

Papers on Philippine Birds I.—A Collecting Trip to Calayan and Fuga<sup>a</sup>

BY RICHARD C. MCGREGOR

ON July 25, 1903, I finished packing my provisions and collecting gear preparatory to a trip to the Batanes and Babuyan, two groups of small islands situated north of the island of Luzon. The avian fauna of these islands was quite unknown at this time except for ten species which were observed by John Whitehead, the English naturalist, during a short enforced stay on the small island of Fuga. Meager as was Whitehead's material it included a species (*Hypsipetes fugensis* Grant) not found outside of the Babuyan; the genus is not known from any other part of the Philippine Archipelago but it has representative species in Japan, Formosa and the Loo Choo Islands. These facts led me to look forward with the greatest interest to collecting on these islands.

The morning of July 26 was very nasty. The typhoon signal was flying on the Weather Bureau building and Manila Bay was so choppy as to render embarkation on the Coast Guard Cutter extremely unpleasant and somewhat dangerous. Cutters on the run we were about to make, from Manila to Aparri, are always heavily loaded and it was noon before all was aboard and we headed for the mouth of Manila Bay. As we neared Corregidor, a small rocky island just within the mouth of the bay, the heavy seas caused our ship to pitch to an alarming degree and the necessary slowing of the engines lost all our headway.

Fortunately the captain decided to stop at Mariveles until the sea abated. Five days we remained at anchor with wind blowing furiously and rain coming in frequent squalls. To remain on deck meant to be soaked, so the passengers huddled together in the saloon or in the little staterooms. This boat has accommodations for eight passengers in the staterooms, and four can rest with some comfort on the transoms of the cabin; on this trip we carried 24 first-class passengers. But what is discomfort to the collector! During the time we were at anchor off Mariveles we took the rarest bird of all our trip and I felt well repaid. A small petrel was driven aboard and captured. This was the first time that any species of the family had been taken in the Philippines. The bird was so badly damaged that even the authorities at the National Museum could not determine its species.

On the 27th two small flocks of swifts (*Collocalia*) flew across the bay in the rain. Two species of tern, one of them *Sterna bergii*, and a gull (*Larus ridibundus*) were seen in small numbers. Two white-bellied eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) circled about the ship and several individuals of the eastern fish hawk (*Haliastur intermedius*) were continually in sight. Birds of the last species are numerous about the Manila shipping where they perform the duties that fall to the gulls along the California coast. In Japanese ports as well I have noticed great numbers of hawks feeding on scraps thrown overboard from ships' galleys.

When the typhoon had blown itself out we returned to Manila for more stores and then made a new start up the west coast of Luzon and with fairly good weather.

Off Lingayen Gulf and to the southward on August 2 I noted numbers of shearwaters but could not tell of what species never having killed any in these waters. *Puffinus leucomelas* has been known from the islands for a long time; it

<sup>a</sup> The birds obtained on this trip were fully reported in Bulletin of the Philippine Museum, No. 4.

was taken by Hugh Cuming. None of the recent collectors seem to have taken the bird.

At San Fernando de Union an individual of the common swamp kingfisher, *Halcyon chloris*, came aboard the ship and remained for a short time. From San Fernando we proceeded up the coast, making several small ports but nothing of importance in the bird line was observed until we reached Aparri.

Aparri, August 8.—In the bay were numerous small terns, dark-colored and white herons, and a few snake birds (*Anhinga melanogaster*). At night a small owl (*Ninox*) came aboard and was added to our collection. As the captain declined to land us on any of the Babuyanés I took myself, two native assistants, and outfit ashore, trusting to luck to find other means of transportation to the islands.

Aparri is a fair-sized town at the mouth of the Cagayan River and is the shipping port for the finest tobacco of the Philippines. Tobacco in small quantities can be purchased very cheaply at Aparri; I found an excellent cigar put up in bundles of ten each at 5 cents American money per bundle. "Aparri is a desolate place; the country about is flat, sandy and barren. The wide sand beach, an unusual sight in the Philippines, extends for miles to Cabo Engaño and nothing is found here but a few broken clam shells, crabs, flies and tiger beetles. The sun beats down heavily." (From my note book.)

Birds were scarce and of common species. In the scanty growth of dry grass back of the beach were a few grass warblers (*Megalurus palustris*) and the common bulbul (*Pycnonotus goiavier*). In the dry rice fields, the little warbler (*Cisticola exilis*) was uttering his grasshopper notes and the rufous lark (*Anthus rufulus*) was feeding in the stubble. The Jagor rice bird (*Munia jagori*) and the Philippine crow (*Corone philippina*) were noted in small numbers. The bee bird (*Merops* sp.) was especially abundant feeding over the river and I was told that it nested in banks a few miles up stream. A rufous flycatcher (*Zeocephus rufus*) flying about a bush in the yard adjoining our house seemed strangely out of place as my experience indicates that it prefers woods or brushy localities at some distance from houses. The rufous flycatcher is a very lovely species of about six inches length; the entire plumage is rich reddish brown and the legs, bill, and eyelids are deep blue; the middle pair of tail feathers are greatly elongated in the adult male making his total length five or six inches greater than that of the female.

August 25, after many delays and fruitless search for boats to Fuga or other island we got away in a "viray," a flat-bottomed sail boat some twenty feet in length. It was not decked over but had nipa palm thatch fore and aft for the protection of cargo. Our boat was such a one as the more venturesome natives of any country might use to reach distant islands and by such means no doubt, many small animals have been introduced into isolated localities where their presence is otherwise difficult to account for. Our viray actually carried the following animals from Aparri to Calayan Island: hermit crabs, beach crabs, a small wood-boring beetle, a mouse, three species of spiders, three species of ants, a lizard, and a frog. The natives of south sea islands still visit the Hawaiian Islands in sail boats and may have carried in former times many of the lizards, plants and insects that are now well established there.

Our crew was a hard-looking set. It consisted of a "pilot," a young native with a long tongue and no brains, three native sailors, and a helmsman, an old Cagayan man who said nothing, looked and drank like a pirate and proved to be the best sailor and most reliable man of the lot.

The morning of the 26th found us within a few miles of Camiguin, a high

rocky island north of Cabo Engaño. I am sure I saw two species of Tubinares on this occasion; one was certainly a shearwater and the other, a larger bird, was probably an albatross, but neither came near enough for a shot.

We were in high hopes of reaching Camiguin before noon and those of my readers who have worked islands from a sail boat will realize how easily and repeatedly these hopes may be destroyed. We beat about nearly the whole day but Camiguin came no nearer, in fact I believe we lost on each tack. At 4 p. m. the weather began to get squally and the old man at the helm said that we had better make for the lea of Fuga where there was protection and a good landing. I told him to put about; as he did so a squall struck us and the main boom got mixed with the after deck house causing our boat to list so that she took water like a tub. The old man did well however, and got her running before the breeze while all hands turned to and bailed for their lives. I was throwing some water myself when behind me I heard, "Santo, Santo," and looking around saw our "pilot" on his knees, shaking so he could scarcely pray. I asked what he was doing there and he said: "No matter, you go on bailing; I am too sick." By great good luck our stores and outfit were not seriously damaged and before midnight we were in quiet water. The next morning we landed on a protected coral sand beach.

There are very few trees on Fuga and none of them is large; this with the fact that the island is small precludes the possibility of an extensive avian fauna. Two species are particularly interesting; one is *Hypsipetes fugensis*, mentioned above as the only Philippine representative of its genus; the other is *Cinnyris whiteheadi* which was first found in Luzon where it is much rarer than on Fuga.

Two other species are very abundant on Fuga and altho they are not of much interest to the collector they are welcomed by the camp cook. I refer to the wild chicken and the megapode.

The first of these is generally considered to be conspecific with the Indian jungle fowl, the wild stock of our barnyard friend. This is *Gallus gallus* of most authors, or *Gallus bankiva* of those who object to the use of tautonyms. This bird is known from nearly all the Philippine Islands where collections have been made and it is particularly abundant on some of the smaller islands. On Fuga we found it commoner than on any other island I have visited. I do not believe that this species in its wild state is polygamous to so great a degree as are the domesticated varieties. It is unusual to see more than one hen with a cock; on Fuga I saw many pairs and but once a flock consisting of three hens and one cock. Another time I mistook a yellow-legged rooster for a wild bird and brought him down; my boys got him into the pot at once and considered it a good joke on the owner of the bird rather than on me. Before seeing this bird in his native land I had an idea that the famed jungle fowl afforded good sport, but as the birds seldom come out of the woods or thickets and usually run when in the open there is no sport in killing them. The female makes her nest on the ground beneath a small shrub. The eggs of the wild *Gallus* are much smaller than is usual with the domestic breeds and are dark cream in color. I have seen small chicks in February and in May.

The "tabon" or mound builder (*Megapodius cumingi*) is a relative of the jungle fowl but of considerably different habits and appearance altho of similar size. The skin of the head and upper neck is more or less bare and of a dark reddish or brownish color; the remainder of the body is well feathered and its general color is warm brown; the wings and tail are short; the legs are large and powerful and

the claws are particularly thick and strong. The sexes are similar in coloration. The nest consists of a great pile of sand, earth and leaves in which the eggs are buried at from twenty to thirty inches from the surface. I doubt if decaying vegetation has anything to do in producing the required temperature for I never found any such material in the numerous mounds examined. After depositing an egg and covering it with earth the old bird thinks no more of the matter and it seems to be asking too much of her to require that she calculate the hatching date of her chicks and be on hand to help them escape from the ground!

Probably several birds combine their energies on a single mound tho I know of no direct evidence bearing on the matter. The eggs are very large for the size of the bird, having fully twice the capacity of a hen's egg. When fresh they are pink but turn to a dirty brown as incubation advances. These birds afford even less sport than *Gallus* as they are always found on the ground and seldom fly unless hard pressed. The flesh is a trifle strong but is not to be despised in camp.

Both *Gallus* and *Megapodius* are found on Calayan but are comparatively scarce there. It is not unusual to find these two species rare on a large island and abundant on a smaller island nearby. Possibly monkeys, found in the forest of all the larger islands and usually absent from small islands, control the increase of these ground nesting birds by destroying their eggs.

September 3.—The wind and rain having moderated and the crew having improvised a set of oars and cleaned the boat we set sail for the island of Calayan which we reached, after various delays, on September 7. Here I dismissed the boat, intending to collect thoroly on this island.

Calayan lies about 25 miles north of Fuga and is a little larger than that island being approximately fifteen miles long by seven miles in greatest width. The beach for the greater part is coral, and narrow flats of the same material are exposed at low tide; beyond the flats the water deepens rapidly. Back of the narrow beach is a fringe of small trees (*Barringtonia*) inhabited principally by megapodes, bronze-winged doves (*Chalcophaps indica*) and a small migratory hawk (*Accipiter gularis*). Back of the fringe of beach trees are small meadows or glades more or less surrounded by thickets of guava bushes. This level area is narrow, the remainder of the island having an uneven and elevated surface. In the central part of the island there is a ridge of moderately high hills covered with heavy forest; many of the trees are valuable for timber. On the lower hills are large patches of "cogon," a tall coarse grass which is very serviceable for thatching houses. Extensive beds of coral limestone were noticed even on the tops of the higher hills, but the eastern part of the island is entirely basaltic in structure and many of the columns are well preserved.

The small town in which we were to spend some four months is inhabited by natives of northern Luzon (mostly Ilocanos) and by a few families from the Batanes, small islands north of Calayan. The people of the Batanes have a dialect considerably different from any of the people inhabiting Luzon and my Tagalo assistant, Andres Celestino, who is familiar with several of the dialects spoken in the Philippine Islands, was unable to understand the Batan islanders; he said: "They talk just like birds."

Thru the influence of the "presidente" of Calayan a family was induced to move, and to rent us their house at the modest sum of two dollars per month. Ours was one of the best houses in town.

The following I quote from my note-book: "With the exception of two or

three of stone, the houses are of cogon and well made. They are usually very small and low and are strongly built to resist the wind. There are never any windows on the north side of the house, and all are double, having the usual outer swinging window and inner sliding shutter of wood. But few of the houses have any facilities for cooking; when present the kitchen is a minute house connected with the main house by a platform. Cooking is usually done on the ground under the house or even inside the house, which latter must be very disagreeable. In rainy weather they do no cooking as the wood is all wet and they never keep any dry wood on hand."

If I may be allowed a digression I wish to mention an interesting spider that occurs on Calayan. This species is found running about on the twigs and leaves of small bushes that are infested by a small yellowish ant. The body of the spider is yellowish brown, there is a constriction in the cephalothorax, and the front pair of legs are waved about aloft in the same manner that an ant uses his antennæ. So closely does this spider mimic the ant that I have seen persons unable to distinguish the difference even in the laboratory. Of what use these mimetic characters are I was unable to determine, but they were so evident that one could not avoid seeing them.

In many of the islands there is a black beetle which certainly bears a close resemblance to a large black wood ant and like it the beetle is usually seen on tree trunks. This also, I am inclined to think, is a case of mimicry.

Some four months were spent on Calayan and a collection of over 1000 skins prepared; a number of the species were then taken for the first time in the Philippine Islands. Of these the most interesting were the migrants: the siskin (*Chrysomitris spinus*) represented by four specimens all killed from a single bush in a few minutes; the brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) of which three were killed within sight of our house; the Japanese starling (*Spodiopsar sericeus*) of which I killed a single individual during a drizzling rain; the wheatear (*Saxicola ænanthe*) represented by one specimen taken within one hundred yards of our door. Other interesting species, the zone-billed duck (*Polionetta zonorhyncha*), the pale thrush (*Turdus pallidus*), and the rough-legged swallow (*Chelidon dasypus*) were killed almost within the town.

Early in December our provisions were used up and during the remainder of our stay we depended largely upon the natives for our supplies. Our bill of fare was reduced to rice, bananas, occasional fish and eggs and such birds as we could secure. Even my two Filipino companions could not refrain from remarking that the rice part of our menu was too much in evidence.

In January a government steamer was sent to convey us to Manila and I experienced a peaceful sense of relief when I discovered its smoke on the sky line where I had looked in vain on many preceding days.

Manila, P. I.