

BEAUFORTIA

SERIES OF MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS

ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

No. 218

Volume 16

June 6, 1969

Notes on the extinct pigeon from Mauritius, *Alectroenas nitidissima* (Scopoli, 1786)

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ABSTRACT

The attention is called to the presence in the "Artis-Bibliotheek" of two representations of the extinct *Alectroenas nitidissima* and the only known description of its voice. Furthermore two pen-drawings, found in a ship's journal dating from 1601—1603 and very probably representing the same species, are reproduced.

In the "Artis-Bibliotheek", formerly the library of the "Koninklijk Zoölogisch Genootschap Natura Artis Magistra" (the Amsterdam zoo "Artis") but part of the University of Amsterdam now, is a collection of drawings, watercolours, etc. mainly representing animals. Apart from their aesthetic value these pictures are sometimes also of great scientific interest.

The collection is heterogeneous: especially in the 19th but still in the 20th century an attempt was made to compile an "Iconographia Zoologica" in which of every animal known as many as possible illustrations were gathered systematically. In those days one did not even hesitate to ruin books for this purpose by tearing out the plates. Also watercolours and drawings bought at auctions or presented by artists working in the zoo or the museum and by authors of scientific publications in "Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde" (the zoological periodical which from 1848 onwards is still issued) were inserted. The collecting was mainly the work of R. T. Maitland († The Hague 8.XII.1904) who inserted his own collection as well as the "Atlas Zoologique" of Th. G. van Lidt de Jeude (Tiel 8.VII.1788 - Utrecht 23.XII.1863) (cf. Maitland, 1888 : 22; Scheffer, 1939 : 142—143, 147—150). The "Iconographia Zoologica" is kept in wooden boxes and seems to have been consulted regularly. It

Received: January 31, 1969

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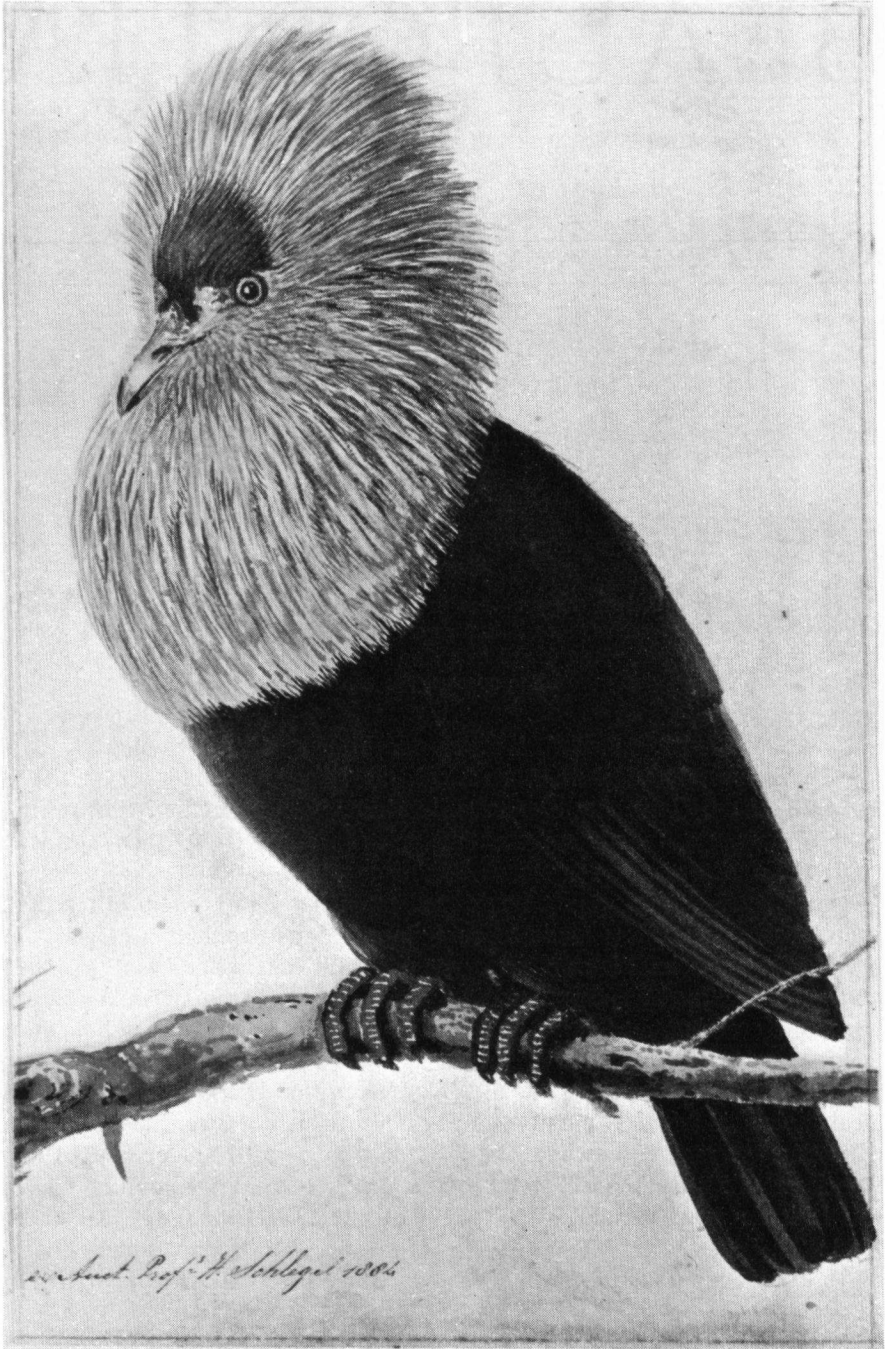


Fig. 1

is still in the "Artis-Bibliotheek", although the drawings, watercolours, etc. now have been taken out to guarantee the best possible preservation.

Among these last mentioned valuable items, I have found two representations of *Alectroenas nitidissima* (Scop.), the extinct pigeon from Mauritius.

One, a watercolour in the manner of Aert Schouman (a Dutch painter, Dordrecht 4.III.1710 - The Hague 5.VII.1792) but unsigned and possibly by G. Haasbroek (see below), measures 208 × 131 mm (fig. 1). It bears the annotation in ink: "ex Auct. Prof. H. Schlegel 1884". On a small piece of paper pasted on the lower margin one reads in the handwriting of Arnout Vosmaer (Rotterdam 1720 - The Hague 1799, director of the menageries and cabinet of the Prince-Stattholder William V of Orange-Nassau; cf. Engel, 1939 : 291 and 328—329): "Deze donkerblauwe met lootkoleure hoofdveeren, dien zij eeven als eene kraag omhoog kunnen opzetten zijn mij vande Kaap gezonden, doch van 'n Eyland *Mauritius* gekomen. Aan 't Hof vereerd door de Baron I. N. E. van Lynden 1790¹). En werden Pavillons Hollandois genaamd. Een heb ik maar levend ontf. doch naa is mede na eenige maanden aan de Waterzucht gestorven. Des avonds 11 a 12 uren en veelmalen in de nagt maakten het een 10 a 12 maalen aardig geluid schielijk op elkaar als Baf Baf, en overdag een soort van korrend geluid." (translated: "These dark-blue with leadcoloured head-feathers, which they can turn upwards just as a collar were sent to me from the Cape, but originated from an isle Mauritius. Presented to the Court by the baron I. N. E. van Lynden 1790. And were called Pavillons Hollandois. One only I have rec. (eived) alive but died later after a few months from dropsy. In the evening 11 till 12 o'clock and many times during the night it made nice sounds 10 to 12 times quickly after another like Baf Baf²), and during the day a kind of cooing sound.").

As far as I know this is the first time that "Pavillons Hollandois" (French for: Dutch flag) is used as a name for this bird, though the more usual "Pigeon hollandais" is explained by the likeness of the plumage to the Dutch colours (cf. Snouckaert van Schauburg, 1935 : 328). Furthermore I have not been able to find anywhere a description of the voice of this bird, so it seems worth while to publish this note by Vosmaer on a living specimen. On the old passe-partout of this watercolour is written in pencil: "afkomstig van Vosmaer (transl.: "has come from Vosmaer) *Alectroenas Franciae* Gm."

The other representation, a water-and-ink-drawing, measures 198 × 151 mm and is signed G. Haasbroek (fig. 2). It is very much like the above mentioned painting, but shows at right the head and neck of a second

¹) Very probably the person meant is Johan Nicolaas Steven van Lynden (1738—1788) who has been "independent-fiscal" at the Cape of Good Hope (cf. Nieuw Nederl. Biogr. Woordenboek VII (1927): 799—800). Van Lynden corresponded in 1790 with the Prince, and had a daughter married to the son of the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope at the time, C. J. van der Graaff. For these informations I am much indebted to Mr. E. Pelinck (director of Koninklijk Huisarchief, The Hague).

²) The *a* in "Baf" is pronounced in Dutch as the *a* in "part".

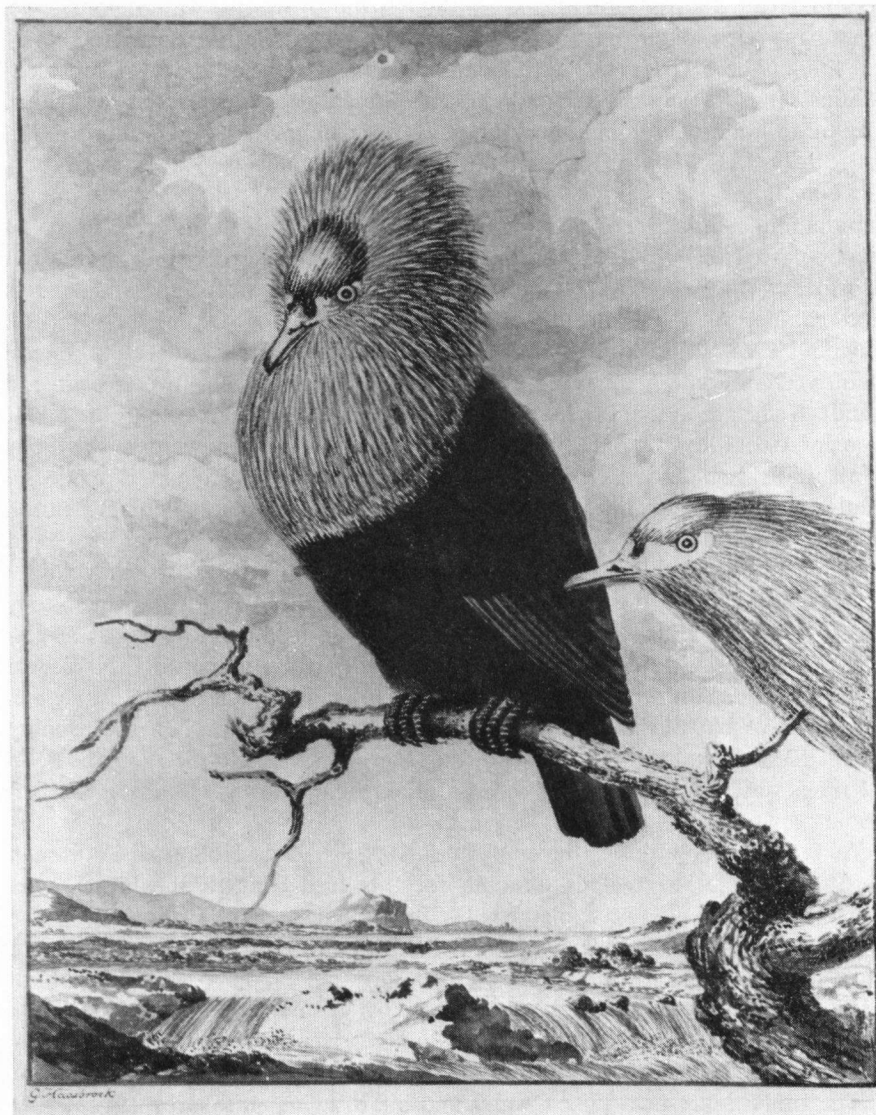


Fig. 2

specimen with the collar flattened, whereas a panorama with a river and falls forms the background.

Circumstantial evidence (the dimensions, the artist, the connection with Vosmaer) leads me to the supposition that these drawings were meant to illustrate another issue of Vosmaer's *Regnum Animale*, a series of descriptions of animals in the menageries and cabinet of the Prince-Stattholder William V at The Hague, which were published from 1766 until 1804 (cf.

Tuijn & van der Feen, 1969). I have been able to trace neither notes for these publications nor manuscripts.

The two ink-drawings of *Alectroenas nitidissima* (figs. 3 and 4) are reproduced here by courtesy of Mrs. Dr. M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs (Algemeen Rijks Archief, The Hague), who was so kind as to show me a journal under her charge kept during the voyage of the ship "Gelderland", 1601—1603 (cf. Bijlsma, 1927: 211, nr. 135). On this journey Mauritius was visited. The journal is a vellum-bound volume measuring 31.5 × 21 cm and containing 144 numbered sheets. Some turtles and a lot of fishes are depicted, apart from the bird drawings mentioned below. Later it became clear to me that this is the very important bound manuscript to which Oudemans refers (1917: 47). Though in the end his long search for this journal was successful, unfortunately he never published his opinions on its contents, as was his intention (Oudemans, 1918: 339).

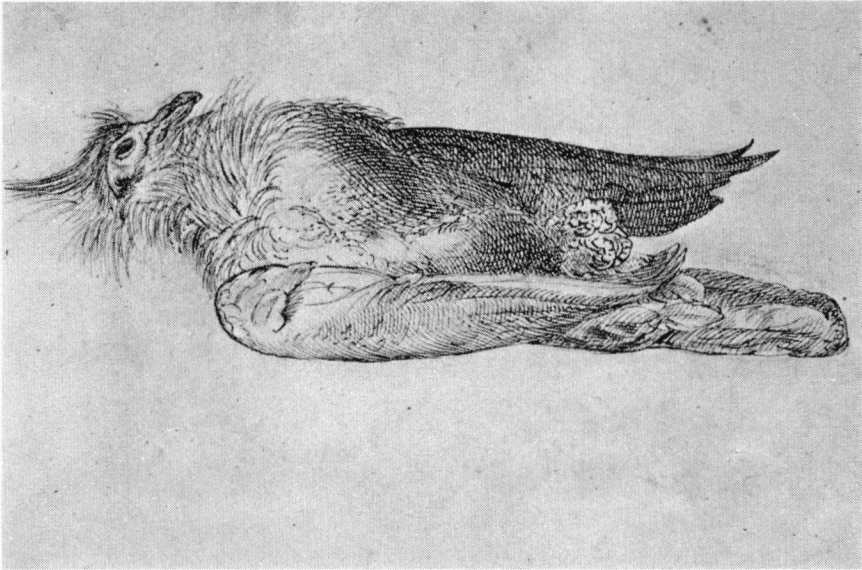


Fig. 3

Two drafts for this paper in handwriting, consisting of 100 and 136 pages 4 to respectively, are in the "Artis-Bibliotheek" at the moment. The second of these drafts is entitled: "Een en ander over het Journaal van de reis van Wolfhart Harmansen, 1601—1603. Eene studie op diarologisch, historisch, linguistisch, grafisch, geografisch, ichthyologisch, herpetologisch en ornithologisch gebied. Tevens een voorloper van zijne Dodo-Studiën II, door Dr. A. C. Oudemans, Arnhem" (translated: "Something on the journal of the voyage of Wolfhart Harmansen, 1601—1603. A diarological, historical, linguistic, graphic, geographical, ichthyological, herpetological and ornithological study. At the same time a precursor of his Dodo-Studies II, by Dr. A. C. Oudemans, Arnhem"). It bears on its last page the date "3 Mei 1920". On its con-

tents I intend to publish in the future. With this manuscript were found 23 photographs, measuring 18×24 cm, of drawings of fishes and birds taken from the "Gelderland"-journal.

These manuscripts form a part of the so-called "Dodo-archieven van Oudemans" (translated: "Dodo-files of Oudemans") which comprise two more unpublished papers, one called "Dodo-Studiën II" (70 pages 4to) and the other entitled "De Maskarenen, hun dierenwereld, en de Drie Dodo-Soorten uit authentieke bronnen van 1598—1669, door Dr. A. C. Oudemans. (Met 1 Plaat)" (translated: "The Mascarene Islands, their fauna, and the three Dodo-species from authentic sources 1598—1669, by Dr. A. C. Oudemans. (With one Plate)") (65 pages 4to). Furthermore Oudemans's Dodo-files con-

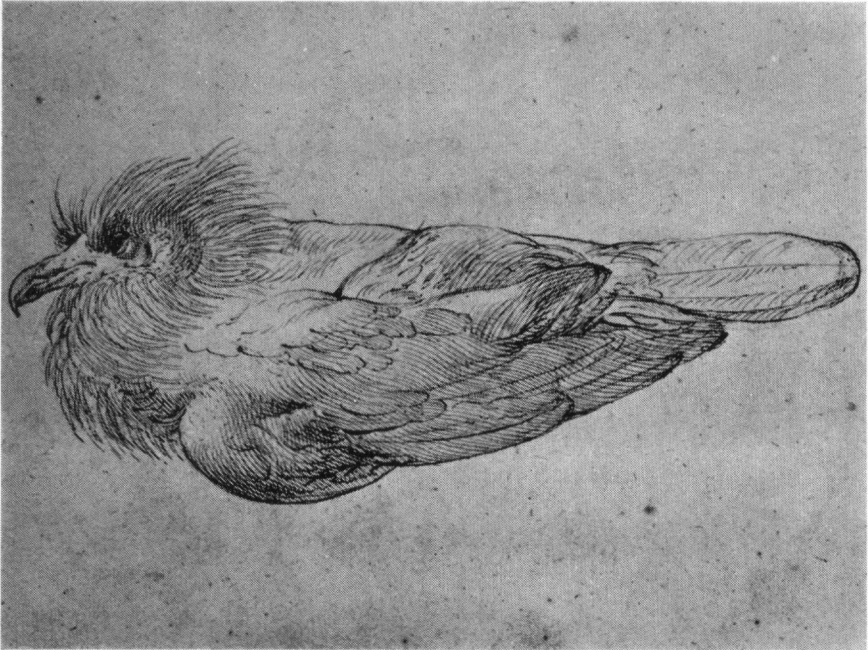


Fig. 4

sist of a collection of literature references, notes for the manuscripts mentioned above and various letters (dating mostly from 1917, 1918 and 1920) concerning the Dodo and the possibilities of publishing *Dodo-Studiën II* and the journal of Wolphert Harmensz. Finally the files comprise the published plates from the *Dodo-Studiën* (1917) and some notes and letters concerning his 1918 publication.

In the journal from the "Gelderland" one finds a drawing of *Aphanapteryx bonasia* (Sélys-Longchamps) (sheet 63), a sketch of a walking Dodo together with a detailed drawing of the head (sheet 63 verso, sheet 64), various sketches of Dodo's (sheet 64 verso, sheet 65) — a tracing of one of

these was reproduced by Newton (1893—1896 : 156) —, the two drawings of the pigeon of Mauritius reproduced here (sheet 65 verso, sheet 66), and a drawing of *Lophopsittacus mauritianus* (Owen) — an engraving, not very exact, after a tracing of this drawing is published in Newton (l.c.: 216) —.

Though Oudemans (1917 : 47—48; 1918: 334) refers to Ornis, 14, 1907 : 82, it is remarkable that he does not mention the fact (stated on that same page 82) that two of the tracings (and one of these actually of a Dodo!) are reproduced by Newton, but only says: “Nothing now prevents the publication of the tracings at Cambridge”. According to Hachisuka (1953 : 54) the tracings are still at Cambridge. It is not quite clear whether this author saw the tracings there himself, as he only mentions those of the Dodo and does not include the other ones in the list of Pictorial Evidences of *Aphanapteryx broeckii* (l.c.: 140) nor in his descriptions of *Alectroenas nitidissima* and *Lophopsittacus mauritianus*. Hachisuka’s plate of this last mentioned species seems copied from Newton (1893—1896 : 216) and Rothschild (1907), as is also literally a part of the text (compare Rothschild, 1907: 49 with Hachisuka, 1953 : 188).

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