

Notes on Diggles' "Ornithology of Australia." Qd. Nat. 17:99-102.

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# NOTES ON DIGGLES "ORNITHOLOGY OF AUSTRALIA"

By ELIZABETH N. MARKS

Research for a biographical study of Silvester Diggles (Marks, 1963, *Qd Nat.* 17:15-25) revealed also some new information on his uncompleted publication "The Ornithology of Australia" which is here recorded. Some of this is apposite to A. H. Chisholm's paper in this issue.

The sources of information are the same as quoted previously, and are not here acknowledged again, nor listed as references. Where this information is at variance with that of previous writers, its source is indicated by the number under which it was listed in the earlier paper.

## Date of Publication of Parts

Mathews (5) and Whittell (7) dated publication of Part I as 1866. A newspaper cutting (4) dated in ink 7 Nov., 1865, reports:

"At a meeting of the Brisbane Philosophical Society, held last night . . . Mr. Diggles laid before the meeting a copy of the first number of the Ornithology of Australia. The first part of Mr. Sylvester (sic) Diggles' new work "The Ornithology of Australia" has just been issued from the press."

I have been unable to find the source of this cutting (Brisbane Courier, Queensland Guardian, Queensland Times\*, and Weekly Herald were searched) but it mentions that W. P. Townson was admitted a member, and that Dr. Waugh read a paper on spectrum analysis, which the Queensland Philosophical Society's archives (12, 13) confirm occurred at the meeting of 6 Nov., 1865.

Twenty-one parts of the Ornithology were published. Mathews (5) lists them with their contents and year of publication: II-X, 1866; XI-XV, 1867; XVI-XX, 1868; XXI, 1870. The Queensland Philosophical Society minutes record that Part XVII was laid on the table at the meeting on 5 June 1868 and Part XIX on 30 Oct. 1868. Part XXI may have appeared earlier than 1870; Diggles (5) wrote in Sept. 1871 to J. J. Halley, "It is now nearly two years since I stopped the issue of my work and saved myself from severe loss. I hope bye and bye to resume."

## Cessation of Publication

Part VI lists 86 subscribers and Part XII, 93 (Mathews (7) gives the figures as 85 and 92, probably overlooking the Governor at the top of the list). With the financial crisis in the colonies in 1866, the list suddenly fell to 60 and Diggles had to cease publication but he continued to work on the book.

In Dec. 1868 he told E. P. Ramsay that the number of birds he had figured was 500, and in Feb. 1873 told F. G. Waterhouse "Very few indeed are the birds I now require to finish my book, 20 perhaps will do it, and they of course the rarest."

In 1874 or '5 in a final endeavour he appealed to the Government for assistance, offering to provide the Public Schools of Queensland with a series of uncoloured object lessons of the various plates to be issued till the work was completed "these plates to be drawn on stone, by myself, at the Government Lithographic Office, and accompanied with a letterpress description, for the use of teachers", in exchange for the printing of 150 copies of each for himself. Diggles told Waterhouse "They would have done so but the plates **must be all colored**. I declined giving coloured plates for blank ones . . . and in disgust bound up my plates the labor of 12 years." A similar offer to the Board of Education had also been rejected.

\* I am indebted to the Chief Librarian, State Library of Victoria for searching the *Queensland Times*, and to the Librarian, Parliamentary Library, Brisbane for searching the *Weekly Herald*.

## Binding of Parts

Diggles in May 1875 had printed a title page, preface, the original prospectus, and a history of the publication which he was now content to style "A Synopsis of the Ornithology of Australia; or, Companion to Gould's Letterpress Handbook". These were available to subscribers. Some copies of the Ornithology are therefore still extant in their original unbound parts, and others have been bound, with the plates rearranged and the title page etc. included. One hundred and fifty copies of the plates in Parts VII-XXI were struck off. Originally one hundred copies had been struck off of those in Parts I-VI; it became necessary to redraw the plates to make the sets complete; this was done on stone, principally by Diggles himself, the remainder by H. G. Eaton, and nearly all were copied from the original drawings. In 1877 there was published in Brisbane in two volumes, Diggles' "Companion to Gould's Handbook; or synopsis of the birds of Australia". This is a rearrangement of the Ornithology, presumably from stocks of plates and letterpress which had not been issued to subscribers. Diggles wrote to E. P. Ramsay on 31 Aug. 1877, "I have lately had an index printed of what I shall for the future entitle "A Synopsis to Gould's handbook". Do any of my old Sydney subscribers want it? price 5/-."

In Oct. 1881 Albina Diggles (4) sent the remaining stock, 30 sets of the volumes, unbound and uncoloured (which she valued at £5 a set), plus 70 of each of 5 uncoloured plates for framing (Regent Bird, Rawnsley's Satin Bird, Rose-breasted Cockatoo, Australian Cassowary, one not named) to Quaritch, the London bookseller (at his request), with the loan of her own copy to colour them by. She ultimately received £20 for the consignment.

## Illustrations

Chisholm (1) says Diggles executed the 600 figures with the aid of his niece Mrs. Cumming and that A. J. Campbell had said it was Diggles' daughter who did the work. Chisholm's authority was George Diggles who said the niece hand-coloured each plate in each series.

Rowena Birkett, later Mrs. W. Cumming, was born in Sydney in Nov. 1860 and died at Sandgate in July 1915. Diggles (5) wrote in June 1872 "We have a niece from Sydney come to spend some time with us". This could have been Rowena or her older sister.

The 600 figures of birds (originals except for a few lithographs), published and unpublished, are on 325 plates in the Mitchell Library, Sydney (22). Some bear Diggles' signature or initials, usually with date, the remainder are unsigned. The dates range from Oct. 29 1863 (*Menura superba*) to Oct. 21 1875 (*Circus fuliginosus*). Most of the plates had been completed in 1871 and, on the score of her age alone, it is unlikely that Rowena had helped with these, or in colouring the lithographs in the 21 parts issued.

A *Brisbane Courier* article, 3 April 1875, regretting the lack of Government support for the Ornithology says "All the work is his own—the illustrations are by his pencil, and the descriptive matter by his pen. After the lithographic and letter-press printing were completed, the figures had to be coloured by hand. When he could not do this himself, great difficulty has been found in engaging efficient assistance." Diggles said "The coloring constituted the chief expense, the skilled labor necessary being almost unattainable". He wrote (5) in Sept. 1871 to J. J. Halley (who had just published his first and only part of "A monograph of the Psittacidae or Parrot Family of Australia") "The amount of anxiety I have had in bringing out the 21 parts already issued, is unknown to anyone but myself. Slapdash coloring which could not be passed but I dare not complain, as I should not be able to replace my colorist. Many

are the anxious hours I have spent in going over the plates to make them at all passable. . . For my own part I will send you a part of my work in exchange for every one of yours and will undertake to give every plate a modicum of my own pencil work. You invite criticism which shows you are not much afraid of the same. The letter press is excellent both in matter and manner of getting up, and the plates are also very good but I think may be improved in certain parts, as in the *Barrabandii* and *Melanura* which require some of the bright tints more energetically treated—I would also advocate a little bolder treatment of the feathering (map out the wings well) and avoid wooliness. I will not say more at present and have perhaps said too much already. My own lithographer's work is far from faultless." The lithographs in the *Ornithology* are signed H. G. Eaton, or bear no signature.

The Queensland Museum's bound copy of the *Ornithology* has inserted in it a typed extract from the Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 18 July 1877: "With regard to Mr. Diggles' offer to sell his own copy of his work on the ornithology of Australia, 21 parts, for £20, it was decided that in view of the fact of the drawings being all original, and the coloring by the artists' own hands, and therefore of increased value, that the offer be accepted, the transaction to be completed when funds were available".

From the above I conclude that the originals were entirely Diggles' own work, that he coloured some of the lithographs in the 21 parts himself, and employed a colourist to do the rest. I have heard it said that his pupils helped in colouring them, but have found no evidence to support this. Probably Rowena coloured the lithographs in the later two-volume "Companion . . ." and this is what George Diggles' remark to Chisholm meant.

A memo (4) of Albina Diggles in 1886 notes that she sent to Quaritch "Eatons bills, also Pugh, and Mr. Bishop for coloring"; that "Lithographer McKellar" was paid in 1874 for sets of the 5 plates for framing; and that she had the 4 bound volumes of original plates, with manuscript description "Price £400". It also states "Oct. 10th 1863 to Oct. 10th 1871, 8 years drawing 600 birds".

On 11 May 1868 W. F. Bishop (6) wrote to E. P. Ramsay from Ashley Cottage, South Brisbane, "Sir, Hearing from Mr. Cockerell that you are engaged on an illustrated work on the *Ornithology* of Australia. I beg to state that for the last 2½ years I have been with Mr. Diggles of this place as a colorist. . . ."

Chisholm (1) says that the Mitchell Library received the unpublished plates from Angus and Robertson, to whom George Diggles sold them in the hope of seeing them published. Whittell (7) says that these plates were presented to the Mitchell Library by Angus and Robertson. There exists (4) a memorandum dated 29 May, 1899 to Mr. G. S. Diggles from Angus and Robertson, "If we publish your father's book on the *Birds of Australia* we will give you two (2) copies of same". Inside each of the volumes in the Mitchell Library are the signature and the book plate of David Scott Mitchell. It appears likely therefore that Angus and Robertson sold them to D. S. Mitchell and that the Mitchell Library received them in his bequest.

In some of the later drawings in the volumes in the Mitchell Library there are head and shoulders only of several birds to a page; others have lettering across their legs suggesting they were originally head and shoulders, and completed later. A few are incomplete, pencil outlines only, or with the basic coloration flatly painted and shaded, but no feathering, or nearer completion with notes such as 'feet black' pencilled beside them. Several are lithographs dated 1874, apparently lithographed as well as coloured by Diggles himself (these are presumably the plates from early Parts that were redrawn).

## Rawnsley's Satin Bird

A. H. Chisholm (1965, *Qd. Nat.* 17:87-90) brings us up to date on the bower-bird which Diggles in 1867, in Part XV of the Ornithology, described and figured, and named *Ptilonorhynchus rawnsleyi*—'Rawnsley's Satin Bird'.

Diggles preserved an unsigned note (4), which I feel certain is in Charles Coxen's hand, having compared it with his signature in the Queensland Philosophical Society's Minute Book. Written above the note, probably in Diggles' own hand, is "First notice of Mr. Rawnsley's new Satin Bird". The note reads:

"Mr. Rawnsley killed the accompanying Bower Bird (?) in his scrubs at Witton, Brisbane, on the 14th July last—the color of the eye is pale sea green. He believes that it is entirely new. The Surveyor General [i.e. A. C. Gregory] informed Mr. Rawnsley that he had seen the bird once, perched on a high tree on the Sutor River which runs into the left branch of the Burdekin River.

Mr. Diggles is at liberty to publish this bird in his work and perhaps he will call it after Mr. Rawnsley.

The bird when seen by Mr. Gregory was uttering most extraordinary calls in the top of a tree. It was not killed."

Rawnsley died in 1872. In Aug. 1873 Diggles (5) wrote to G. Masters "I believe she (Mrs. Rawnsley) has got the *Ptilonorhynchus rawnsleyi* and would part with it for a sufficient consideration." E. P. Ramsay (1875, *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 1875:68-69) published "Notes on the Original Specimen of *Ptilonorhynchus rawnsleyi*, a hybrid bower bird". He was quite scathing—"After a close examination of the specimen I do not see how any unbiassed naturalist can have any doubt of its being a hybrid". He added information, not published by Diggles, that "The bird was shot out of a troop of satin bower-birds, in a neighbourhood frequented by regent birds". Ramsay did not say who owned the specimen or where he saw it; perhaps it was when he visited Brisbane in Jan. 1874. *P. rawnsleyi* was subsequently listed by most ornithologists as a hybrid. T. Iredale (1950, *Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*, p. 212) regarded it as an aberration of the Satin Bower-bird, *P. violaceus* Vieillot, and incorrectly dated Diggles' description as 1868. A. J. Marshall (1954, *Bower-birds*) said "Rawnsley's satin-bird was probably a mutant", and pointed out that among the bower birds, both the bower and the male's display to attract the female are very distinctive for each species, obviating any chance of hybridization.

### Correction

Two errors have been noted in my earlier account of Diggles in *Qd Nat.* 17, and I am grateful to Mr. K. G. S. Diggles and Mr. G. P. Whitley respectively for leading me to the correct information. The Brisbane Philharmonic Society (p. 17) was founded in 1861, not 1862. A copy of its "Rules and Regulations Adopted Sept. 12, 1861" is in the possession of Mr. Diggles.

It was not R. B. Sheridan from whom Diggles received insect specimens (p. 22) but Brinsley Guise Sheridan, who was appointed Police Magistrate at Cardwell on 30 March 1870.

### EATING HABITS OF A SMALL TORTOISE

The children found a two-inch diameter tortoise in the creek and placed it in a large tub of water. When we dropped raw meat beside it, after a cautious wait, out came its head from beneath the shell. It swallowed the very tiny bits of meat straight down, but larger pieces were held in the mouth and torn with the claws of first one of its small webbed front feet, then the other. When sufficiently shredded, the meat was swallowed with one gulp.

—E. MCKENZIE.