

This gaily coloured bird is a native of Australia, but a few, escaped from captivity, have multiplied in the North Island. In New Zealand the bird is apparently taking to a ground life, with the result that a native variety far less adapted for flight than its Australian progenitor is already being developed.

Another curiosity was a sparrow with a deformed beak, the upper mandible being of extraordinary length and curved downwards, giving the head of the bird the appearance of that of a miniature female huia.

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SECOND MEETING: 6th August, 1901.

Mr. G. V. Hudson, President, in the chair.

*Paper.*— "On Caves in the Martinborough District, and Moa-bones found therein," by H. N. McLeod.

ABSTRACT.

The paper set forth minutely the details of the route to the caves, which are situated on the Makara Stream (not to be confounded, of course, with the better-known Makara near Karori), as well as careful measurements of the caves and fissures and fossil bones found therein. The locality is about sixteen miles from Martinborough, and the caves are found in what is known as the "Cliff Paddock," a hill some 1,300 ft. high, with precipitous sides, rising from the stream. The stream itself appears to mark the route of a subterranean river. A stream issues from one of the caves, while in another place a creek plunges into a shaft and is lost to view. Moreover, after descending one of these pits, about 16 ft. deep, and winding along a narrow tunnel for some distance, the roar of an underground torrent was distinctly heard, but no access to the dark river was discovered. When the land was first occupied, some twenty years ago, the existence of the caves was unsuspected. The locality was covered by a forest so dense that, as the station-manager said, "a hawk could not have penetrated the undergrowth," yet from the various caverns since exposed quite a cartload of moa-bones, some of large size, have been removed, and are now mostly distributed among settlers in the neighbourhood. The author gave precise and minute descriptions of eight separate caves, also of the fossil remains, stalagmites, stalactites, and other ordinary contents of such receptacles. In the vertical shafts the bones of sheep and cattle were found, as well as those of extinct birds. The moa-bones had not only been found in the form of skeletons, but lying piled at the angles and in the narrow portions of the caves, where they had been carried by water. Investigations of a gallery, which they had some hope would open into a larger chamber, has been checked by stalactite pillars 12 in. to 18 in. in circumference. Water was still oozing from the roofs of the caverns, and the solid lime was still being slowly deposited. One passage, about 3 ft. wide, the sides coated with much siliceous deposit, somewhat damaging to clothing and knuckles, was followed up for quite 100 ft., when it became too narrow to permit of further progress.

Sir James Hector exhibited a map of New Zealand, especially prepared to show the distribution of moa remains, in which some hundreds of limestone caves in both Islands were indicated.

He said he remembered his own surprise in the early sixties, when first exploring such caves, at finding, as Mr. McLeod had done, bones of sheep and cattle mixed with fossils of a period generally supposed to be remote. The animals had fallen into the cave, and flowing water had carried the bones into strange company. The caves at Martinborough were geologically recent; others, notably at Takaka, in Nelson, were of far more ancient date. Hundreds of these caves had never been properly examined, and they were full of valuable material for the scientific investigator. He was glad that one of our members had devoted serious attention to the subject. Some of the secret caves of the Maoris in the North Island in particular would hereafter be mines of treasure for the archaeologist. For ages the natives had been in the habit not only of depositing therein the bones of their great chiefs, priests, and warriors, but their most treasured heirlooms, in the way of greenstone ornaments, &c., which were practically imperishable, and were the sole remaining relics of native art of prehistoric times.

Sir James Hector exhibited the skeleton of a young female whale of a rare species—*Mesoplodon hectori*, Van Beneden—which, with its mother, was captured last March at Titahi Bay.

Only four specimens of this species had, he said, been met with. The first two were fragments only. The adult specimen on this occasion the Museum, unfortunately, had not been able to secure, and this was, therefore, the only perfect skeleton available. Strangely enough, the two other specimens had been found in the same little bay. The *Mesoplodon* might be regarded as a miniature species of the family of which the great sperm whale was the type. A northern species was known, differing in several points from the New Zealand species.

Sir James Hector directed the attention of the meeting to a collection of some forty or fifty out of a large collection of water-colour drawings of our native fishes by the late Mr. F. E. Clarke, a member of the Society.

He said Mr. Clarke's knowledge of fish was minute and accurate, and it would be difficult to exaggerate the beauty and scientific fidelity of his drawings. A special value attached to these drawings inasmuch as some represented rare and others absolutely unique specimens which had come under Mr. Clarke's observation—one of these, notably, a large shark of a kind which Sir James had never seen, and which was undescribed save by Mr. Clarke, while it differed remarkably from any other known species. At some distant day, perhaps, these valuable drawings might be reproduced and issued in book form—that was, if they could be secured for the Museum; as it was, they were in danger of being lost or dispersed. Mrs. Clarke was willing to dispose of them, and he hoped the collection would be purchased in its complete form by the colony.

The meeting expressed its concurrence.

Sir James, in continuing his remarks, said that something more than accurate delineation of our fishes was needed. We had still much to learn of their habits and life-history, though we knew far more about them than might be supposed from occasional reports published at public expense, in which, it was not too much to say, a great deal of nonsense might be found. One fact we could not escape—that New Zealand was an island, and that the surrounding hundred-fathom limit within which fishing operations could be conducted was a narrow one. It was impossible, in the absence of breeding-grounds such as the North Sea or the banks off Newfoundland, that New Zealand could ever establish a great fishing industry. He then called attention to some curious facts