

REASSIGNMENT OF THE TYPE-LOCALITY OF *PLATYCERCUS VENUSTUS* (KUHLE, 1820), THE NORTHERN ROSELLA

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When Kuhl (1820) described the Northern Rosella *Platycercus venustus* he gave the type-locality as "Nova Hollandia". This was later restricted to Arnhem Bay by Mathews (1917: 345-351) who wrote, "With accession to Brown's original manuscript I find the original specimen was procured at Arnhem Bay". This type-locality was later repeated by Peters (1937). Although any debate concerning the scientific name of *P. venustus* has long since been resolved (see for example Gould 1865) there has been no critical examination of this type-locality.

In 1803 when Robert Brown collected the holotype of *P. venustus* he was with Matthew Flinders on the *Investigator*. Brown kept his own journal during the voyage and also noted the scientific name, locality and date of the collection of any specimen on a separate slip (Whittell 1954). According to Whittell, *P. venustus*, "was described by Brown on a slip (No. 804) as got at "Arnhem Bay" on 6 February 1803". This slip, written in Brown's handwriting, is still in the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH) with the same information on it (copy provided by A. Datta, *in litt.*).

This information has been put on a tag on the original specimen; however, any original collector's label is missing from the type (*P. Colston, in litt.*). Warren (1966) noted that the holotype came from "Arnhem Bay, Northern Territory, Australia, (6 Feb. 1803)". She also mentioned that this followed Mathews (1917), but, as noted above, Mathews had restricted the locality to Arnhem Bay not Arnhem Bay. Mathews may have had doubts as to the accuracy of his type-locality as he later (Mathews 1931: 199; 1946:61) reassigned the locality to "Arnhem Land, Northern Territory". This procedure was followed by Condon (1975).

Examination of Flinders' account of the voyage (Flinders 1814) highlights that Arnhem Bay and Arnhem Bays are different localities. According to Flinders, the *Investigator* was

moored at Caledon Bay from 2 to 10 February 1803 at the time when the holotype was supposedly collected, while Arnhem Bay was not reached until 28 February, some three weeks later. These anomalies can be resolved through perusal of both the journal of Peter Good, who was the gardener on Flinders' voyage (Edwards 1981) and Brown's original diary. Good's notes must have been made during the voyage, as he died upon his return to Sydney. On 11 February 1803 after passing "Cape Arnhem" (Cape Arnhem of Flinders 1814) Good wrote, "for except Arnhem Bay we never landed on the main[land] during our stay in the Gulf but 4 days in different places". This was prior to reaching what is now known as Arnhem Bay. The only place that fits the description of Good's Arnhem Bay is Caledon Bay where they were anchored over eight days.

Brown's diary is now held by the BMNH from where I was able to obtain a copy of his notes for the critical period. Brown did not cite Caledon Bay by any name in his notes. However he did mention visiting "North Arnhem Bay" on 13 February. Flinders called the bay visited on this date Melville Bay while Good did not give it a name. Burbidge (1953) noted that the type-locality of *Triodia procera* R. Br. is given as "Arnhem S. Bay" by George Bentham in his *Flora Australiensis* Vol. 7 (1878), suggesting that Brown may have called Caledon Bay by the name South Arnhem Bay, which was later changed to Arnhem South Bay by Bentham. Thus it would appear that during the voyage Caledon Bay was referred to as Arnhem Bay by both Brown and Good.

Flinders gave Caledon Bay its name after the voyage was completed when writing up his account, "I have distinguished it by the title of CALEDON BAY, as a mark of respect to the worthy nobleman, lately governor of the Cape of Good Hope". The Earl of Caledon was the Governor until 1811 when he was succeeded by

Governor Cradock (Troup 1972: 84-86) notorious for having "promulgated the Hottentot Code of 1809, in effect the first pass laws" in South Africa (Troup 1972).

Brown did go ashore on 6 February 1803. Flinders' entry for 5-6 February 1803 is as follows:

"In the evening [of the 5th], I went over with two of the gentlemen to the south side of the bay; for the purpose of taking a station upon a hill there named *Mount Caledon*, whose height exceeded that of any other near the water side.

"We landed at dusk, at the foot of the mount; and ascended the top next morning before the heat of the sun became excessive, passing in the way several streamlets which were coursing rapidly down to the sea. The view was fully equal to what had been anticipated, and extended to a projection half way to Point Arrowsmith on one side and all over the islands in the entrance to Mount Alexander on the other."

And Good noted:

"and in afternoon [of the 5th] Captain with Mr Brown & Westall Set out with Boat set out for some hills of moderate elevation on South West Side of the Bay with intension of staying all night . . . In the afternoon [of the 6th] the Captain &c returned having met with some fine rivulets of fresh water running from the hills to the Beach".

Finally, Brown noted:

"In the afternoon of the 5th I accompanied Capn Flinders in the whale boat to the south side of the bay, to the foot of the low hills of which there are a chain in that part we got on shore about 7 P.M. I pitched our tent close to the beach between two small rivers of fresh water early in the morning we set off for the hill in the way & on the hill itself I observed few & but very few new plants. . . . We returned to the beach about half past 10 A.M. & after taking a little refreshment in the boat put off it was now squally with heavy rain & a wind nearly contrary after pulling about an hour to windward we got up our sails & reached the ship, about half past 2 P.M."

Although no account mentioned the collection of any birds it is unlikely that either Flinders or Good would have anyway. Flinders' account was mainly concerned with navigation reference points while Good's was largely botanic in nature with very few references to birds. However Flinders does mention the observation of some birds a little over a week later. In his entry for 16-February (when at Melville Bay, i.e. "North Arnheim Bay" of Brown) he noted,

"Kangaroos appeared to be rather numerous in the woods, brown doves and large white pigeons were tolerably plentiful, and a bird nearly black, of the size and appearance of a hen, was shot; there were also cockatoos, both black and white, and a beautiful species of paroquet not known at Port Jackson. The aquatic birds were blue and white cranes, sea-pies and sand-larks."

Whittell (1954) assumed that Flinders' "paroquet" was the type-specimen of *P. venustus* yet he also said that the slip says that the type was collected on 6 February. Brown's diary for the same date does not mention any birds, however on 14 February also when at Melville Bay he listed a "*Psittacus splendidus*" as well as a "Phasianus" and "White pigeons". *Psittacus splendidus* would at this time have been a synonym of the Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans*. It antedates *Platycercus splendidus* Gould, 1845 (= *Platycercus eximius ceciliae* Mathews, 1911) and thus refers to *Psittacus splendidus* Shaw, 1792 (see Condon 1975). Unfortunately Good did not mention any birds for either day.

Nevertheless the original data slip states that the specimen was collected on 6 February not 16 February. No other specimens were recorded by Brown for February 1803 in an index to his data slips at the BMNH prepared by F. C. Sawyer (A. Datta, *in litt.*). However there is a possible problem of missing specimens. The index to Brown's specimens runs to 1030 yet there are only 224 slips. The type-specimen was held by the Linnean Society until 1863 when it was given to the BMNH with the rest of the Society's specimens (Sharpe 1906)¹. Not all of Brown's specimens could have come to the BMNH from this source as only 87 specimens were given by the Linnean Society and many of those came from George Caley. Sharpe (1906) makes no mention of donations of skins to the BMNH by either Brown, Flinders or Bauer, the natural history artist on the expedition. Furthermore, Mathews (1917) suggested that the type is from a secondary series and Whittell (1954) also noted that some specimens are missing.

Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the bird that was described by Kuhl was not collected on 6 February 1803. The type-locality must therefore be Caledon Bay rather than Arnheim Bay. This change in locality, although quite minor, may be of more relevance to any plant material Brown collected, as I have already noted.

¹Sharpe (1906) notes that the types of *Psittacus brownii* and *Psittacus venustus* were given by the Linnean Society to the BMNH. *P. brownii* is a synonym of *Platycercus caledonicus* Kuhl, 182 of Tasmania as noted by Mathews (1917).

Thus the citation of *Platycercus venustus* should now be: *Platycercus venustus* (Kuhl)

Psittacus venustus Kuhl, 1820, *Nova Acta Phys. Acad. Caesar. Leop.-Carol.* 10:52; "Nova Hollandia" (restricted to "Arnhem Bay" by Mathews, 1917, *The Birds of Australia*, Vol. 6: 350, corrected to "Arnhem Land, Northern Territory" by Mathews, 1931, *A List of the Birds of Australasia*: 199, re-restricted to the south-west shore of Caledon Bay, eastern Arnhem Land, Australia by McAllen, 1988, *S. Aust. Orn.* 30: 193-195).

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