

## SOME ECCENTRIC ANIMALS.

BY GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.

*Illustrated by the Author.*



TO any close student of mammalian and bird life it would sometimes appear as if Nature had been engaged either in a series of experiments at the time of their creation or evolution, or else had deliberately set to work to form weird and grotesque creatures,

graceful of all the mammals, viz., the antelopes, appears to have the head and horns of a small Cape buffalo, the feet and legs of a deer, whilst the tail and hind quarters might well belong to one of the zebras or to a pony, the stiff mane on the necks of full grown specimens of both sexes assisting in their asinine or equine appearance ; whilst in



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WHITE-TAILED GNU.

*[Gambier Bolton.*

many of them made up of what can only be described as a lot of odds and ends, or leavings of others.

Take, for instance, the gnu or wildebeest (*connochaetes gnu*) of South Africa, known as the white-tailed gnu, which, although rightly classed amongst some of the most

very old gnus we find the horns at their base joined tightly together, so that they form a solid mass of horn, exactly as is seen in the case of an old Cape buffalo. Add to this, as pointed out by Lydekker and others, that the bony cores of the horns are honey-combed with cavities as in the ox tribe, to



which they do not belong, and are totally different from those of their relatives the antelopes, and that their upper molar teeth differ entirely from those of the ox tribe, and we have a zoological eccentricity of the first order, and one that puzzled scientists for many years after their discovery.

In their habits, too, gnus are quite as eccentric and differ quite as widely from the antelopes amongst which they are classed, for whilst these, on the approach of their natural enemy, man, will leap off in a series of graceful bounds, doing their utmost to escape from his dreaded presence, the gnus, as so well described by that great sportsman Gordon Cumming half a century ago, "unless driven by a large field of hunters, do not leave their ground although disturbed.

numbered amongst the "have been" with the dodo, quagga, and many others.

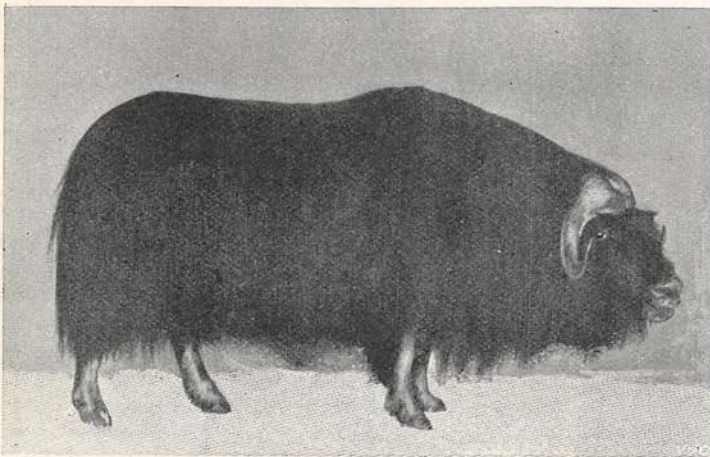
It has been said that the gnu forms a link between the oxen and the antelopes, just as the quaint-looking musk-ox of arctic America forms a link between the sheep and the oxen, its scientific name, *ovi-bos* (sheep-ox), and its many striking peculiarities helping to prove the truth of the statement. No living specimen has ever been known to reach our shores alive, so we must depend on the fine mounted specimen in the galleries of our Natural History Museum at South Kensington to give us an idea of what the musk-ox looks like when alive, its general appearance being decidedly sheep-like, more especially about the face and muzzle, whilst the molar teeth are quite unlike those of

the ox, although the general shape of the horns and body are distinctly ox-like, and the strong smell and taste of musk in its coat and flesh is identical with that of the rare European bison (*bos bonasus*) and others of the ox tribe.

If it were possible to clip one of these animals we should then see a very large ram-like creature, with the pointed ears of a sheep and a decidedly short tail, whilst between the hoofs, as in many mammals which inhabit the arctic regions,

grow bunches of hair, which possibly help the ox to get a good foothold when walking on slippery surfaces, the massive polar bear also having these tufts, and being able to turn on ice or frozen snow with wonderful rapidity.

The habits of musk-oxen, however, are decidedly like those of wild cattle in different parts of the world, and not at all like those of the timid wild sheep, for when brought to bay by the hunter they will select some elevated ground and form in line with their heads towards the enemy; or, as Mr. Biederbeck says, "if attacked from more than one point, they form a circle, their glaring, bloodshot eyes resolutely watching the attack, and I think it would go hard with the man or beast who, under such circumstances, might come within reach of their broad horns or hard hoofs."



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[Gambier Eolton.

MUSK-OX (STUFFED).

Wheeling about in endless circles and performing the most extraordinary varieties of intricate evolutions, the shaggy herds of these eccentric and fierce-looking animals caper and gambol round the hunter on every side. While he is riding hard to obtain a shot at a herd in front of him, other herds are charging down wind on his right and left, and, having described a number of circular movements, they take up positions on the very ground across which he rode only a few minutes before."

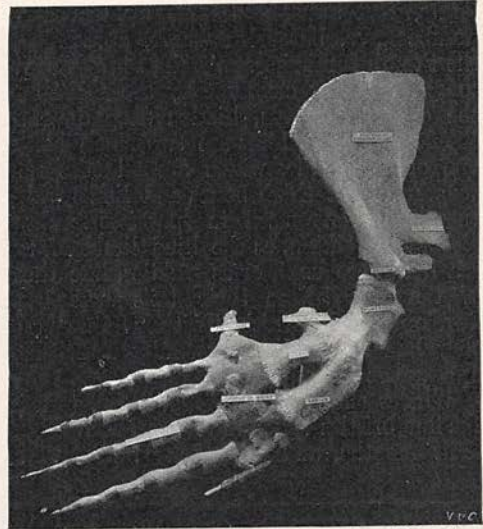
Little wonder is it, then, that the gnus are being rapidly swept off the face of the earth, and that good living specimens are fetching such large prices in Europe to-day, for their very tameness and curiosity have been their ruin, and ere many years are past, these quaint zoological conundrums will be



Turning to the pig tribe, we find some of Nature's most comical pieces of handiwork, for few creatures can be more weird-looking than the wart-hogs (*phacochoerus*) of Africa, of which there are two species, *Ælians'* and *Pallas'*, the former being by far the more peculiar. They have huge heads, the eyes are set very high up, and their tusks are exactly the opposite to those of other pigs, the upper ones being much longer than those in the lower jaw.

But the most prominent feature about these grotesque beasts, and the one from which they derive their name, is the great excrescence or wart just below each eye, a much smaller one being placed between each tusk and the wart above it, making altogether four of these hideous excrescences per pig, as they are possessed by both sexes. The body is almost hairless, excepting along the neck and spine, from which hangs long, coarse hair, producing in the wart-hog an animal of a most repulsive appearance. Mr. E. H. Drummond mentions a strange

fact in connection with the habits of these creatures, which would almost entitle them to rank as the clowns of the animal world. They often take possession of empty burrows made by the aardvark (ant-bear), jackal, and other animals; and instead of rushing straight out from the hole, when disturbed, as any other brute of ordinary habits would do, directly they have reached daylight, they turn a sharp back somersault on to the top of the hole; and as that is exactly the spot where a person waiting for the hog would naturally stand with either rifle or spear, many acci-



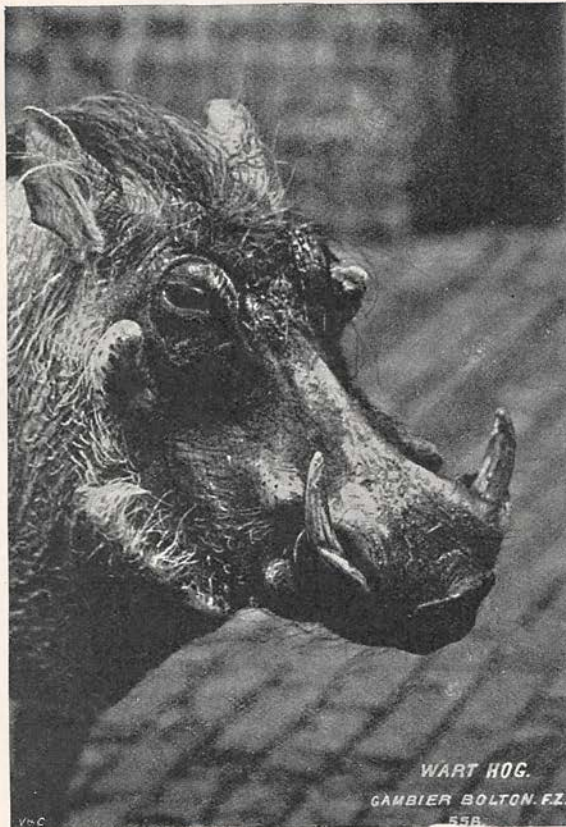
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[Gambier Bolton.]

A WHALE'S ARM AND HAND.

dents occur, as Mr. "Warts" is quite capable of ripping up a man's leg with his powerful tusks.

The whales, too (*cetaceans*), may well come under our category, as, although thought of by many persons, even in these enlightened days, as fishes, on account of their external appearance and habits, they are just as true mammals as either gnu, musk-ox, or wart-hog, for they not only possess warm blood, as do man and all mammals, but they breathe air by means of lungs, bring forth their young ones alive, nourishing them with milk until they are old enough to feed themselves, and are the proud possessors of upper arms, shoulder



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WART HOG.

GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.

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WART-HOG.



joints, fore arms, and fingers which often number five, but from which, occasionally, the thumb is missing. Again, as if to prove to sceptics how closely they are related to the other mammals, hidden deep down in the flesh of their loins are two small bones, one on each side, which are all that now remains of the thigh bones and limbs which they may have used in prehistoric days, either for walking, as the hind limbs of the sea lion were used, or as paddles, like those of the seal, before their tails had been developed and furnished with "flukes" and they had assumed so generally a fish-like appearance of body.

Whales show traces of hairiness, too, in the fine bristles which are often found round their mouths, and the thick "blubber," as

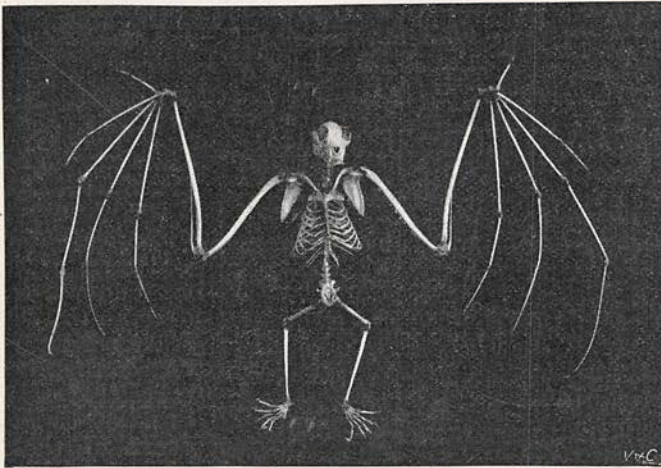
some of the apes, his near relatives, and that with us it has merely withered away until it is now quite useless, and that it is nothing more than a relic, and often a dangerous relic, showing our descent from the other mammals, with many of whom to-day it is a regular organ and an extremely useful one.

After the fish-like mammals, who spend their whole lives in the water—and these include not only the whales, but also the dolphins, porpoises, and narwhals or swordfish—we shall be quite prepared for the flying mammals, which, unlike the so-called flying squirrels and phalangers, who indulge in what is termed a "spurious" flight, actually possess the power of *true* flight, aided by genuine wings, and not only spend the whole of their lives, when not sleeping, on the wing, but feed and drink, and even carry their young ones, clinging closely to their bodies, whilst in the air.

The order *chiroptera* consists of the bats only, which are found in nearly every part of the world, including even the arctic regions, although the tropical and temperate regions appear to suit them best. Nearly five hundred distinct species are known to exist, the little "flutter-mouse" of our country districts being one of the members of this vast family, divided by scientists into fruit-bats, insect-eating bats, and the typical bats, these again being subdivided into many smaller groups.

They vary in size from the Malay fox-bat, which measures nearly five feet from tip to tip of wing, down to the little whiskered bat which measures only six inches across the wings and barely two inches from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail.

The word *chiroptera* exactly describes the chief features in these mammals, as they are "hand-winged," and our photograph of a fruit-bat's skeleton shows this very plainly. We generally find that the mammals possess hind limbs quite as large, and in many cases even larger than the front ones, but in the bats this is reversed, and the fingers are enormously lengthened, whilst even the thumbs are extended, terminating in a hooked claw, with which they climb, or hang when sleeping. The third finger will be seen to be much the longest, and all four



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FRUIT-BAT'S SKELETON.

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the layer of fat is called, which lies just beneath the skin, serves the purpose of the hairy coats of other mammals by keeping in the heat of the body.

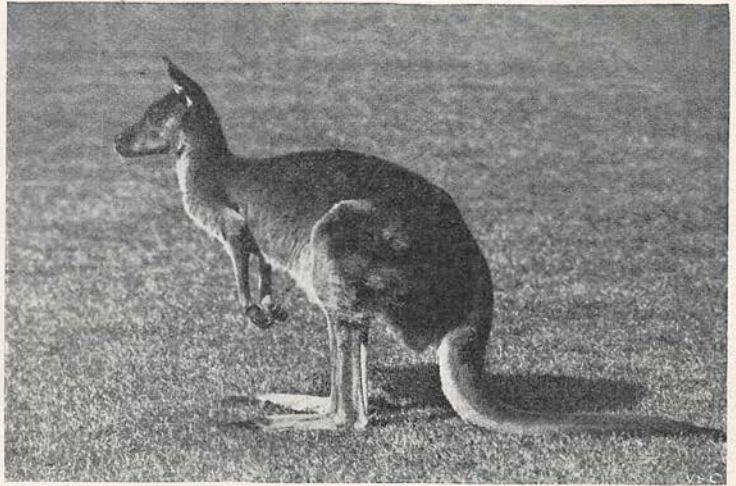
And we cannot afford to look down upon or affect to despise the so-called "lower" orders of creation, for even man, the ruler of all living things, can be but very little removed from them, when, as Dr. Lindsay Johnson has recently pointed out, many a surgeon can testify that he has been called upon to sew up holes in the neck of a human being which are nothing more or less than relics of fishes' gill-clefts, whilst those who have watched the death of a child from having swallowed a cherry-stone or other small substance, which has become fixed in a little pouch in the intestines, will remember that this little pouch is peculiar to man and



consist of thin but strong bony rods on which the wing-membrane is carried. This membrane is continued the full length of the body and on to the short hind legs, making a wing of enormous size and power, which enables them to fly with extraordinary swiftness. The toes are not webbed in any way, but the wing-membrane extends from the hind legs to the tail, and thus we have a mammal so perfected for genuine and rapid flight that it is surrounded with membrane entirely, with the exception of its head. Our British bats hibernate during the winter, but many others, especially those which depend on insects for their food, are compelled to migrate to warmer regions each

year or starve, and they are known to travel many thousands of miles in order to escape the rigours of an American or Canadian winter.

The large fox-bats, which the writer has



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GREAT KANGAROO.



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BENNETT'S WALLABY AND YOUNG.



seen hanging on the trees in countless numbers in Java, are eaten by the Malays and are looked upon as a great delicacy.

Amongst the pouch-bearing mammals (*marsupialia*) and egg-laying mammals (*monotremata*) we find some of the strangest of zoological zig-zags, for a writer feels almost lost amidst such a series of contradictions as face us when we attempt to study them closely. Look at the limbs of the great grey kangaroo: the males, known to Colonials as "boomers," when sitting up and defending themselves with their strong hind claws are as tall as a man, and those hind limbs are enormously lengthened and quite out of proportion to the short front limbs. The fourth toe is far more highly developed than any of the others—in fact, the first or great toe is entirely missing, and the second and third are of but little use, as they are bound together in skin right up to the nails. Yet at birth, and before being transferred to the pouch by the mother, the kangaroo is a tiny mass of inanimate flesh, looking like an enlarged earthworm as much as anything, so weak that it has not even power to obtain for itself nourishment from its mother, a special arrangement inside the pouch and in its own throat being made so as to prevent



ECHIDNA'S EGG.

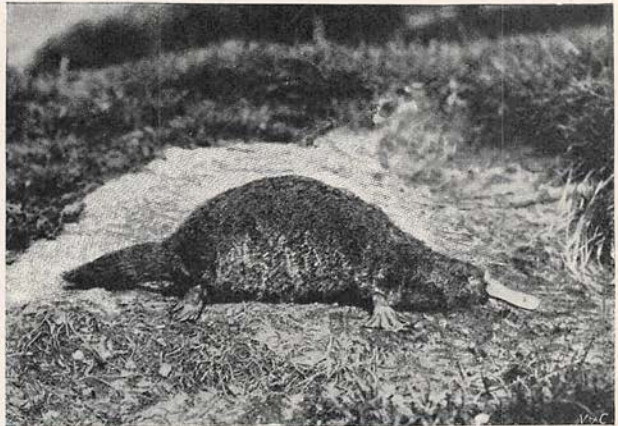
nourishment from its mother, a special arrangement inside the pouch and in its own throat being made so as to prevent



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ECHIDNA.



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PLATYPUS (DUCKBILL).

suffocation; and, strangest of all, the length of the limbs is at this time reversed, the front limbs being longer than the hind ones.

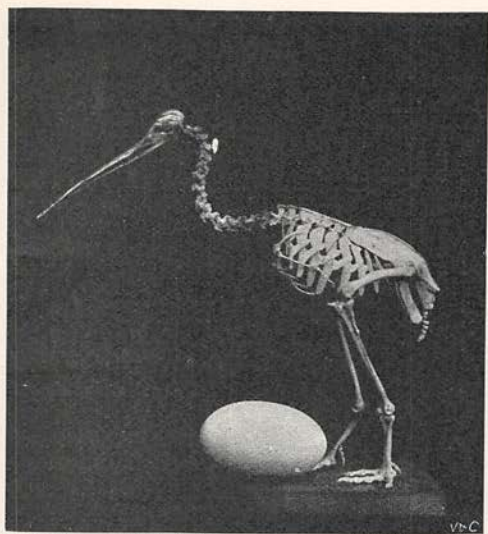
The pouch acts as a nest or shelter for the only partially formed and developed young marsupial, which is born quite naked and helpless, and is used by it long after it is able to feed itself with grass, the young one sitting happily in the pouch, and, as the mother bends forward to eat, reaching out its neck and feeding too; or when still larger and able to shift for itself a little, it may be seen feeding alongside the old one, but if startled it quickly disappears into the pouch once more.



YOUNG ECHIDNA (NINE DAYS OLD).

But of all the pouch-bearing mammals the *monotremes* are the strangest, for, in addition to their nest-like pouches, the young ones are actually produced from eggs laid by the females, and one of the two species is the proud possessor of a bill or beak like that of a duck. Yet scientists will tell you that they are not looked upon as closely allied to the birds, but rather as resembling reptiles in their structural differences and mode of reproducing their young ones. The echidnas or spiny ant-eaters, of which





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KIWI'S SKELETON AND EGG.

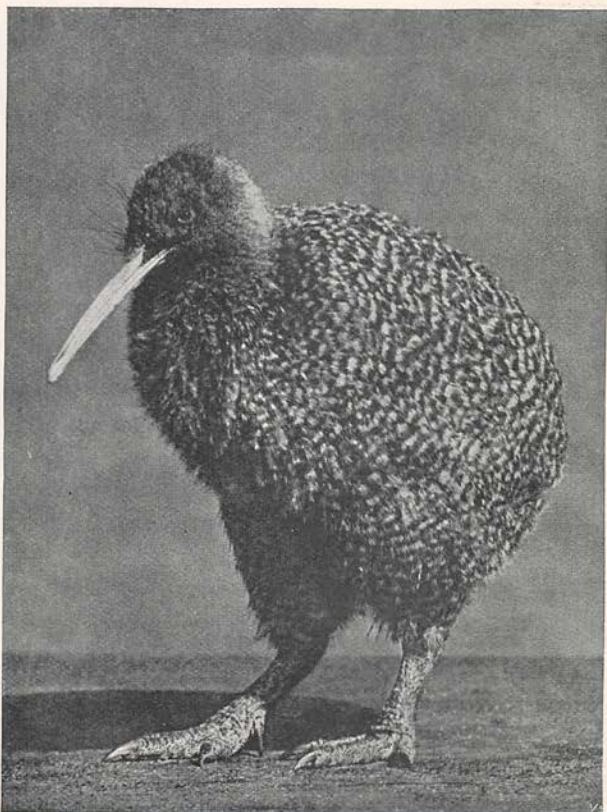
there are two species—the common from Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea, and the three-toed of north-western New Guinea only—resemble hedgehogs in general appearance and size; but they have very small mouths, long tongues looking like a worm, no teeth, and tapering snouts. They have short tails, and their fore limbs are extremely powerful, so that they can dig holes and bury themselves very quickly, whilst the hind limbs being turned backwards they are able to throw away the earth they dig up, their construction being very similar to that of the mole, which uses its limbs for exactly the same purpose.

The common echidna has five toes on each foot, whilst the other has generally only three, although specimens have been found with five on the front foot and four on the hind, each toe being provided with a large, strong, digging claw, quite out of proportion to the size of the animal.

But little is known at present about its breeding habits, as the echidna has not yet been kept in captivity for any length of time, those which have reached this country alive almost invariably dying as soon as the cold weather sets in; but they are supposed to

be similar to those of their near relatives the platypus or duckbill. The duckbill, although about the same size as the echidna, is totally different in appearance, having a soft, mole-like fur, with a dark beak shaped like that of the bird after which it is named, with nostrils in front of the beak, whilst the feet, especially the front ones, are webbed like those of a swimming bird, the hind ones being provided with webs only up to the roots of the nails.

Duckbills live in pairs, in burrows like those of the water rat, at the edges of the rivers or streams, each hole ending in a little chamber in which the nest is made, often as much as fifty feet from the entrance to the burrow, and here two white eggs are laid, each enclosed in a strong but flexible shell, measuring about three quarters of an inch in length. When the young ones are hatched out, they are quite blind and naked and their beaks are very short; but whether they are reared in pouches or not is still a doubtful question, as, although the marsupial or pouch bones are present in the skeletons of both echidna



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KIWI.

[Gambier Bolton.



and platypus, it is not known for certain whether the young ones are actually carried in them or not.

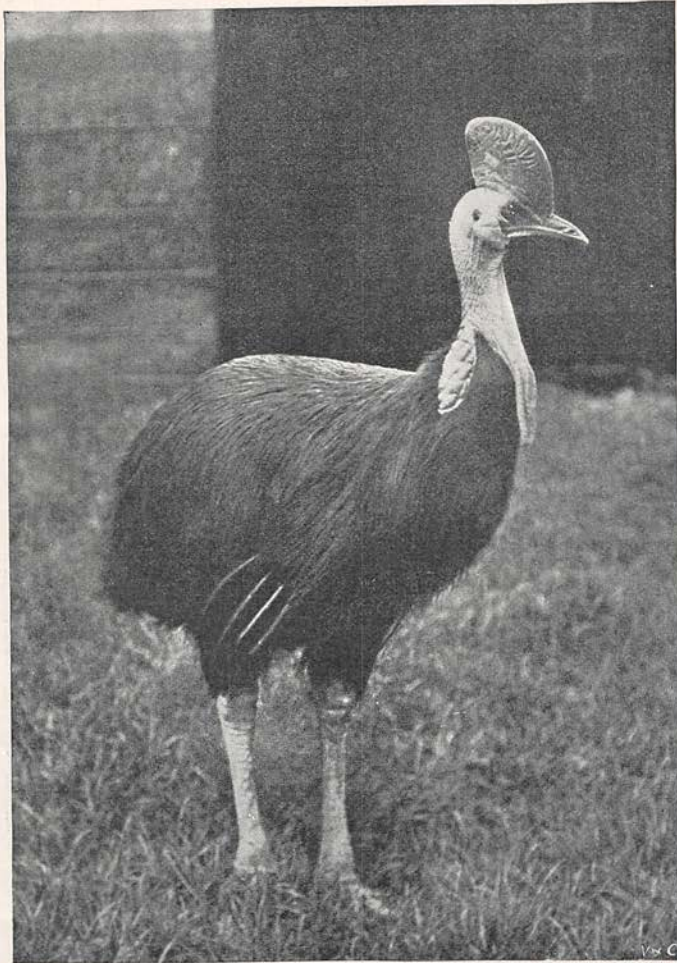
Although we have now heard of swimming hairless mammals, of egg-laying and also flying mammals, we should hardly expect to find hairy-coated birds which cannot fly; yet in the cassowaries and kiwis we actually find such creatures, the former being covered with hair-like feathers and with only the feather-spines of the wing remaining, all the true flying feathers having disappeared, whilst in the kiwi or apteryx the feathers are even more hair-like, and the wings—externally, at least—have entirely disappeared, feather-spines and all.

The apteryx or kiwi of New Zealand is a comparatively small bird, stoutly built, and having exceedingly strong thighs and legs, whilst on each toe is a powerful claw, with which the kiwi can inflict a serious wound. Being a night bird, it is maddened by the sight of light, and strikes out right and left, hissing violently all the time, when brought out to face the camera.

Sir W. J. Buller describes it as "moving about in the twilight cautiously and noiselessly as a rat." The kiwi's eggs are enormous and quite out of all proportion to the size of the bird; when two are laid and placed in a

hollow in the ground which serves as a nest, they are so large that they can be plainly seen sticking out on each side of the cock bird's narrow body, the hen, who evidently considers that she has done her duty, leaving her partner to hatch the eggs and look after the young ones until they are able to take care of themselves.

In the cassowaries we see large birds whose bare heads are capped with helmets which are formed by an upward extension of the bones of the skull, whilst their necks are generally ornamented with long hanging wattles. Their feathers are dark coloured, but unlike the plumage of most birds, they are loose and hair-like, whilst their wings are merely represented by a few black and bare quills, and as their flying powers have deserted them, they are entirely dependent on their powerful legs to



From the copyright photo by

CASSOWARY.

[Gambier Bolton.]

carry them out of danger. The natives of New Britain catch them "when very young, soon after they are hatched, and rear them by hand, but can rarely or never capture the adult, from its being so shy and difficult of approach. They are exceedingly swift of foot and possessed of great strength in their legs." They are first class kickers and always strike forwards, after raising their heads and bodies as high as possible.