

ART. XXIII.—*On the Egg of the Huia (Heteralocha acutirostris)*. By
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[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 12th January, 1878.]

IN a paper read before this Society last year,* I described, as a great novelty, the egg of the huia, from a specimen (containing a well-developed embryo) obtained by Mikaera in the Wainuiomata bush. The same native brought in to me this season another huia's egg obtained in the same locality. It differs so much in appearance from the one in the Colonial Museum as to create a doubt at first sight of their identity. Mikaera, however, stoutly affirms that he is right; and on proceeding to blow the egg I found the shell extremely thin and fragile, agreeing in this respect with the one already described. The present specimen is more elliptical in form, measuring 1·8 inches in length by 1·1 in its widest diameter. It is of a very delicate stone-grey, inclining to greyish-white, without any markings except at the larger end, where there are, chiefly on one side, some scattered rounded spots and dots of dark purple-grey and brown. Towards the small end there are some obsolete specks, but over the greater portion of its surface the shell is quite plain.

The egg when brought to me was perfectly fresh, and the native declares that he took it from the ovary of the bird just as it was ready for extrusion. This may perhaps account, in some measure, for the extreme delicacy of the shell, which fractured under the gentlest handling in blowing, as well also for the absence of markings. I see no reason to doubt the authenticity of the specimen, for any one who has taken the trouble to examine and compare the eggs of the common house-sparrow will be aware how much the eggs of some species differ from each other in this respect, even those taken from the same nest; and we have no sufficient data at present for determining the extent of variability in the eggs of this rare form.

Mikaera brought this specimen to me on or about the 11th October. The egg previously described, which was apparently within a day or two of hatching, was obtained about the 20th October. These dates will therefore give approximately the period of incubation.

The Museum specimen (which I am permitted to exhibit this evening for comparison) measures 1·45 by 1·05 inches, and is of a pale stone-grey, irregularly stained, freckled, and speckled with purplish-grey, the markings in some places running into dark wavy lines.

* "Trans. N.Z. Inst.," VIII., p. 192.

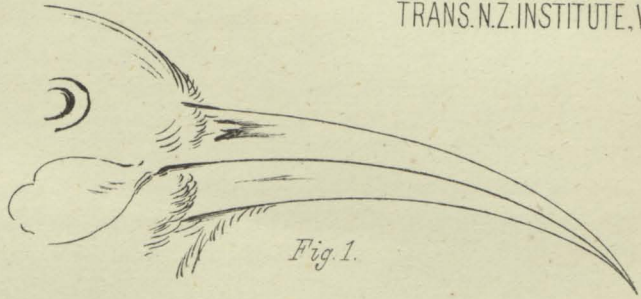


Fig. 1.

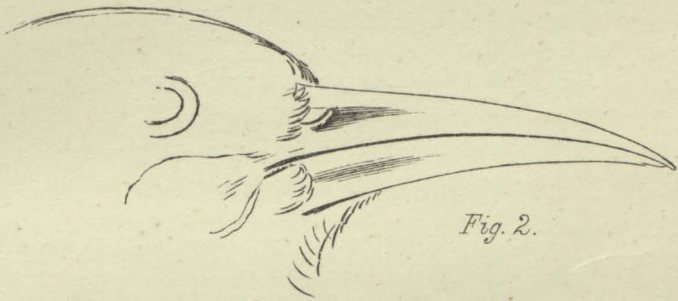


Fig. 2.

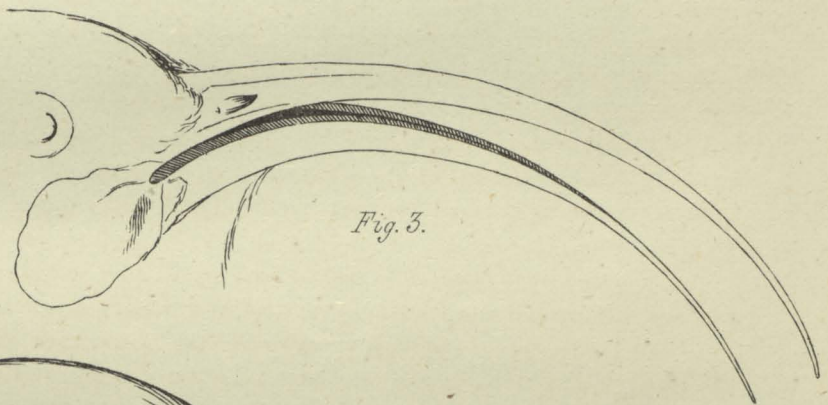


Fig. 3.

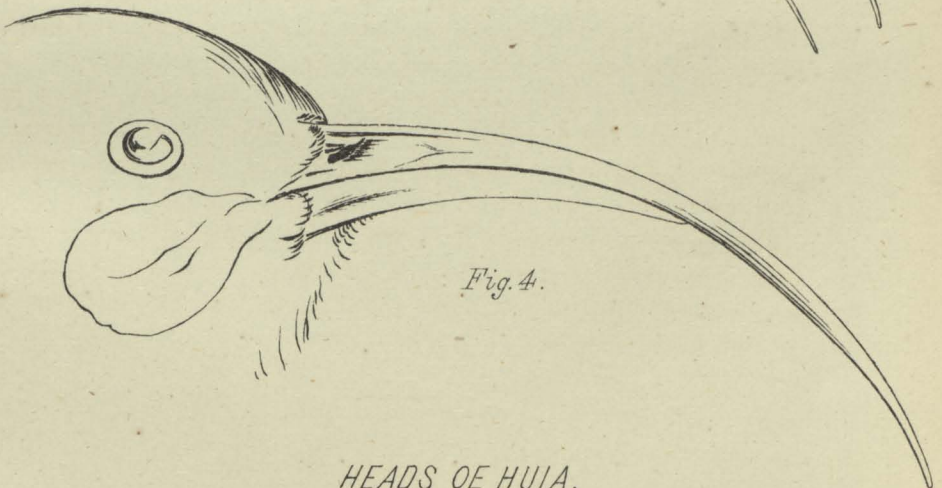


Fig. 4.

HEADS OF HUIA.

To illustrate Paper by Dr. Buller.

W. L. Buller, del.