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[PART 2.

Order Picariae, Sub-order Halcyones, Family
Alcedinidae, Genus Dacelo, Species Dacelo gigas.

THE LAUGHING JACKASS.

... UPPER SURFACE.

Forehead.—Light brown, each feather barred with dark brown.

Crown.—Dark brown, barred and tipped with black in the centre, dull white at the sides, feathers elongated to form an erectile crest.

Occiput.—Dull white, stippled with black.

Hind Neck.—A line of dull white feathers, largely tipped with dull black.

Lores.—Dull white, line of feathers under the eye and over its upper two-thirds dull black.

Ear Coverts.—Dull black.

Lower Neck and Upper Back.—Dull white, forming a broad collar.

Back.—Between the shoulders dull black; lower back greyish white, finely barred with black.

Upper Tail Coverts.—Bright brown barred with black, with a faint wash of metallic blue in old birds.

UNDER SURFACE.

Chin and Neck.—White.

Breast and Abdomen.—White, faintly barred with black.

Flanks.—White, finely barred with black.

Under Tail Coverts.—White, the bases faintly barred with black.

Wing.—Bases of first seven primaries white, the white more extensive on the inner webs, extremities black, the outer webs washed with metallic blue. Secondaries, dull brown, slightly tipped with white, the inner webs broadly edged with white, outer webs washed with metallic blue.

Lesser Coverts.—Dull brown.

Median and Greater Coverts.—Dark brown, largely tipped with light metallic blue.

Tail.—Two central feathers reddish brown, strongly barred with black, and slightly tipped with white. The other feathers the same, except that the white tips become progressively larger to the outermost.

Bill.—Upper mandible black; lower yellowish white.

Legs and Feet.—Brown.

Iris.—Brown.

The female resembles the male.

MEASUREMENTS.—

Total Length.—150 m.m.

Wing.—202 m.m.

Tail.—166 m.m.

Culmen.—74 m.m.

Tarsus.—21 m.m.

Young birds resemble the parents, except that in them the cross barring of the breast feathers is more marked. The white at the sides of the head and back of neck is brownish.

Distribution.—South Australia, as far north as Port Augusta, Victoria, New South Wales, and Southern Queensland. They are not found in Tasmania, Kangaroo Island, or Western Australia.

Although a very common bird in the big timber country, it is seldom found on scrub or pine lands, and never far away from the big gumtrees. They seem to prefer hilly country. They are very local birds, one pair living all their lives on quite a small area. This is well illustrated at the Reedbeds, near Adelaide, where these birds were once exterminated, and years afterwards Messrs. William White and J. W. Mellor reintroduced a few pairs, where they have taken up their abode in the old red gumtrees along the river and are slowly increasing in numbers. Capt. White estimates that there are now about twenty birds.

They live in small companies or probably in families, separating during the day to feed, and congregating just after sunset to roost. As they meet they render their part song, which has been compared to a loud, hoarse, coarse laugh, but which to the settler is a merry good-night; one bird beginning, followed by another, and then they all join in the chorus. This is continued till it is quite dark, or even later. The jackass is also the first bird to awake in the morning, its merry note pealing out before one recognizes that the dawn is breaking. It is usually about a quarter of an hour before the next bird awakes.

Food.—Beetles, spiders, grubs, mice, lizards, small birds, especially the young taken from the nest and the fresh water crayfish or yabbies (*Astacopsis bicarinatus*), for which it dives, catching them in water up to two feet in depth. Capt. White mentions that he has seen a jackass, after an hour's hard work, beat a full-grown rat to pulp and swallow it. It has been noted that he does not eat his food except on the ground or on a large flat horizontal branch of a tree. This bird will sit motionless on the low branch of a tree for hours watching intently. Suddenly he will fly to the ground, give two or three vigorous pecks at the ground, shaking his head after each, to detach the earth from his bill, then throwing his body back on his tail he will extract a large earthworm, with which he will return to his branch, pound it to pulp, and swallow it.

They swallow their pounded food whole, ejecting the indigestible portions (bones, hair, &c.) in quids.

If unmolested they become very tame, and if food be placed out for them they readily learn to come for it. They can easily be taught to come regularly, almost at the same time each day.

Flight.—Very straight, not undulating, long, even, slow-wing movement. On alighting they throw the head back a little and elevate the tail, and usually utter a few gurgles. The tail is kept slowly moving up and down like a pump handle for a few minutes after settling. It is not jerked like that of a rail, but moves with slow, regular beats.

Nesting Place.—A hollow spout in a gumtree, usually high up. Sometimes they hollow out a hole for themselves in a rotten tree. They make no nest, but lay on the wood dust in the bottom of the hollow. The eggs are two or three in

number, almost round, and white in colour, becoming creamy white as incubation proceeds. They are laid in September, October, and November. Before the eggs are hatched these birds are very shy, quietly leaving the nest on the approach of danger. When their young are hatched they become fierce and plucky, attacking any intruder, whether it be bird, beast, or man.

When the young are taken from the nest they are easily reared and tamed. A pair owned by Dr. Morgan for two years were never seen to drink, although they liked to bathe in the summer. When angry, or on defence against the cat, they elevate the feathers on the scalp, like a crest, and open the beak widely. This tame pair used to catch sparrows by pretending to sleep near the watering place and pouncing on their prey when they came to drink.

They are totally protected under the Birds Protection Act of 1900, as they kill large numbers of young snakes, caterpillars, and grubs. The only harm they have ever been known to do is taking young birds.
