

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF SOME AUSTRALIAN
ARCLEIDÆ IN TASMANIA.

The past summer and autumn have been marked by a special visitation of two species of Australian Herons to Tasmania. One, the White Egret, *Herodias alba*, Linn., which has hitherto been an occasional straggler to the island, has occurred in considerable numbers during the summer, both in the north and south. The other, *Ardea pacifica*, Latham, a rare visitant to Tasmania, has been half a dozen times met with in the north during the past two months.

The localities visited by the White Egret appear to have been the basin of the Derwent, including the Sorell district, the Midlands, and the vicinity of the Tamar and Esk rivers in the north. Mr. T. Carr, a prominent member of the Northern Science Association, informs me that he has had numerous examples brought to him, which has also been the case as regards the Hobart Museum, which testify, unfortunately, to the old story in England: that as soon as a new bird appears on the landscape, it is shot down by every pot-hunter who meets with it. More of these handsome white visitors have doubtless been immature birds, which might have remained in the island, and, in any case, would have returned another year; their destruction, therefore, means the partial driving away of an interesting, permanent addition to our avifauna. This species is so widely distributed that there is no reason why it should not become a resident in the island, breeding at the more retired lagoons and morasses of the lake district. It may not be out of place to glance here at the geographical distribution of the White Egret. The union of the Australian form, *Herodias syrmatophorus* of Gould, with the widely-distributed *Herodias alba* of Linnæus, very widely extends the range of the species under consideration. The former was separated by Gould from the old world species on account of its small size, and for a like reason, the bird commonly found throughout India was given specific rank by that herculean worker in Indian ornithology, Mr. Allen Hume, C.B., the editor of the now defunct "Stray Feathers." An examination, however, of a large series got together from various parts of the world, such as that in the national collection at the British Museum, shows that the Indian, Chinese, and Australian and, perhaps, the African representatives of the species are all, more or less, diminutive in size, while the larger race inhabits Central Asia, Russia, the Delta of the Nile, and Syria. Examples in the British Museum, from Kashgaria, Russia, and Egypt, measured by me, gave a length in the wing of 17.6, 16.5, and 16.3 inches respectively, while a specimen of the larger race, often met with in India (and probably straying

south from Kashgaria), reached a length of of 17·0 inches in the wing. On the other hand, North African, Chinese, and Australian specimens measured in the wing, 14·7 to 15·5; 14·2 to 14·75, and 13·0 inches respectively. Ceylonese examples, again, give a length of 13·5 to 15·0 inches. There is, in fact, a regular gradation from the Australian, Chinese, and Indian races to the birds inhabiting the cooler districts above-mentioned, the large examples found occasionally in tropical localities being either local birds, abnormal in size, or wanderers from contiguous cool countries. As regards Tasmanian examples, the measurements of the wing, supplied to me by Mr. Carr, are 13·75 to 14·0 inches, which correspond with those of the smaller races noticed above.

The White Egret ranges from South Africa, along both coasts of the continent to the North, bordering on the Delta of the Nile. It is tolerably common in Russia, and Central and Southern Europe, breeding in the great marshes of Hungary. In France and Spain, however, it is rare, and appears to be absent from Portugal, though found farther west in the Azores. To Great Britain it is a straggler. Coming now to Asia, we find it common in Asia Minor, and occurring in Persia, whence it ranges through Central and Highland Asia, and along the great Chinese rivers to the coast, and thence to the island of Formosa, where Swinhoe procured it. Southwards it extends into India, Ceylon, and the islands of the Bay of Bengal, passing down the Malay Peninsula, and ranging through the islands of Malayana to Australia. In the latter continent it appears in Dr. Ramsay's "Distribution List," as very widely scattered round the coasts of all the colonies, and it extends inland to Riverina, though this author does not record it from the far interior.

The second species under notice, *Ardea pacifica*, Latham, appears to have visited the island in a small flock during the autumn, and then spread over the northern districts. Mr. Carr informs me that it was recently shot at the Lake River, on the Tamar, and at Stanley, within the space of a day or two. On the 24th ult. I procured an adult female on my own estate at Cullenswood. It was frequenting some temporary rain pools in a paddock not far from the house, and was very shy, but by stalking it in long grass I managed to get a shot and procured it.

The Pacific Heron is a handsome species, with great expanse of wing for the size of its body, which gives it a heavy, flopping flight. The measurements and description of my specimens are as follow:—Length, 30·0 inches; wing, 15·75; tail, 5·25; tarsus, 5·0; middle toe, 2·75; bill, tip to gape, 4·4. It is mottled greenish slate; orbital skin, dusky bluish; upper mandible and sides of lower, black; base beneath, fleshy whitish; legs and feet, black.

Back wings and tail, dark green, glossed on the outer webs, and tinged with ashy on the shorter scapular feathers; the inner webs of the longer scapular, and a longitudinal patch on each side of the chest, maroon; head, entire neck and throat, white; marked everywhere, but on the chin and throat with cinereous grey; down the centre of the foreneck a stripe of interrupted black spots; breast and under surface, dark slate; the feathers with a broad, narial white stripe, widest on the under tail coverts; a broad, white patch over the point of the wing, extending along the edge to the base of the outer primaries.

This Heron is distributed widely around the Australian Continent, being found on the extreme north coast, though not recorded from the opposite shores of New Guinea, while on the east and south coasts it is an inhabitant of each colony, likewise extending to Western Australia. Although an occasional visitor to Tasmania, so far as past observation shows, it may, perhaps, become more frequent if not molested on its summer visits to us. It is not at all uncommon in the swamps on the Murray and the plains of Riverina.