. ETC.

One of these species is remarkable for being spotted on the under instead of on the upper surface, and the other for its very diminutive size: both rank among the smallest members of the genus. For the former I propose the specific appellation of *maculatus*; it may be thus described:—

ANTECHINUS MACULATUS.

Fur short, dense, and closely applied to the skin; general tint of the upper surface dark blackish brown, minutely grizzled with yellowish brown; lower part of the flanks and under surface of the body dark brownish slate-grey, ornamented with oblong spots of greyish white arranged in irregular rows in the direction of the body; down the centre of the throat a streak of white.

	inches.
Length from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail	$3\frac{1}{2}$
—— of the tail	$2\frac{1}{4}$
—— from the tip of the nose to the base of the ear	$\frac{1}{2}$
—— of the ear	$\frac{1}{4}$
—— of the tarsi and toes	$\frac{7}{16}$

Hab. Brushes of the river Clarence, on the east coast of Australia.

The other species I propose to name

ANTECHINUS MINUTISSIMUS.

Fur short, dense, and closely applied to the skin; upper surface and flanks brown, slightly grizzled with black; under surface pale buff, approaching to white on the throat; tail brown above, lighter beneath; feet buffy brown, toes covered with hairs of a somewhat lighter hue.