

POSTILLA

Published from 1950 to 2004, the short papers of the *Postilla* series reported on original research by the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's curators, staff, and research associates, and their colleagues, in the natural science disciplines represented by the collections of the Museum's curatorial divisions.

The *Postilla* series, which ceased publication with Number 232 (2004), was incorporated into the journal *Bulletin of the Peabody Museum of Natural History*, available from BioOne Complete at <https://bioone.org/>.

Yale Peabody Museum scholarly publications are archived through EliScholar, a digital platform for scholarly publishing provided by Yale University Library at <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/>.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Yale PEABODY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

P.O. Box 208118 | New Haven CT 06520-8118 USA | peabody.yale.edu

Postilla

YALE PEABODY MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY

Number 19

July 9, 1954

New Haven, Conn.

BIRDS FROM GOUGH ISLAND

S. Dillon Ripley

Recently the Yale Peabody Museum has been fortunate enough to secure a small collection of birds from Gough Island in the South Atlantic Ocean, south of Tristan da Cunha. These specimens were secured through the intercession of Mr. R. Upton, now of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, formerly of Tristan da Cunha. It is of peculiar interest that these birds should come to Yale, as one of the first collections of birds from Gough, secured by Mr. George Comer, was formerly in the possession of Mr. G. E. Verrill, son of Professor A. E. Verrill of Yale; reported upon in the *Proceedings of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* (1895, 9:430-477), and certainly, at least, passed through the doors of the Peabody Museum. Except for the type of the Gough Island gallinule, now in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the whereabouts of the Comer collection at the present time remains a mystery. The Museum's grateful thanks are due to Mr. Wilmarth S. Lewis and to Mr. W. Sheffield Cowles for help in securing these interesting specimens. I am also grateful to Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy of the American Museum for showing me specimens in his care.

Daption capensis (Linnaeus): Cape Pigeon.

A male was taken on Gough October 12, 1952. The species has not previously been recorded from the neighborhood of this island.

Fulmarus glacialoides (A. Smith): Antarctic Fulmar.

This species also is newly recorded from Gough. A male was collected September 13, 1952, and measures: wing 330, tail 120.5, culmen 43.5 mm.

Pachyptila forsteri (Latham): Broad-billed Prion or Whale Bird.

A female, September 5, 1952. Wing 204, tarsus 34, middle toe and claw 38 mm.

Bulweria macroptera macroptera (A. Smith): Great-winged Petrel.

A male, December 15, 1952. Wing 302 mm. This specimen is somewhat more grayish about the throat and forehead than a July female from Tristan da Cunha. Although this bird was presumably not taken during the breeding season (July on Tristan), it appears to be the first definite record for Gough Island.

Bulweria incerta (Schlegel): Atlantic Petrel.

A male and a female taken December 15, 1952, have wing measurements of: ♂ 318, ♀ 326 mm. These specimens are apparently the first recorded from Gough Island. Unfortunately the condition of the gonads was not stated. Compared to July specimens they appear to be in very slightly more worn, brownish plumage.

Bulweria brevirostris (Lesson): Kerguelen Petrel.

A male and female, December 15, 1952. These birds measure: wing ♂ 257, ♀ 265; tail ♂ 110, ♀ 107; exposed culmen

♂ 26.5, ♀ 28.5; tarsus ♂ 38.5, ♀ 37 mm. The collection of these specimens on Gough, although unaccompanied by data on their breeding condition lends credence to the original supposition that the Kerguelen Petrel might breed in the neighborhood of Tristan da Cunha (Salvin, 1896, *Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus.*, 25:410), and later reinforced by the collection of a female in January 1946 on Inaccessible Island (Roberts, 1948, *Ann. Transvaal Mus.*, 21:60). Gough Island is far enough south (lat. 40°19'S.), to lie within the Subantarctic Zone, and the date of collection (December) corresponds to that for the season of nestlings in down, on Kerguelen Island, the only presently known breeding place for this rare species. These birds match approximately in size those recently reported from Kerguelen by Milon and Juanin (1953, *l'Oiseau*, 23:17).

Bulweria mollis mollis (Gould): Soft-plumaged Petrel.

Three specimens taken on December 15, 1952, measure: wing ♂ 249, ♀ (2) 260; tail ♂ 111.5, ♀ 112, 120; culmen ♂ 28, ♀ 28, 29; tarsus ♂ 34, ♀ 36, 37 mm.

Fregatta grallaria melanoleuca Salvadori: Tristan Storm Petrel.

A pair taken December 15, 1952, have wing measurements of ♂ 171, ♀ 155 mm.

Pelecanoides urinatrix dacunhae Nicoll: Tristan Diving Petrel.

A female, December 15, 1952, measures: wing 117.5, tail 37, culmen 16 mm. This specimen confirms the occurrence of this subspecies on Gough Island.

Puffinus assimilis elegans Giglioli and Salvadori: Tristan Shearwater.

A female, December 15, 1952, measures: wing 190, tail 65, culmen 26, tarsus 42 mm.

Gallinula nesiotis comeri (Allen): Gough Island Cock.

The Gough Island Cock, so-called, was originally described by J. A. Allen (1892, *Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, Bull. 4:57) as differing from *nesiotis* of Tristan (now extinct?) in having greatly reduced areas of white on the edges of the wings and the flank feathers. In size and structure the two forms appear to be so close that it seems useful to list them as subspecies rather than species.

A pair and a downy young female were collected on December 15, 1952. The adult birds measure: wing ♂ 145.5, ♀ 141.5; tail ♂ 63, ♀ 67; culmen (with shield) ♂ 42.5, ♀ 40; tarsus ♂ 48.5, ♀ 47.5; mid-toe with claw ♂ 64, ♀ 67. The soft parts of these birds appear to be as recorded by Clarke (1905, *Ibis*, 5(8):258-259), the frontal shield and basal two-thirds of the bill being bright coral red, the distal third yellow. The legs in these specimens are red splotched with greenish yellow, the feet rather greenish yellow, the pads, nails, and posterior margins of the tarsi being blackish.

The downy young bird, previously undescribed, is exactly similar to a downy young gallinule or moorhen. It is covered with black down and has black legs and feet. The bill is horny yellow, the upper mandible having a median black band and a black tip. The lower mandible is horny yellow, the basal half of the gonys and the tip being black.

Allen (*op. cit.*:58) created the genus *Porphyriornis* for the Tristan and Gough Island gallinules on the basis of combining the short thick bill and oval nostrils of "*Ionornis*"=*Porphyrula*, with the coloration of *Gallinula*. Actually the nostrils are oval, set in a nasal depression in *Porphyrula*, just as they are in *Gallinula*. The bill is stouter in the Gough and Tristan species than it is in a typical gallinule, but this is a feature of island species in any case, and its shape, and that of the frontal shield are virtually identical. These island birds, as well as the gallinules, both belong to the group which have narrow lateral membranes on the toes as pointed out long ago by Sharpe (1894, *Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus.* 23:6), and in fact the only striking morphological differences are the reduction in

size of the wings in connection with flightlessness, and the heavier, more rugged appearing feet and tarsi, usually a corollary development.

It appears to be a question, then, whether the genus *Porphyrionis* should be maintained. Peters (1934, "Check-list of the Birds of the World," 2:206, footnote) united *Ionornis* with *Porphyryula* feeling that the minor external differences of the species concerned were not of generic significance. *Porphyryula* differs from *Gallinula* in lacking lateral membranes on the toes, in having a bright plumage in the adult, differently colored young, and a posteriorly pointed frontal shield. These characters add up to a cumulative factor which may be considered to imply generic value. The sole character of "*Porphyrionis*," aside from relative proportions, is flightlessness. Flightlessness, whether verified in fact or not, has not been thought of as having generic importance in the case of *Rallus wakensis*, for example, (Rothschild, 1903, *Bull. Brit. Ornith. Club*, 13:78). In the case of ducks, flightlessness is not considered to have generic value in itself. The Auckland Island and Campbell Island flightless teal have been made subspecies of the New Zealand Brown Duck, *Anas aucklandica*, by Delacour and Mayr (1945, *Wilson Bull.* 57:20, 39).

Purple gallinules have been shown to occur rather commonly on the Tristan group of islands as occasional vagrants. An immature male and female in the Yale Peabody Museum collection were taken on Tristan in May and June 1952. (See also, Hagen, 1952, "Birds of Tristan da Cunha, Results of the Norwegian Sci. Exped. to Tristan da Cunha 1937-1938," No. 20: 199-201). If Purple gallinules can wander from the New World so easily to Tristan, it seems quite possible that the Tristan and Gough Island gallinules represent an endemic population derived from vagrant *Gallinula* of New World origin.

Rowettia goughensis (Clarke): Gough Island Bunting.

Two pairs of this interesting species were secured December 15, 1952. They measure: wing ♂ 98.5, 100.5, ♀ 96 (worn),

104; tail ♂ 76.5, 81, ♀ 81.5, (w.); culmen ♂ 18, 19, ♀ 18, 19; tarsus ♂ 29, 30, ♀ 27, 31 mm. On the label it is noted that the birds were seen from sea level to 1800 feet.

Certainly in outward appearance *Rowettia* seems of New World origin, markedly similar in color pattern to *Melanodera* as pointed out by Lowe (1923 *Ibis*, 5(11):511-513).