

FROM THE INDIAN FORESTER –ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

THE
INDIAN FORESTER
October, 1911 (pp. 579-580)

NEW GUINEA BIRDS

A wonderful collection of the birds obtained on the expedition in the Snow Mountains of Dutch New Guinea is on view at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington. The explorers, under the lead of Mr. Walter Goodfellow, landed on the south coast of the island in January 1910, and the majority of the members of the expedition have not yet returned. Many of the trophies obtained have not at present reached England, but the collection now shown comprises more specimens of the birds of New Guinea than have ever before come to Europe.

It would be impossible to imagine a more brilliant scheme of colour than is displayed in the plumage. Eleven species of birds of paradise are exhibited, including the *Xanthomelus ardens*. Two specimens of this rare bird are contained in a Dutch collection, and a portion of the skin of one is at Genoa, but it has never previously been seen in England. The best known English work on the birds of paradise represents them as having a black neck, and this flight of fancy of the artist for some time puzzled the explorers, who imagined that the red and yellow birds which they obtained were of an entirely new species. The adult males possess a wonderful crimson ruff round the neck, but no trace of black is to be seen in either male or female. A more common but far more gorgeous species is the bird of paradise of the mainland of New Guinea. Its yellow tail plumes, which are of considerable length, are worn in the head-dresses of the natives for spectacular effect during their dances which consist largely of wagging the head.

Two entirely new parrots, known as *Aprosinctus*

wilhelminae and *Cydopsittacus godmaui*, have been brought home, and there are also a number of specimens of the *Nasiterna vividipectus*, the smallest parrot on earth—a little creature less than half the size of a sparrow. Other interesting birds are the Goura pigeons—now growing scarce on account of the demand for their plumage in the European market—and some large night jays, with great frog-mouths, known as the *Podargus papuensis* and the *Podargus ocellatus*—the latter being slightly the smaller kind. Amongst all these things which were strange and new it was remarkable to note a common English cuckoo, taken in New Guinea, and probably on its way to Australia.

A great collection of reptiles, fish, and insects is also being formed, and will eventually come to this country whilst the collection of plants is at present growing at Singapore. Many objects of great ethnological interest are also promised. The explorers report that many of the native tribes are living in the conditions of the stone age. They have never before seen steel axes or any kind of iron implement. Many drawings have been brought back of their stone weapons and primitive tools, and one represents a strange contrivance of bark which is used as a protection against rain, and has the appearance of a large hood worn close over the head and covering the body to the waist.

The expedition is now under the command of Captain Rawling, Mr. Goodfellow having returned along with Mr. G. C. Shortridge and brought the present collection. - (*Indian Field*)