

CORRESPONDENCE

THE TYPE LOCALITY OF *Psittacus aterrimus*

To the Editor of 'The Auk':—

In Peters's 'Check-list' (vol. 3, p. 171, 1937) this writer considers that the type locality of *Psittacus aterrimus*, as restricted by van Oort in 1911, is Cape York.

This species was described in 1788 and not discovered in Australia till over fifty years later. Edwards's drawing, dated 1761, is the type. This was made by order of the Governor of Ceylon before the east coast of Australia had been discovered. Buffon's reference is from the same plate. Latham is using Parkinson's notes which refer to *Calyptorhynchus* (as reading them will show). This author proved this when, in 1787, he described the Banksian Cockatoo which "differs from the Ceylonese Black Cockatoo and is probably the same with that mentioned by Mr. Parkinson in his voyage."

This will show that *aterrimus* was not obtained in Australia in the eighteenth century. The part of New Holland known in 1788 certainly did not include the habitat of any form of *aterrimus*. The fantastic statement that a bird may have flown on to Captain Cook's boat can be ignored.

The question arises, is an author allowed a prophetic type locality or must the type locality be governed by the facts at the date of description? Surely the latter interpretation is the only one.

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[*Psittacus aterrimus* Gmelin (Syst. Nat., 1, pt. 1, p. 330, 1788) is based on Kakatoës noir of Buffon (Hist. Ois., 6: 97), the Great Black Cockatoo of Edwards's Gleanings, plate 316, and the Black Cockatoo of Latham's Synopsis (1, pt. 1: p. 260, no. 66). Buffon's bird is based on Edwards's plate and granting that Mathews is correct in supposing that Latham's account is based on Parkinson's notes, which relate to another species, brings us back to the fact that Edwards's plate is the sole basis of Gmelin's name.

In the text accompanying the plate, Edwards, after describing the bird, writes: "This figure was taken from a drawing done from the life, of its natural size, by the order of John Gideon Loten, Esq., late Governor of the island of Ceylon, and other Dutch settlements in the East Indies. . . ." The caption to Edwards's plate reads: "The Great Black Cockatoo from the East Indies. After an Original Drawing. George Edwards, Sculp. October. 15 AD 1761."

Psittacus aterrimus is the type of the monotypic genus *Probosciger* Kuhl, and is divided into five subspecies distributed over the western Papuan Islands, New Guinea, the Aru Islands and the Cape York Peninsula of Australia. It is quite certain that the original of the plate from which Edwards took his drawing must have come from somewhere in this range and that his figure is a perfectly recognizable plate by which the species may be identified, but of course it must not be relied upon to represent any particular subspecies. A definite restriction of type locality for the typical form is necessary in such a case and Dr. van Oort realizing this, designated the northern part of Australia. This is not as improbable as Mr. Mathews seems to think since the coasts of the northern parts of Australia were known to the Dutch navigators and traders prior even to 1700 and it is entirely possible that the original of the plate copied by Edwards actually did come from Cape York.—JAMES L. PETERS.]