

The Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) in Eastern Coastal Australia

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The Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) was first described and figured by J. W. Lewin in the *Birds of New Holland*, 1808, as the Crested Thrush (*Turdus cristatus*). The plate in this rare book bears the date 'March, 1808' and represents a female bird. In the accompanying text Lewin gives the following field notes: "*Inhabits*. Rocks; frequents barren scrubby places. Has a jerk in its walking motion, at the same time erecting its crest like the cockatoo." It would seem from these remarks that he had seen the bird in life. The type locality of Lewin's specimen has been listed as Sydney.¹ Many of the birds figured by Lewin came from the neighbourhood of Sydney, i.e. Parramatta (where Lewin lived for some years, *circa* 1802-1810), Nepean River, Hawkesbury River, etc. Eighteen species are figured in the 1808 edition and of these the localities of eight are given, six from near Sydney; one, the Red-backed Wren, "from near the banks of Patterson's River"; and one, the Regent Bower-bird, "30 miles from the settlement of Newcastle." Localities are not stated for the remaining ten species illustrated, but eight of them are fairly common birds near Sydney. The other two include the Blue-faced Honeyeater, which is rare, and the Crested Bellbird, which has never been definitely taken in the Sydney district.

In 1801 Lewin accompanied Lieutenant James Grant in the *Lady Nelson* on an exploring trip to the Hunter River, and he probably collected both the Regent Bower-bird and the Red-backed Wren at that time. Had the Crested Bellbird been taken in that locality, where it is not known to occur, Lewin would most likely have mentioned the fact. Up to the time of the publication of Lewin's book exploration had not extended to any part of New South Wales now known to be the haunt of the Crested Bellbird.

In eastern Australia the Crested Bellbird is considered a bird of the drier inland areas and there seem to be few records of its occurrence east of the Dividing Range. Robert Brown is supposed to have collected a specimen at 'Kent's Group' [= Kent Group, Bass Strait] in December, 1803,² but Gregory M. Mathews considers the locality given is erroneous.³ Brown was exploring some of the islands of Bass Strait in December, 1803.[†]

*For Lewin's "Patterson's River" [— Paterson River] read Hunter River. See *Australian Encyclopædia*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 437.

†Vigors and Horsfield state (2): "This bird was presented to the Society [Linnean Society, London] by Mr. Brown and was procured by that Gentleman at Kent's Group in December, 1803." Robert Brown came to Australia with Matthew Flinders and remained

S. W. Jackson lists⁴ eggs of the species taken at Tyringham, some sixty miles south-west of Grafton, north-eastern New South Wales, in October, 1890, and also in November, 1895. These eggs should be in the 'H. L. White' collection, Melbourne Museum, Victoria. I have been unable to trace any other definite records of the presence of the Crested Bellbird in the coastal areas of New South Wales. In a list of the birds of the County of Cumberland, Sydney⁵, A. J. North includes the Crested Bellbird without comment. Later⁶ he remarks: "In New South Wales it does not occur near the coast." Recently a report was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (June 7, 1941) that two birds had been seen at Middle Harbour, near Sydney, about two years previously. I interviewed the observer, Miss Shadforth Hooper, and showed her skins of the species (April 21, 1942), but Miss Hooper was not absolutely certain that the birds seen were Crested Bellbirds. They were not Bul-buls, an imported species with a crest, which Miss Hooper knows well.

The Crested Bellbird is known to occur near Bathurst, New South Wales⁴ where eggs were taken in January, 1889; Mudgee, nesting⁷; and Wellington⁶. These three localities are on the western slopes of the Dividing Range and probably represent the normal easterly range of the species in New South Wales. They are from 100 to 150 miles west and north-west of Sydney. There can be no doubt that Brown's specimen was collected in eastern coastal Australia, either in New South Wales or Bass Strait, and that Lewin's bird was probably taken somewhere near Sydney. In the light of the present known distribution of the species it is difficult to account for these occurrences other than that drought conditions inland had driven the birds over the Dividing Range to coastal areas.

Most of the birds common to the Sydney district during the ten years prior to Lewin's arrival in New South Wales in 1800 are represented among the 'Watling,' 'Lambert,' and other series of paintings. The Crested Bellbird is not among them, from which it may be inferred that if it did occur during that period it was extremely rare.

Sixteen of the plates in the 1808 edition of Lewin's book bear dates between March 3 and March 31, 1808, and two 'March, 1808.' Lewin engraved some, if not all, of the

until 1805. After Flinders had left for England, Brown, with his draughtsman Ferdinand Bauer, visited some of the islands in Bass Strait and also parts of Tasmania. An island in Bass Strait seems a most unlikely place to find the Crested Bellbird and there are no other records of the occurrence of the species in that part of Australia. However, consideration must be given to the fact that Brown was a careful and accurate worker. His original Mss. is now in the British Museum and an examination of his field notes may reveal the correct locality.

plates about three years earlier in Sydney and, after having sets struck off, he sent the plates to London where the dates were erased and altered as above, the letterpress amended and printed, and the book published under the supervision of his brother. In 1813 Lewin used the sets he had previously struck off in Sydney in 1804-5, for the Australian edition, under the title of *The Birds of New South Wales*, the letterpress being printed by G. Howe. This work is considered the first book devoted to natural history printed and published in Australia. Gregory M. Mathews gives⁸ dates appearing on seven of the plates as falling between December 16, 1804, and February 15, 1805. The date for the plate of the Crested Bellbird is not stated though it was probably engraved about the same time. This is interesting when we consider that Brown's specimen was taken in December, 1803, and suggests a possible coastal movement of the species about that time. Lewin commenced to paint birds, and other natural history subjects, soon after his arrival in Australia. In the 'Mathews' collection now at Canberra are three original water-colour drawings of Sydney birds painted by Lewin in 1800.⁹

The R.A.O.U. *Checklist*, 1926, gives the distribution of the Crested Bellbird as "... not eastern coastal districts." In view of the above remarks it is now suggested that the distribution of the species should be altered to read either 'accidental, coastal New South Wales' or 'exceptional, coastal New South Wales' and that the locality of Lewin's bird should read 'Coastal New South Wales, probably Sydney' and of Brown's specimen 'Eastern Australia, probably New South Wales.' Mathews has designated¹ the type localities of both these specimens as Sydney.

It may be added that while Lewin was the first to describe the species, in 1808, his name was found to be pre-occupied by *Turdus cristatus* of Pennant in Forster's *Ind. Zool.*, 1781, p. 41; thus the use of *gutturialis* of Vigors and Horsfield, 1827.²

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