

SHORT NOTE

Fijian birds described in newspapers

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It has long been known that the Fijian red-throated lorikeet *Charmosyna amabilis* was first described by Edward P. Ramsay as *Trichoglossus (Glossopsitta) amabilis* in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, largely through Ramsay publicising this in a later paper (Ramsay 1875a; 1876d; see also Mayr 1945, and Watling 1982). Watling (1982) considered this description 'unprecedented', but this is clearly not the case, with numerous birds and mammals being described in newspapers and popular periodicals, for at least the preceding 50 years.

Many of these names are in common use and there has been no argument over their validity, for example, the whiskered tern genus *Chlidonias* Raffles 1822, described in *The Kentucky Gazette*, and the shoebill stork *Balaeniceps rex* Gould 1850 described in *The Athenaeum*. Furthermore there were many taxa named in Australian newspapers long before Ramsay's description of *Trichoglossus amabilis*; the first being *Casuaricus australis* Wall 1854, which was published in *The Illustrated Sydney News* for 5 Jun 1854. Ramsay's first new taxon, the rufous scrubbird *Atrichia rufescens*, was also described in a particularly obscure place; *The Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser*, a newspaper issued at Grafton in country New South Wales on 12 Jun 1866. His publication in such a location was probably unintentional, as it appears to be a text that was sent at the same time to the Zoological Society of London for publication in their *Proceedings*.

Later newspaper writings by Ramsay seem to have been deliberate. This followed the description of the yellow-rumped pardalote *Pardalotus xanthopyge* in the Melbourne newspaper *The Australasian* by Frederick McCoy, the then Curator of what was to become Museum Victoria. Although McCoy knew Ramsay was soon to publish a description of the same taxon, McCoy sent his own description to the editor of *The Annals and Magazine of Natural History* in London on 26 Dec 1866. By this stage Ramsay's description, in which he hoped to name the taxon *P. leadbeateri*, had already been sent to the Zoological Society

of London. A few days later on 29 Dec 1866, McCoy published his description of *P. xanthopyge* in the newspaper and then informed Ramsay, who was obliged to withdraw his description (see Hindwood 1950).

Apparently as a consequence of this affair, Ramsay then made a regular habit of sending copies of proposed new taxa either to newspapers, or journals that published frequently, such as *Nature*. He ceased sending papers to such publications after the introduction of the *Abstracts for the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* which were usually published within a few days of the meetings of the Society (McAllan, unpubl. data.).

Most of Ramsay's publications in newspapers have previously been noted in the literature, though one bird article has long been overlooked. When examining Ramsay's diaries and notes in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, some years ago, I came across the annotated descriptions of several taxa in a newspaper cutting (Fig. 1). This cutting was not dated, though obviously published shortly after the meeting of the Linnean Society of NSW for 28 Nov 1875. Examination of microfilmed copies of the *Sydney Morning Herald* for subsequent issues revealed that the birds concerned were described on 8 Dec 1875 (Ramsay 1875b). When compared with the microfilm, the cutting is essentially complete, though it lacks the words "Description of a new species of Blackbird (*Merula*):—", before the description of *Merula ruficeps*, and where the cutting was divided into two to fit on the diary page.

Three of the names in the newspaper were also described by Ramsay in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* [hereafter = *Proceedings*], which was published in Feb 1876 (Ramsay 1876a; 1876b; 1876c; see Fletcher 1896 for the date of publication). Of these three names, two, the Fiji bush-warbler *Vitia ruficapilla* and the Kadavu subspecies of island thrush *Merula ruficeps*, were identical, though the name for the Kadavu fantail *Rhipidura personata*, was originally given as

LINNEAN SOCIETY.

The following paper, by Mr. E. P. Ramsay, F.L.S., C.M.Z.S., Curator of the Sydney Museum, was read at the Linnean Society's meeting on Monday last, November 29th:—

1875
 Characters of a new genus and species Passerine bird, from the Fiji Islands, proposed to be called *VITIA* (nov. gen.), *Vitia ruficapilla*. Nov. Sp.

This is an interesting *passerine* form, which appears to be allied to *Synallaxis* on the one hand, and *Troglodytes* on the other. I have not yet determined to which family of the Passeres it most properly belongs, but for the present I place it among the Troglodytes (*Troglodytidae*, *Scelater.*) I can find no genus in any of the works at my disposal, *Gray's Genera of Birds* included, into which I can place it with any degree of certainty, and although much averse to forming new genera, I do not see how I can possibly avoid it, unless by leaving it for some one else to do. I therefore propose to form, for the reception of the present species, the genus *Vitia* which may be thus characterised.

VITIA—Nov. genus.

Bill as long, or about the same length as the head, straight, comparatively strong; as wide as high at the base, compressed laterally past the nostrils, culmen very slightly curved to the tip, which is entire.

Nostrils, lateral, basal, placed in a longitudinal groove; the opening oblong, partially covered with membrane; distance between the anterior margin of nostril and tip of the bill nearly equal to the distance between the nostrils and 1st angle of the mouth.

Wing, short, 1st quill about one-half the length of 2nd; 2nd one-fourth shorter than 3rd, which is about equal to the 9th; the 4th, 5th, and 6th about equal and longest; the 7th and 8th very little less; the remainder gradually decreasing to the innermost secondary.

Tail, of ten feathers, long, graduated, somewhat rounded—the lateral feathers only slightly (*one-fifth*) shorter than the central.

Tarsus, long, about one-third shorter than the *tibia*, slender, scales obsolete; hind toe, long, strong; the claw equal to the length of the toe; lateral toes uneven, the inner shorter than the outer, with its claw about equal to the length of the middle without its claw; outer toe joined to centre toe from about the middle of first joint.

In the formation of the wings and legs this genus resembles that of *Malurus* and *Sericornis*.

VITIA RUFICAPILLA, Nov. Sp.

The whole of the head rufous, paler rufous on the sides of the face; the throat, chest, and centre of the abdomen ashy white; the sides of the neck and of the body, light ashy brown, becoming browner at the flanks and under tail-coverts; tail underneath brown crossed by numerous indistinct narrow wavy bars of darker tint, seen only in certain lights, above dark brown, with a slight tinge of reddish brown on inner margins of the quills; wings below brown, the quills margined with whitish along the inner webs towards the base; under wing-coverts white, wings above dark brown, slightly tinged with reddish brown on the outer margins of the quills and upper wing-coverts; lower hind neck, back, and remainder of the upper surface brown, with a slight reddish brown tinge on the wings and upper tail-coverts. Bill dark horn-brown, lower mandible whitish, legs and feet light brown, iris brown; total length, 4.8 inches; wing, 2.4; tail, 2.5; tarsus, 0.95; bill from forehead, 0.7; from angle of the mouth, 0.72; from nostril, .4; height at nostril, 0.2; width, .2.

Adult Female.—In size and plumage same as the male. This species was found at Kandavau, in the Fiji group. It was discovered in pairs traversing the more open parts on the sides of the ranges, flitting from bush to bush, and emitting a weak monosyllabic note. When separated they use a rather loud call note.

MERULA RUFICORPS, Nov. Sp.

Adult Male.—The whole of the head, neck, and chest coraceous buff or pale rufous; the remainder of the body, upper and under tail-coverts, and of the wings and tail above, black; under surface of wings and tail blackish brown; legs brown, lower half to the knees buff; bill, tarsi, and feet gamboge yellow; iris pale brown; total length 6½ inches; wing, 4.1; tail, 2.7; bill from forehead, 0.7; from angle of the mouth, 1.1; tarsus 1.2.

The female is similar in plumage, one specimen not quite adult has the legs of a uniform brown colour, and is slightly larger than the male; total length 7½ inches; wing, 4.1; tail, 2.9; tarsi, 1.2; bill from forehead, 0.9; from angle of the mouth, 1.1.

Description of a new species of Flycatcher (*Rhypidura*):—

RHYPIDURA PERSONATUS, Nov. Sp.

All the upper surface brown, of a duller and darker tint on the head and neck; upper tail-coverts and tail blackish brown, the outermost feathers on either side of the tail margined with white, narrowly at the tip, and becoming only a very narrow line of white margining the inner webs, the shafts of these feathers below white, the next two on either side having only a very small white mark at the apex; wings above brown, the inner secondaries margined on the outer webs with dull light buff, under wing-coverts brown margined with silvery white, head and neck dark brown; a line of white extends from the forehead over the eye to the upper part of the ear-coverts; lores, ear-coverts, and a narrow line round the eye blackish brown; from the posterior angle of the eye over the ear-coverts a short line of white; throat and sides of the neck below white; from the centre of the throat, extending and widening out on the chest, is a broad somewhat triangular patch of black; the lower part of the chest, the breast, and remainder of the under surface of the body and under tail-coverts white; the sides and flanks tinged with olive-brown, more extensively in some than in others; bill black; lower mandible whitish; legs and feet dark lead blue; iris light-brown; total length, 6.2 inches; wing, 3.2; tail, 3.75; tarsus, 0.4; bill, from gape, 0.55; from forehead, 0.4; from nostril, 0.3.

The sexes are alike in plumage, but the female appears to have a greater extent of olive-brown on the flanks and sides.

In actions and habits they closely resemble the *R. albicauda* of New South Wales, being seldom seen in the "opens," usually confining themselves to the dense bushes and thickly wooded parts.

Description of a new species of *Myiolestes* (?):—

MYIOLESTES (?) *helenae*, Nov. Sp.

The whole of the upper surface dull brown, washed with rufous brown on the rump and upper tail-coverts; wings brown; the outer webs of the quills and wing-coverts washed with rufous brown; throat and chest and the under surface of the body, wings, and tail, of a lighter brown, lightest on the abdomen; flanks and under-tail-coverts rufous brown; tail above dark brown, lighter below; all the feathers crossed with narrow indistinct bars, visible in certain lights only. The outer two feathers on either side are tipped with white to a greater extent on the inner web than on the outer. The next feather on either side is slightly margined with white on the inner web only; on the remainder the spot becomes obsolete. Bill blackish horn-colour, brown at the base of the lower mandible; bill strong, nearly as long as the head; legs and feet lead blue, iris brown. Total length, 8 inches; bill from forehead, 0.9; from gape, 1 inch; from nostril, 0.55; height, 0.25; width at gape, 0.4; wing, 3.3; tail, 2.75; tarsus, 0.9.

I have placed this bird provisionally in the genus *Myiolestes*. I believe, however, that it may hereafter prove to be more closely allied to *Myiolestes*. It is closely allied to, but I believe quite distinct from, *Myiolestes helenae* of Hartlaub and Finsch. This specimen has not any black about the lores or under the eye or on the chin, nor has it white under tail-coverts, as in *M. helenae*.

The above described new species were discovered by Mr. Charles Pearce in the Fiji Islands; and now form part of the magnificent collection at Elizabeth Bay. I am indebted to Mr. William Macleay, F.L.S., for the privilege of describing these new and interesting forms.

Fig. 1 Ramsay's copy of the descriptions in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 8 Dec 1875. Mitchell Library, SLNSW, MLMSS 2278 544, Box 3.

Table 1 Measurements of descriptions and specimens of *Clytorhynchus* specimens. Measurements in inches. *, bill measured from forehead; **, bill measured from gape, F&L (1995), Fisher & Longmore (1995).

	Total length	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Bill
Ramsay: description of <i>brunneus</i>	6	3.3	2.75	0.9	*0.9, **1
Layard: description of <i>compressirostris</i>	6.5	3.33	3	0.83	1
Layard: <i>compressirostris</i> as reported by F&L (1995)	6.5	3.25	3	0.88	1
B.7166: F&L (1995)	6.62	3.19	3	0.81	0.81
B.7166: IMcA	6.7	3.25	3	0.83	*0.9, **1
B.7167: F&L (1995)	6.62	3.19	3.25	0.88	0.81
B.7167: IMcA	6.6	3.35	3	0.85	*0.9, **1

Rhipidura personatus in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and was changed to *Rhipidura personata* in the *Proceedings*. Given the annotation by Ramsay of the cutting, this can be considered a justified emendation by the author. Apart from the spelling of this *Rhipidura*, the accounts for these names are also word for word, and thus the three names date from the newspaper account rather than the journal.

A problem arises with the last name, *Myiolestes brunneus*. This name is no longer in use and from the newspaper cutting in Ramsay's diary, there is no doubt that Ramsay decided it referred to the lesser shrikebill *Myiolestes* [= *Clytorhynchus*] *vitiensis* and withdrew the name before the publication of the *Proceedings* in Feb 1876. The cutting has the remains of blue pencil scrawled across the *Myiolestes* section, apparently of the word 'cancelled'. On this basis it is likely the cutting was initially sent to the editors of the *Proceedings* to be used as the text for publication. There is no doubt from the context that the *Myiolestes* concerned is the lesser shrikebill population from Kadavu, usually referred to by the name *Clytorhynchus vitiensis compressirostris* (Layard 1876).

The type specimens of these taxa that were described at the meeting of the Linnean Society of NSW for 28 Nov 1875, were reviewed by Fisher & Longmore (1995), though these authors were not aware of Ramsay's *Myiolestes brunneus*. They noted that in the *Proceedings* the tarsus measurement for *Rhipidura personata* was too short and was probably an error by either Ramsay or the printer. However, as the measurement is identical in the newspaper account, the error was undoubtedly either made by Ramsay or the printer of the newspaper and not the printer of the *Proceedings*. The *Proceedings* gave all the corrections as found in Ramsay's newspaper cutting, but as at least two of the errors were not changed (the spelling of *Rhipidura* and the tarsus measurement) it is evident that in this instance Ramsay's proof-reading was not thorough.

Fisher & Longmore (1995) relied heavily on the published measurements to identify the types of all the taxa concerned in the Macleay Museum, though they noted that the holotype of *M. compressirostris* Layard is probably in The Natural History Museum at Tring, UK. Given the flaws in both the *Proceedings* and newspaper accounts, this reliance on the published measurements for identification of the type specimens may be problematic. Ramsay's description gave measurements for the type of *M. brunneus* that differ appreciably from Layard's measurements. These in turn differ from the measurements reported by Fisher & Longmore (1995) to have been made in Layard's paper, though the errors made by Fisher & Longmore are minor. As noted by these authors there are two specimens of *Clytorhynchus vitiensis* in the Macleay Museum; B.7166 and B.7167.

The measurements for these specimens were checked by IMcA and measurements given by Fisher & Longmore (1995) were found to be in general agreement (see Table 1). All measurements for the specimens are similar to those in Ramsay's newspaper account, though the total length and tail are much shorter. However, if the tails are measured by placing a rule between the central tail feathers rather than measuring the exposed feather tracts, the measurements become 2.85 inches for B.7166 and 2.9 inches for B.7167 (as measured by IMcA & S. Norrington) and are closer to the measurements given by Ramsay.

The anomaly with the total length would seem a mystery as these specimens are the only candidates as syntypes for *M. brunneus*. It may be that this difference is another printer's error; the fraction being omitted.

Even with the anomalies in the description, the name *Myiolestes brunneus* is valid, though there remains the question as to its availability. Under the current edition of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999) the relevant section concerned is Article 23.9.1. In this

Article it notes 'prevailing usage must be maintained when the following conditions are both met:

'23.9.1.1. the senior synonym or homonym has not been used as a valid name after 1899'

and,

'23.9.1.2. the junior synonym or homonym has been used for a particular taxon, as its presumed valid name, in at least 25 works, published by at least 10 authors in the immediately preceding 50 years and encompassing a span of not less than 10 years.'

In this instance, although present usage would suggest maintenance of the name *compressirostris*, despite an intensive search I cannot find the required 25 instances where this name has been used since 1955. Those found include: Blackburn (1971); Clunie (1984; 1999); Dickinson (2003); duPont (1976); Fisher & Longmore (1995); Howard & Moore (1980, 1984); Langham (1981); Mayr (1978); Mayr & Cottrell (1986); Warren & Harrison (1971); Watling (1982, 2001); Wolters (1975–1982). This is in itself perhaps stretching the number of publications, as it includes multiple editions of the same works, some that are reprints of older pre-1955 works, and most are also merely listings of taxa. The upshot is that *both* conditions, as required by the Article for suppression of the name, cannot be met. Consequently *Clytorhynchus vitiensis brunneus* (Ramsay 1875) appears to be both valid and available for the subspecies of lesser shrikebill on Kadavu.

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