

On the Type Locality of Some Australian Birds Described by William Swainson

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Summary

The original collection locality for four species and one subspecies of Australian birds (Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus regina*, Noisy Pitta *Pitta versicolor*, Barred Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina lineata*, Paradise Riflebird *Ptiloris paradiseus* and White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii tricolor*) is discussed. Although no firm locality can be determined, historical evidence suggests that it was probably near Port Macquarie, New South Wales.

Introduction

Over the course of his life, the naturalist William Swainson (1789–1855) described many new species of birds from around the world (see Mearns & Mearns 1988, 1992). In January 1825 (Swainson 1825) he wrote a paper in *The Zoological Journal*, and named as new five species of birds (one now considered a subspecies): the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus regina*, Noisy Pitta *Pitta versicolor*, Barred Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina lineata*, Paradise Riflebird *Ptiloris paradiseus* and White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii tricolor*; and three new genera: *Ptilinopus*, *Sericulus* and *Ptiloris*. In this paper Swainson referred only to the specimens coming from the general locality of ‘The vast Island of New Holland, or Australasia’.

Schodde (in Schodde & Mason 1997) followed Mathews (1912) to restrict the type locality of one of these species, the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, to New South Wales (NSW). However, no basis for this decision was made by Mathews in his publication. Frith (1982) also gave the type locality of this species as NSW, but noted that the specimens could have been collected from ‘anywhere within its range in eastern Australia’. Frith reasoned that ‘By 1825 there had been collecting at various places between Sydney and Cape York.’ Although this comment is true, the number of collections made up to this time in the range noted by Frith was actually small, and these collections are generally well-documented. This short note is thus an attempt to restrict the type locality further on the basis of available evidence.

The donors

In January 1825, when Swainson described these taxa, he wrote:

Every new expedition that has been set on foot by the local government, for the purpose of extending our local knowledge of the interior, has returned with fresh proofs of the Zoological treasures it contains. Some of these, supposed to have been collected during the late survey of a tract hitherto but little known, were brought home a few months ago; and have fallen under my inspection through the kindness of ——— Brogden, Esq. M.P. in whose possession they now are. A few others have been presented to me by my friend Baron [sic.] Field, Esq. who has recently returned from the same country, and from whom the public may soon expect some valuable information on the geographical and geological features of those distant regions.

On this basis it can be seen that the specimens were probably collected not long

Table 1. Taxa named in Swainson's article in Volume 1 of *The Zoological Journal*.

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Page</i>	<i>Donor</i>	<i>No. of specimens</i>
<i>Ceblepyris lineatus</i> [= <i>Coracina lineata</i> Barred Cuckoo-shrike]	466	Brogden	2
<i>Ceblepyris tricolor</i> [= <i>Lalage sueurii tricolor</i> White-winged Triller]	467	Brogden	1
<i>Pitta versicolor</i> [= <i>Pitta versicolor</i> Noisy Pitta]	468–470	Brogden	1
<i>Ptilinopus</i> (new genus)	473		
<i>Ptilinopus purpuratus</i> (var. <i>regina</i>) [= <i>Ptilinopus regina</i> Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove]	474–476	Brogden	2
<i>Sericulus</i> (new genus) for the Regent Bowerbird <i>S. chrysocephalus</i>	476–479	Brogden	2
<i>Ptiloris</i> (new genus)	479–481		
<i>Ptiloris paradiseus</i> [= <i>Ptiloris paradiseus</i> Paradise Riflebird]	481–484	No donor given	Both sexes described, no number given

before the paper was written, possibly less than a year or two. Swainson indicated that nearly all the taxa were based on specimens supplied by 'Brogden, Esq. M.P.', though at least one specimen of the Paradise Riflebird may have been in the possession of Barron Field, the recently retired Judge of the Supreme Court of NSW (Swainson 1825; Currey 1966; see Table 1). Frith (1982) could not identify 'Brogden', nor was Brogden mentioned in Hubert M. Whittell's history of Australian ornithology (Whittell 1954). However, from enquiry with the House of Commons Information Office, there appears to have been only one Member of Parliament in the 1820s with this surname (M. Ringer *in litt.* 30 April 2003). James Brogden was the member for Launceston in Cornwall, UK, from 1796 to 1832 (Thorne 1986). Despite being the Member for Launceston, Brogden lived at Clapham Common, then in Surrey, but now part of Greater London. He never visited Australia, but undoubtedly received specimens from there.

Correspondence in the Macarthur family papers in the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (= ML), reveals that a box of bird specimens was sent by Hannibal Hawkins Macarthur to James Brogden on behalf of his uncle, John Macarthur (Macarthur Family Papers, vol. 5, letter dated 3 July 1813, ML). At this time, John Macarthur was using Brogden and Brogden's brother, Henry, as political leverage (Ellis 1955, wherein Henry is erroneously listed as the MP; see also Thorne 1986). John Macarthur had been arrested for his part in the rebellion against Governor Bligh on 26 January 1808, and had been sent to face trial in England. Macarthur also had been friends with Barron Field, though they had fallen out by the time that Field left the Colony in 1824 (Ellis 1955).

In addition, several specimens are listed as in the possession of 'H. Brogden of Clapham' in the *General History of Birds*, by John Latham (Latham 1821–1828). This included Australian species such as the Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*, Crested Shrike-tit *Falcunculus frontatus*, and the then undescribed Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*. Latham was clearly referring to Henry Brogden.

During 1824, at about the time that James Brogden let Swainson view the specimens, James Brogden became one of the founding directors of the Australian

Table 2. Usual near-coastal range limits of the taxa mentioned in Swainson's article in *The Zoological Journal*.

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Usual northern range limit</i>	<i>Usual southern range limit</i>
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	Cape York, 10°40'S	Port Stephens, 32°42'S
Noisy Pitta (nominatè subspecies)	Gladstone, 23°50'S	Barrington Tops, 32°15'S
Barred Cuckoo-shrike	Cape York, 10°40'S	Port Macquarie, 31°26'S
White-winged Triller	Australia wide	Australia wide
Paradise Riflebird	Fraser Island near 26°S	Barrington Tops, 32°15'S
Regent Bowerbird	Fraser Island near 26°S	Hawkesbury River, 33°34'S

Agricultural Company, as did John Macarthur (Anon. 1825). On this basis, Brogden could have been in contact with many people in the Colony.

Given that Brogden may have had several Australian contacts, it is unclear whether or not the specimens concerned were collected on an officially sanctioned expedition. The most recent surveys of the Australian coast at that time were by Lieutenant Phillip Parker King in command of the *Mermaid* and the *Bathurst* between 1817 and 1822 (King 1827; Hordern 1997). King's account of these surveys provided a listing of the bird specimens collected on the expedition, including four forms he considered new, as well as ten that were already described (King 1827). None of the taxa described by Swainson in 1825 is listed.

Known distributions and early exploration

Apart from the White-winged Triller, all of the taxa described by Swainson are usually found in rainforest, and are likely to have been collected at the same locality. There was no exploration of the interior of Queensland before 1827, two years after Swainson's paper, when the naturalist/explorer Allan Cunningham went overland to the Darling Downs. So if the birds were collected in Queensland at one locality, this can only have been near the coast. The usual range limits of the species restrict the possibilities of where the species were collected even further (see Table 2). The northernmost point at which all species are found together close to the coast is somewhere near the south of Fraser Island, Queensland, where both the Regent Bowerbird *Sericulus chrysocephalus* and the Paradise Riflebird have their northern coastal limit. At the other end of these species' ranges, the southernmost point where all the species are found regularly is near Port Macquarie, NSW. The Barred Cuckoo-shrike breeds this far south, though it is also occasionally seen as far south as Harrington (31°55'S). South of here it can only be considered a vagrant, including records from Port Stephens in the 1830s and October 1910 (Bennett 1837; Hull 1911); near Sydney some time before July 1886 (Chisholm 1932); at Thirroul on 25 and 26 November 2000 (Morris 2002); and Glenifer Brae, near Wollongong, on 15 November 1998 (Brandwood 2001; Morris 2001). In addition, the Paradise Riflebird is unknown south of Barrington Tops, and the Noisy Pitta and Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove are only vagrants south of here, though the last two are more regularly recorded than the Barred Cuckoo-shrike. White-winged Trillers can be found almost anywhere in Australia, so the specimen in the collections reviewed by Swainson could have been collected anywhere, including Sydney.

In 1825 there were no settlements between Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay in southern Queensland. In fact, the rivers on the North Coast of NSW were not

discovered by Europeans until late 1825, when runaway convicts found their way to Port Macquarie from the new penal settlement in Moreton Bay (Mackey 2001). The specimens also cannot have been sent by the founding members of the Moreton Bay settlement, as the ships that transported the first settlers to Moreton Bay did not return to Sydney until October 1824, too late for any birds to have been included in Swainson's paper (McMinn 1970).

This was not the first visit by Europeans to Moreton Bay. Captain James Cook discovered it in 1770, though he did not stop to investigate further (Feeken *et al.* 1970). The next European visitor was in August 1799, when Matthew Flinders landed at the southern entrance to Pumicestone Passage. However, no natural-history specimens are recorded as having been collected on this or any other expedition by Flinders before his voyage on the *Investigator* in 1801 (Whittell 1954; Vallance *et al.* 2001).

John Oxley conducted a survey of Moreton Bay in the *Mermaid* during November and December 1823. There are published accounts of this survey, by both Oxley and the crew member John Uniacke, in a book edited by Barron Field (Field 1825). The ship also anchored at the southern entrance to Pumicestone Passage. Oxley and a small party surveyed much of the western shore of the Bay using a smaller vessel, and were able to ascend the Brisbane River over 30 km. Uniacke, however, remained with the *Mermaid*, and visited only areas of the shore adjacent to Pumicestone Passage, where he intended to collect specimens of 'rare birds' (Field 1825). Although Oxley recorded rainforests along the Brisbane River, Uniacke did not go there, nor is Oxley known to have collected any birds on this expedition. Oxley's field notebooks for this expedition (now in the ML) record only the collection of geological specimens. There is the possibility that one of Oxley's party collected bird specimens on his ascent of the Brisbane River, though there is no evidence for this.

Both Oxley's and Uniacke's accounts suggest that the main habitat observed at the southern end of Pumicestone Passage was a dry sclerophyll forest, though rainforest habitat is found at the northern end of the Passage today (Durrant & MacRae 1994). The Pumicestone Passage area is still largely in its original state but, apart from the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, none of the birds described in Swainson's paper is resident there now (Durrant & MacRae 1994). Most are considered rare visitors, and the only local population of the Paradise Riflebird is found 10 km inland from the northern end of the Passage.

Field's book included 'A glossary of the most common productions in the natural history of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land' as an Appendix. In it there were three of Swainson's new names, *Ptiloris paradiseus*, and the generic names *Ptilinopus* and *Sericulus*. However, there is no guarantee that this is a reference to any taxa that Uniacke may have collected. Indeed, given that there was little suitable habitat, it is unlikely that the birds were collected at the Pumicestone Passage.

Contemporary specimen collections and further associations

On this basis, the probable locality where these species were obtained is near Port Macquarie. Some of these taxa were certainly collected there at around this time. This includes two specimens of the Paradise Riflebird, one of which is now in the Royal Scottish Museum, and both were the basis for the description of the synonym *Epimachus brisbanii* by James Wilson (Wilson 1827; Herman *et al.* 1990; R. McGowan *in litt.* 9 May 2003). Wilson observed that these specimens were part

of a shipment of bird specimens sent to the Edinburgh Museum early in 1824 by Sir Thomas Brisbane, the then Governor of NSW. The shipment itself must have been brought together some time before, as an accompanying catalogue was dated 17 August 1823 (R. McGowan *in litt.* 9 May 2003). Several specimens of the Paradise Riflebird were evidently collected at Port Macquarie around this time, as the synonym *Epimachus regius* was described from another specimen collected there a few months before the visit of the *Coquille* to Sydney in January 1824 (Garnot & Lesson in Lesson 1825; specimen MNMH A.C. [ancien Catalogue] 10351 in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, J.-F. Voisin *in litt.* 2 September 2005).

Wilson's description of *Epimachus brisbanii* apparently created a series of errors in later literature concerning the collection of the first specimen of the Paradise Riflebird. Campbell (1901) noted that the first Paradise Riflebird ever seen 'was supposed to have been shot by a convict named Wilson'. Jackson (1907) went further and added that the bird was supposedly collected by 'Wilson' in 1823. This information was also quoted in Frith & Beehler (1998). However, in searching through accounts of the Port Macquarie area before 1825, I have found no evidence of this taking place, let alone any convict named Wilson. The Assistant Engineer to the settlement was a Lieutenant William Wilson, though again there is no evidence that he collected any bird specimens (Sargent 1996).

The collection of specimens at Port Macquarie can have occurred only after 8 October 1818 when the area was first visited by John Oxley, accompanied by the Colonial Botanist Charles Fraser (Oxley 1820). Although bird specimens were collected on this expedition, only three species were considered unusual at the time, all from west of the Great Dividing Range: the Squatter Pigeon *Geophaps scripta*, Red-winged Parrot *Aprosmictus erythropterus* and Mallee Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius barnardi*, the last being scientifically described from a specimen collected on this expedition (McAllan 2003). The Governor of the time, Lachlan Macquarie, considered these species interesting enough to commission the artist John William Lewin to paint them. As these taxa were the only ones considered unusual, it is unlikely that any of the species described by Swainson were collected on this expedition.

In May 1819, Oxley and Fraser returned to survey Port Macquarie in the *Lady Nelson*. Accompanying them was King, in command of the *Mermaid*, with Cunningham aboard (McMinn 1970; Hordern 1997). Both King and Cunningham kept diaries, but neither specifically mentioned the collection of bird specimens (see also Cunningham diaries, State Records, NSW; Hordern 1997). This in itself is not significant, as they rarely mentioned the collection of birds anyway. King apparently knew how to prepare bird specimens as, amongst other birds he collected the type specimen of the Yellow Oriole *Oriolus flavocinctus* during his investigations of the northern Australian coast, and also collected specimens of birds when surveying the coast of southern South America from 1826 to 1830 (King 1827; 1828a,b; 1831). Cunningham also prepared bird specimens, and supplied Swainson with specimens from his inland explorations of 1827 (Swainson 1829–1833). In addition, he apparently collected the type specimen of the Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathami*, though this species had already been painted by Lewin in 1809, long before Cunningham arrived in the Colony (Warren 1966; Lewin painting in ML, see Neville 1997).

It is clear also that there were links between many of the participants of the 1819 expedition and the people associated with Swainson's paper of 1825. Given the small circle of Australian society at the time, both King and Cunningham had

met Barron Field. In May 1818, King named two islands off the Northern Territory coast, Barron Island and Field Island, and in December of the same year Field boarded the *Mermaid* en route to preside at the first sitting of the Supreme Court in Hobart (Currey 1966; Hordern 1997).

Cunningham was on Oxley's inland expedition down the Lachlan River valley in 1817. In early June the expedition came across a range of hills now known as the Cocoparra Range. Oxley named two peaks in the southern part of the range. Mount Caley was named after the naturalist George Caley and the other mountain was named Mount Brogden, though Oxley did not say who this commemorated (Oxley 1820). However, on 2 June 1817 Cunningham wrote in his diary, 'A corresponding Mount Southerly [of Mt Caley], has been called Mount Brogden, in honor of Charles [sic] Brogden Esq. — of Clapham.' (Cunningham's diary, State Records, NSW; also Lee 1925). In addition, in April 1818, King named a Point Brogden in the Northern Territory after James Brogden (Hordern 1997). It is unclear if King actually knew Brogden at this time. King's family came from Launceston, UK, and so this landmark may merely have been named in deference to his long-standing local member.

Conclusions

With all these connections, it would be easy to conclude that some of Swainson's birds were collected at Port Macquarie on the visit of the *Mermaid* and *Lady Nelson* in May 1819, but there is still an element of doubt. In particular, both the Barred Cuckoo-shrike and the White-winged Triller are migrants in NSW and have usually left the State by the end of March. There are few records of either species in NSW for April, so a May date for these specimens is unlikely. On this basis, it could be that the original specimens were collected by the early European settlers at Port Macquarie, rather than the first explorers or surveyors, especially as at least three specimens of the Paradise Riflebird were sent from there within a few years.

The actual source of the specimens named by Swainson in January 1825 may never be known, but on balance it appears that they were collected near Port Macquarie some time between May 1819 and mid 1824.

Postscript

Some of the type specimens in Swainson's collection are now in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, UK (see Benson 1999; specimens listed below). However, at least five type specimens from Swainson's paper are missing. These specimens may have been in the part of his collection that was lost at sea. Alternatively, they may have never been held by Swainson and remained in the possession of Brogden and Field. In either case, their whereabouts is no longer known. Note also that the type specimen of the Paradise Riflebird listed by Frith & Beehler (1998) is actually the type specimen of *Epimachus regius*, and not *Ptiloris paradiseus*, which remains unlocated.

Type specimens from Swainson's 1825 paper in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, UK

(1) **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove** *Ptilinopus regina*. Specimen 17/Col/46/ee/4 — claimed by Benson (1999) to be a holotype, but Swainson said that he received two specimens from Brogden. Swainson also described the 'Female or young bird', but the specimen that was suggested by both Benson and Schodde (in Schodde &

Mason 1997) also came from Garnot on the Voyage of the *Coquille*, though it was collected in Tahiti (Specimen 17/Col/46/cc/1). This specimen was thus not from Australia nor from Brogden and cannot be that mentioned in Swainson's description.

(2) **Barred Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina lineata*. Specimen 27/Cam/4/s/2—Syntype. According to Benson (1999) the specimen has an artefact, or substitute tail with upper and lower tail-coverts white. This indicates that the tail is from some other species.

(3) **White-winged Triller** *Lalage sueuri tricolor*. Specimen 27/Cam/6/i/3—Holotype, male specimen.

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