

*Graucalus melanops.*

*G. melanops*, Vigers and Horsford; Buller, "Birds of New Zealand," 1st ed. p. 148, 2nd ed. vol. i. p. 66; Cat. Birds in British Museum, vol. iv., p. 30. *Colluricincla concinna*, Hutton, Cat. Birds of New Zealand, p. 15 (1871).

Light ash-grey; abdomen and lower tail-coverts white; a broad band of black from the bill through the eye. The two middle tail-feathers dark-grey, lateral ones brownish-black, tipped with white. Quills brownish-black, the outer webs edged with white. Bill and legs black. Length of the wing, 8 in.; of the tarsus, 1.1 in. In the adult bird the forehead, sides of the face and neck, the throat and fore-neck, are black, with a greenish gloss.

The immature bird from Australia is described as having wavy bars of dusky black on the throat, but there are none on any of the three New Zealand examples which I have seen.

## ART. XXXIII.—A Rare Saurian.

By Archdeacon WALSH.

[Read before the Auckland Institute, 12th September, 1904.]

FROM time to time over a number of years reports have been brought in by surveyors, bushmen, and others of the existence of a large lizard on the Waoku Plateau. This is an extensive tableland, about 2,000 ft. above sea-level, lying between the Hokianga and Kaipara districts. It is covered with forest, and here and there are several shallow lagoons. It is about these lagoons that the lizard is supposed to make its home.

So far as I am aware, no specimens have been captured; or, if they have, they have not been preserved. A dead specimen was, however, washed down the Waima Creek, a stream leading from the plateau, about thirty-five years ago, on the occasion of the *hahunga* or official reinterment of the bones of Arama Karaka, when it was seen by several European visitors, and was recognised by the Maoris, who were much frightened at its appearance. Being in a partly decomposed condition, however, no attempt, I believe, was made at preservation. From the appearance of this specimen, and from such other slight details as have been gathered from the reports above mentioned, it has been concluded, I understand, that the animal is a species of salamander hitherto undescribed.

As I have occasional opportunities of visiting the neighbourhood of the Waoku Plateau, as well as the Waima Valley, where the decomposed specimen was seen, I have made it my business to seek for any information that was to be had on the subject.

Beyond the repetition of certain vague second-hand rumours, however, I had until lately never met with any success. The lizard, like the *taniwha*, was apparently a creature of whom all had heard but none had seen, and if it had not been for the well-authenticated specimen of Waima I should have been tempted to classify it amongst the fabled monsters of imagination.

During a recent visit to Hokianga, however, in the course of a conversation with Mr. John Webster, of Opononi, the ultimate referee in all Hokianga matters, this gentleman informed me that shortly after his coming to the district, some fifty years ago, he had seen an animal which may have been one of the sought-for species. He was exploring in a rocky part of the Wairiri Creek—a tributary of the Hokianga River—when he saw what he described as a lizard about 18 in. long of a yellowish colour. While looking about for a stick or stone wherewith to despatch it the reptile slipped down into the water, and quickly disappeared amongst the boulders in the bottom of the stream. Whether it was one of the same species there is not sufficient evidence for exact proof, but we have at least the fact established of a lizard of about the required dimensions, of amphibious habits, and found in a locality connected with the Waoku Plateau by a continuous forest. In the absence of any proof to the contrary, therefore, I think it may be fairly assumed that the species are identical, and that at that period at least the animal was pretty widely distributed.

My object in presenting these very sketchy notes is the hope that the information, scanty as it is, may lead to further research. Although a road has been made over the plateau, the place is still very much in its primitive condition. Some attempt at occupation was made some ten or fifteen years ago, but though a good deal of bush was cut down no very effective settlement took place. The swampy nature of the soil, which is nothing but a thick layer of vegetable humus, and the too abundant rains, made a successful "burn" impracticable, and after some more or less futile efforts to clear the land the attempt at settlement was generally abandoned. The clearings are fast reverting to bush, and the primæval forest which still occupies the greatest part of the surface remains practically intact. If, as seems to be the case, the animal is amphibious and probably a tree-climber, these qualities should help to secure it from the ravages of the wild pig, which would otherwise have probably exterminated it before this, as they have done in the case of the tuatara wherever they have had access.

Taking all things into consideration, therefore, I think there is little doubt that a careful and intelligent search would result in the addition of an interesting species to the list of the New Zealand fauna.