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[p. 12f]

‘Mr. Wallace’s Collection of Birds.’

The magnificent collection of birds formed by Mr. A.R. Wallace during his eight years’ sojourn in the Malay Archipelago has just been secured by the trustees of the British Museum for the national collection; and on so important an acquisition the public generally, and ornithologists in particular, may well be congratulated. We do not hesitate to say that a more valuable collection of birds, the result of private enterprise, has never been previously exhibited. It consists of about 2,400 beautifully prepared skins, belonging to 750 different species, and of these some 250 are familiarly known to naturalists as “types”—that is, as the original specimens from which the species which they represent were first described as new. The whole are separately labelled with the name of each species; the sex, and locality whence obtained—an invaluable feature in the eyes of a student. The collection, although a general one, is particularly rich in hawks, parrots, pigeons, and birds of paradise, many of which are of remarkable beauty, and are not to be found in any other collection. The value of the birds of prey may be estimated when it is stated that, out of the 87 species known to inhabit the Malay Archipelago, 72 were obtained by Mr. Wallace; while, of the 28 species of hawks, which have now become the property of the nation, 26 were previously unrepresented in the national museum. From this it will be gathered that birds of prey (excepting the vultures, which are entirely absent) are tolerably plentiful in the Malay Archipelago, the total number of species being greater than those of India, as restricted by Dr. Jerdon. “This large number,” says Mr. Wallace (*Ibis*, 1868, p. 2), “seems to be chiefly due to the breaking up of the district into a vast number of islands, most of which were separated at a more remote epoch than that of the origin of many existing species, while some date from a high geological antiquity. Closely-allied representative species, therefore, abound and swell the total amount, although in any one island or locality the number to be obtained is very small. The average number of Falconidæ found in an island is 10, of Strigidæ three. Java contains the largest number, possessing 17 hawks and eight owls; Celebes comes next, with the same number of hawks, but only five owls; whereas in many districts of India, equal in extent to one of these islands, double the number of species would probably be obtained. In Ceylon Mr. Layard obtained 23 hawks and seven owls.” In Mr. Holdsworth’s more recently published catalogue of the birds of Ceylon (P.Z.S. 1872, p. 404) 27 hawks are included and eight owls. The two most remarkable groups of fruit-eating birds—the parrots and the pigeons—attain their *maximum* development, as regards beauty, variety, and number of species, in the same limited district, of which New Guinea forms the centre, and which Mr. Wallace has called the Austro-Malayan sub-region. It extends from the island of Celebes on the west to the Solomon Islands on the east, and includes the Moluccan and Timor groups. Its actual land area is less than one-sixth that of Europe; yet, according to Mr. Wallace, it contains more than one-fourth of all the species of pigeons that are known to exist. The islands west of Celebes, as far as Malacca and the Nicobar Islands, and including the Philippines, are also rather rich in this family of birds. They form the Indo-Malayan sub-region, and by combining the two we have in the Malay Archipelago considerably more than one-third of all the pigeons that inhabit the earth. As to the causes which have led to this peculiar distribution, the reader should be referred to the elaborate monograph of “The Pigeons of the Malay

Archipelago” which was published by Mr. Wallace in the *Ibis* for 1865, and which has been consulted in penning these remarks.—*Field*.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.