

**BIRDS OF PARADISE IN THE REGENT'S PARK.**

THE Zoological Society of London, aided by a large annual income, and the modern facilities for locomotion and transport, have succeeded in bringing alive to their garden in the Regent's-park many striking forms of animal life of which a few years ago the existence was barely known, or which had only been previously seen in a state of nature by the most hardy and

the most enterprising of travellers. The Shoe-bill, or *Balaniceps*, of which strange bird two examples were procured in 1859, through the exertions of Consul Petherick, comes strictly within the first of these categories of zoological rarities, having only become first known to science in 1850, and previously to Mr. Petherick's return from the White Nile with the living birds, having reached Europe only in the shape of a few stray stuffed specimens. Birds of Paradise, on the other hand, it is true, have been known to exist almost from the times of the middle ages. But though it has been stated that one of these birds was kept alive for a short time in this country some forty years ago, that fact has remained, we believe, almost unknown both to the public and to the world of science, until the recent arrival called it forth, and is certainly a solitary instance of such an event. In fact, previously to Mr. Wallace's recent visit to the homes of the Paradise-birds in New Guinea and the adjoining islands, the French naturalist Lesson, and the savants attached to the Dutch exploring expedition in the Indian Archipelago in 1828-9, were almost the only persons who had had the privilege of seeing these birds in a living state. Now, thanks to the liberality of the Zoological Society, and to the energy displayed by Mr. Wallace, the whole civilized world will have the liberty of seeing and admiring these beautiful creatures, and when they die an opportunity will be furnished for the examination of the entire structure of this bird, which, we believe, has never yet been investigated.

So little were our forefathers acquainted with the true nature of Paradise-birds, that, from their skins being brought to Europe only in a mutilated condition with the feet removed, it was imagined that they passed their whole existence sailing in the air, and in this state carried on all the functions of life, even to the production of eggs and young! Dew and vapours were said to be their food, and it was supposed that they never touched the earth till the moment of their death, suspending themselves, when in want of rest, to the branches of trees by the shafts of their elongated tail-feathers!

The illustrious Linnæus commemorated these fantasies of the olden writers by bestowing on the greater Bird of Paradise the scientific appellation of *apoda*, though he was quite aware that, like every other bird, it is well provided with these useful appendages. This Paradise-bird, from which the Lesser Bird of Paradise—the species now alive in the Zoological Society's Gardens—differs but little, except in size, is an inhabitant exclusively of the Arru islands, lying to the south of New Guinea, between that *terra incognita* and the northern coast of Australia.

"A person cannot be long in the interior of Arru," says Mr. Wallace, to whom science is indebted for all that is really known concerning the habits of this bird in a state of nature, "without hearing a loud, harsh, often-repeated cry, *waak-waak-waak*; *wok-wok-wok*." Our readers may now hear this cry, without going so far as the Arru islands. On proceeding to the Zoological Gardens, and showing to the Paradise Birds there incarcerated the long wavy plume of one of their deceased brethren, similar calls will be quickly excited. "This is the *Paradisea*," continues Mr. Wallace; "and it is sure to be heard morning and evening, besides occasionally throughout the day. It is the most frequent and loudest of all the cries in the forest, and can be heard at the greatest distance. One soon becomes convinced that the bird is most abundant; and it is, in fact, over a very large part of Arru, one of the very commonest species. Much of the noise, however, is made by the young birds of various ages, who seem to be ten times as numerous as the full plumaged, adult males. We shot nearly a dozen of the former before we even saw one of the latter. The adults frequent the very loftiest trees, and are shy and wary, and so strong and tenacious of life, that I know no bird of its size so difficult to kill. It is in a state of constant activity, flying from tree to tree, scarcely resting still a moment on the same branch, and at the slightest alarm flying swiftly away among the tree-tops. It is a very early bird, commencing to feed before sunrise. But it does not seem to gorge itself and then rest half-torpid, like many fruit-eating birds, as it may be seen and heard at all times of the day in a state of activity." In Arru, Mr. Wallace proceeds to tell us, the natives obtain these birds by shooting them with arrows from huts of boughs concealed amongst the branches of the trees. The situation chosen is in one of the lofty large-leaved forest-trees, to which the males of this Paradise-bird resort in troops "to exercise, dress, and display their magnificent plumage." The archer mounts to his lair before daylight, leaving an attendant crouched at the foot of the tree to secure the birds as they fall and recover the arrows. The birds commence to assemble soon after sunrise. When a sufficient number are arrived, the hunter begins to shoot, and "if skilful, will kill nearly the whole of them in succession, as each bird seems so intent on his own enjoyment as not to miss his companions." Such is the Arruan style of "sporting for Paradise birds." Hence are procured the dried plumes, which, passing through the hands of the Malayan traders into the European market, were formerly in such request to adorn the heads of our fair country-women, and, as we are informed, are now coming into fashion again.

In the Arru islands Mr. Wallace also obtained specimens of the King Bird of Paradise in perfect plumage and excellent condition. This species is believed to feed entirely on fruit, frequenting the loftiest trees in the forest, and flying from branch to branch in quest of its food. During a subsequent visit to the trading-station of Dorey, situated in the northern peninsula of the mainland of New Guinea, in the autumn of 1858, Mr. Wallace secured a few good specimens of the Lesser Bird of Paradise, and others of the King bird; but gave a very indifferent account of this spot as a

place for collecting. "You will ask," he says, in a letter written shortly after this to a correspondent in England, "why I did not try somewhere else, when I found Dorey so bad? The simple answer is, that in the whole mainland of New Guinea there is no other place where my life would be safe a week. It is a *horribly* wild country. You have no idea of the difficulties in the way of a single person doing anything in it." It was, however, to the little known island of Waigiou, situated at the north-western corner of New Guinea, that Mr. Wallace looked with greatest hopes of fulfilling his commission of obtaining Birds of Paradise alive. The Red Bird of Paradise, which is found there, is not shot with arrows, but always caught alive by the natives in snares. These are placed on the trees it frequents, and baited with the large red fruit of a species of *Arum*, of which the bird is very fond. Mr. Wallace made repeated attempts to keep captured individuals of this Bird of Paradise alive when he visited this locality, as they were often brought to him uninjured by the natives, but all in vain. Though he soon induced them to feed in a cage, they were invariably attacked by convulsions on the second or third day, fell off their perches, and soon died. Shortly before last Christmas Mr. Wallace, whose health had suffered from numerous attacks of fever and the constant hardships to which he had been exposed during an eight years' residence in these barbarous countries, was travelling in the interior of Sumatra, having in contemplation a speedy return to England, to visit the world's exhibition and see civilized life once more. Upon information being brought to him that two Paradise-birds had been brought alive to Singapore, he resolved to hasten his departure, and started for that place without delay. On arriving at Singapore he found the two Paradise-birds, which had been brought to that entrepôt by a native trader, in the hands of a European merchant, who was well aware of their value, and demanded an exorbitant price before he would part with them. Relying, however, on the well-known liberality of the Zoological Society, for which he was acting, Mr. Wallace did not hesitate to advance the requisite sum for the purchase of these birds, and left with them for England by the following mail, arriving in London, with his precious freight in perfect safety, on the 1st instant.

The Paradise-birds seem to do well in the spacious room that has been fitted up for them in the Zoological Society's Gardens. They feed voraciously, consuming rice, bread, and vegetables, varied with insect food, in the shape of cockroaches and meal-worms. In the morning they may be seen to greatest advantage, as they clamber and flit about the branches of the tree in their roomy cages, and elevate their half-grown side-plumes, which, when fully developed, form such a conspicuous ornament in this bird. They are believed to be probably in their fourth year, as it requires, according to the information obtained by Mr. Wallace, three moults before this extraordinary mass of feathers commences to appear. In their native wilds the Paradise-birds begin to show their ornamental side-plumes in April, arriving at full perfection in May and June. In the present instance the change of climate may probably have some effect in retarding their development, but before the close of the summer we trust that the Paradise-birds may be seen in full beauty.

In the meantime, should any one wish to gain more perfect knowledge of the eccentric forms of the feathering in the adult males of this group of birds, they may be recommended to pay a visit to the bird-gallery in the British Museum. They will find there, in the large glass cases standing by themselves in the middle of the room, a perfect series of all the different Paradise-birds obtained by Mr. Wallace during his travels in the East. The specimens are beautifully mounted, and exhibit each of the various stages of the plumage of these birds. Besides the four kinds we have already spoken of there is a fifth, of which Mr. Wallace had the pleasure of being the original discoverer. Wallace's Standard-wing, as the latter bird is called, was quite unknown to science until Mr. Wallace found it in the woods of the island of Batchian in 1858, and it has been appropriately named by Mr. G. R. Gray after its meritorious discoverer.