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# Dr William H. James 1852–76: medical doctor and naturalist

by Graham R. Fulton

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**SUMMARY.**—Dr William Hughes James (1852–76), commonly known as Dr James, was an American citizen, originally from Virginia, USA. He travelled with William Macleay's *Chevert* Expedition to New Guinea in 1875, assuming dual roles as the ship's surgeon and as a collector / taxidermist. The expedition collected in northern Queensland, the Torres Strait Islands and New Guinea. At the conclusion of the expedition Dr James returned to New Guinea and continued collecting, and while doing so he was murdered by natives. While many of his specimens were never recorded against his name, at least 99 birds, three mammals and some invertebrates were. They are now in the Natural History Museum, Tring, and the Macleay Museum, Univ. of Sydney. Very little has ever been published about Dr James despite his participation in an important and historic international expedition. This paper presents what is known based on published and unpublished sources.

Dr W. H. James was an American medical doctor who turned his hand to collecting natural history specimens. His full name of William Hughes James and his year of birth were sourced via his archive at the Univ. of Virginia Library (Anon. 2016). He was commonly and affectionately known simply as Dr James. Born in Loudon County, Virginia (Anon. 1877a) he studied medicine at Baltimore for a year before pecuniary difficulties necessitated he join his uncle's medical practice to receive further training<sup>1</sup>. His collecting career lasted from 28 May 1875 to 23 August 1876—one year, two months and 26 days<sup>2</sup> (Anon. 1876a). He was speared and killed while on a boat in Hall Sound, adjacent to Yule Island, New Guinea, on 23 August 1876 (Anon. 1876a,b). He was evidently a young man with a thirst for travel and adventure: travelling first from east to west across the USA before venturing to Australia and then to New Guinea. His short-lived career as a naturalist / collector was conducted on the fringe of the known world, where he penetrated into the unknown—an occupation fraught with inherent dangers and alas his life was taken too soon.

## USA

Dr James travelled to Nevada in the western USA from his home in Virginia, before he travelled to Australia and New Guinea. Information about Dr James' life on the west coast of the USA (Nevada and San Francisco) came to light after his death. His death brought a cluster of newspaper reports of varying veracity. For example, *The Pioche Weekly Record* stated that he was 'seeking for gold diggings' when 'eaten by cannibals' (Anon. 1877b); *The Iola Register* published that he 'was with an exploring party from Melbourne' and devoured on 'becoming separated' (Anon. 1877c); while a headline in the *Sacramento Daily Union* had adopted Dr James as a local, 'A San Franciscan ... sacrificed and devoured by the cannibals' (Anon. 1877d). The most informative newspaper article providing his movements on the west coast of the USA was published in the *Staunton Spectator*, based in his home state of Virginia. It was in the form of a letter from the Attorney-General of Nevada, Mr John R. Kittrell, to Miss Mary Baldwin (Anon. 1877e). Miss Baldwin was the principal of the Augusta Female Seminary, later renamed the Mary Baldwin College (and now the Mary Baldwin University).

'Miss Baldwin:—Some three or four years ago there came to this State from Virginia—I forget what county—a young physician by the name of W. H. James... He was about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age... His first place of residence was at Pioche; thence he removed to White Pine county, and for a while worked at a mine or mill, performing manual labor at a mining camp known as Robinson District ... Leaving there he went to Cherry Creek in the last named county and resumed the practice of his profession with but partial success, I believe, in the Fall of 1874 he became a candidate on the Democratic ticket for a seat in the Nevada Legislature to represent White Pine county in the Assembly. He failed to be elected, and shortly after the election, went to San Francisco, where I met him either in November or December of that year, 1874. He was then endeavoring to procure employment with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company as Surgeon or Assistant Surgeon to sail between the ports of San Francisco and Panama, and succeeded in the undertaking' (Anon. 1877e).

Dr James resided at Pioche, Nevada, where he ran a medical practice with a Dr Rogers, and their place of business was situated at Mrs Stanton's house on Main Street (Anon. 1877b). Dr James' move to White Pine County came about with the discovery of silver there. The 'silver rush' to that location is historically and colloquially known as White Pine Fever (Hall 1994). No record was found of his running for the state legislature in Nevada. Searches of Nevada legislators did not reveal his name and would not if he had not been elected. Regional newspapers also yielded no results, perhaps because they were reporting on a general election during the autumn of 1874.<sup>3</sup> Dr James secured a position aboard the steamer *MacGregor*, from San Francisco to Sydney, although he apparently lost this position during the voyage (see below).

## Sydney, Australia

In Australia, Dr James is best known for his involvement with the *Chevert* Expedition staged in 1875 and the offshoot expeditions that followed. The *Chevert* Expedition was the first scientific expedition to leave Australia for foreign shores, and was headed and fully funded by Sir William Macleay, founder of the Macleay Museum (Fletcher 1929, Fulton 2012).

Dr James arrived in Sydney on 11 January 1875 from San Francisco aboard the RMS *MacGregor*, which had departed San Francisco on 8 December 1874 (Anon. 1875a). According to New South Wales government records, he arrived as a saloon passenger and not as crew (State Records Authority NSW 2016). Moore & Mullins (2012) stated that he had joined the *MacGregor* as ship's surgeon but during the passage he had lost this position and needed to turn to the US Consul in Sydney for assistance. On 14 March 1877, in a letter from the US Consul, J. H. Williams, to the Assistant Secretary of State, John L. Cadwalader, the Consul stated: 'Dr James arrived here some two years ago, as Surgeon of a Steamer from San Francisco, and was (in my opinion) dishonestly left here, without friends or means ... He was a very promising young man and if he had lived would, without doubt have done credit to himself and to his country.'<sup>4</sup>

The US Consul referred him to Dr Alfred Roberts<sup>4</sup> who was a consulting surgeon at Sydney Infirmary and a trustee of the Australian Museum (Rutledge 1976). Roberts in turn encouraged him to apply to William Macleay. He was hired by William Macleay on 19 April 1875 as ship's surgeon for the *Chevert* Expedition to New Guinea.

## ***Chevert Expedition (Australia–New Guinea)***

William Macleay hired Dr James as ship's surgeon for the *Chevert* Expedition. The position had been advertised after his good friend Dr James Cox, medical doctor and conchologist, pulled out about a month before departure. On 19 April 1875, Macleay wrote in his private journal, 'I engaged a Surgeon for the *Chevert* today, a Dr James an American. He is strongly recommended by [Dr Alfred] Roberts and he seems to be willing to make himself useful to the expedition. He is to take lessons in skinning birds from Masters.'<sup>2</sup>

Dr James attended Elizabeth Bay House, where Macleay lived and the expedition was based, and took lessons in skinning birds from George Masters. His first lesson was on a heron, probably a White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*, skinned on 21 April. Apparently the taxidermy went well and Dr James was invited to practice again two days later when he and Masters each prepared a Silver Gull *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae*. At the same time Dr James attended his first patient of the expedition Jimmy Rotumah, one of the Polynesian seamen, and prescribed some medicine; Jimmy was suffering from scrofula, a tuberculosis infection of the lymph nodes in the neck.<sup>5</sup>

The *Chevert* Expedition got underway on 18 May 1875. The *Chevert* sailed from Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) and began collecting at sea. The first reported animal collected by Dr James was an Allied Rock-wallaby *Petrogale assimilis*, on Palm Island, which became the species' holotype. He shared the honours with George Masters, Edward Spalding and an unnamed Nyawaygi guide (Fulton 2016a). Dr James quickly proved an eager and useful addition to the collecting parties as they cruised along the Great Barrier Reef stopping at various islands. His name crops up in Macleay's personal journal frequently, demonstrating his involvement with the expedition, for example: Dr James found a huge tumulus (incubation mound) of a megapode, Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt*, on Palm Island; he shot a pitta on Fitzroy Island, although it was too damaged to be of any value and was discarded; at sea, near Cape Sidmouth, he attended patients of a passing steam launch the *Darwin* who were suffering from malaria<sup>5</sup>.

Macleay was impressed by the diligence of the American, Dr James. He wrote the following account in his journal on 16 June 1875: 'The doctor went out early this morning to lie in wait for a pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles [*Haliaeetus leucogaster*], which frequent the point of land opposite the ship and though not successful in getting a shot at them, he displayed an amount of patient determination and endurance much to be admired. He did not move from his hiding place till sunset.'<sup>2</sup>

This occurred at Cape Grenville where James had collected what we now recognise as a new subspecies of Grey Shrike Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica superciliosa*. Masters considered it a species in his 1875 publication naming it *Colluricincla superciliosa* and adding: 'one specimen only, of this very distinct species, was shot at Cape Grenville by Dr James' (Masters 1875). Macleay also wrote in his 1875 newspaper article that Dr James was 'a most enthusiastic sportsman, was always ready to join in any and every excursion' (Macleay 1875b). No doubt Dr James collected many more specimens than are attributed to him.

When the expedition reached the Somerset outpost near the northernmost tip of Australia, Macleay found many of the indigenous locals had succumbed to disease. To his horror he saw attenuated bodies lying unburied on the ground about the outpost. He immediately sent Dr James to investigate the cause of the 'extraordinary mortality'<sup>2</sup>. James reported the epidemic as measles (Liddell 1996, Stride 2016). Masters and Dr James are reported as collecting many birds here, albeit most without detail. Of those specifically secured by Masters and James were a fine male Magnificent Riflebird *Lophorina magnificus* along with another younger male and three younger females (Fletcher 1929: 249, Fulton

2012). On 20 June Masters and Dr James collected many small birds that Macleay described as 'desirable specimens', among them a quite distinct and brightly coloured female Mangrove Golden Whistler *Pachycephala melanura*<sup>5</sup>. Masters quickly noticed that this bird was more robust than the type seen earlier at Cape Grenville, so he named it *Pachycephala robusta*; he stated that it was shot in dense mangroves and that it was the only one seen (Masters 1875). Before leaving Somerset for the Torres Strait Islands and New Guinea, Macleay reported in a letter to a Sydney newspaper that Dr James had shot and collected a fine specimen of Short-tailed Spotted Cuscus *Spiloglossus maculatus* (Anon. 1875b).

Dr James is not specifically mentioned in connection with any further Chevert collections after Somerset. His name appears occasionally, telling us that his position as a collector and ship's doctor had not changed. He spent one night with Lawrence Hargrave in the small steam launch when it was bumped by a crocodile, at the mouth of the Katow (now Binaturi) River. He treated the Polynesian man, Jimmy Rotuma, until he finally died from scrofula. He had been treating him throughout the expedition.<sup>2</sup> Dr James is remembered as a significant member of the Chevert Expedition not least due to his dual roles as ship's surgeon and collector / taxidermist.

### Dr James returns to New Guinea

The Chevert Expedition ended too soon for some of the expeditioners who staged their own offshoot expedition and returned to New Guinea: Dr James was among this small group. They were drawn predominately from the Chevert and also comprised William Petterd, Felix Knight, Lawrence Hargrave and Kendall Broadbent (Anon. 1875c). Broadbent had been collecting for himself and Count Castelnau at the Norman River on the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria<sup>8</sup>. He had sold some of his birds to Macleay at Somerset on the Chevert's return journey when he met the expeditioners<sup>5</sup>. It was only then that he became associated with the Chevert Expedition (Castelnau & Ramsay 1876). The offshoot group was to join Octavius Stone aboard the London Missionary Society's steamer the SS *Ellangowan* and return to New Guinea (Anon. 1875d).

Dr James had been the first person to formally propose a return expedition to William Macleay in a letter dated 7 August 1875<sup>7</sup>. This was before the termination of the Chevert Expedition while it was collecting on Darnley Island. At this time, Macleay in consultation with Captain Edwards had relinquished the planned exploration of the Fly River and accepted to head to the eastern side of the Gulf of Papua and thereafter terminate the expedition early.<sup>5</sup> Dr James' letter indicates that he forwarded the concept of a return expedition in the form of a business venture, in which Macleay might finance the return to New Guinea for half of the collections made. Dr James wrote:

'Mr. Macleay                      Esteemed Sir.

Begging your indulgence for a few moments I will premise this communication by stating in brief that it contains a business proposition which I have every reason to believe you will feel interested in and which can be defined more explicitly by letter than by word of mouth...

I have no idea of attempting this enterprise alone. I have presented the subject to another member of this expedition hoping that he would consult to join me...

Mr Petterd is to whom I refer...

What we propose is this:— To remain on New Guinea not less than 18 months nor more than 3 years...To proceed to Port Moresby for beginning operations. ...Port Moresby is easy of access, offers facilities for communications and the reception of supplies, and

at the same time constitutes a point not far removed from the mountain range and interior...

...in order to prosecute this work with every prospect of success, we require influence and a certain amount of pecuniary assistance... we ask assistance upon the following conditions:— that we spare no effort to reach the interior of Papua:— that we devote at least 18 months to the trial:— that we make collections from every department of natural science for which we have the material:— and that of the entire collections you shall receive half. —Yours most faithfully, W. H. James.<sup>7</sup>

Dr James' collections were not sent to Macleay, and Macleay did not finance their return to New Guinea<sup>5</sup>. Instead, Macleay did offer some ammunition to the returning expeditioners (French & Petterd 1875).

William Petterd wrote two letters just prior to the commencement of the offshoot expedition, dated 17 and 23 September 1875 and sent to his uncle Mr. T. A. Reynolds and Mr French of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens respectively; both were subsequently published in newspapers. The following is a summary:

'Dr. James, Mr. Knight, and myself, return from here to New Guinea per mission steamer *Ellangowan*, collecting on our own account, and as I have lost the result of years of toil, I come to the conclusion of losing my life, or turning up trumps. The steamer is to land us at Port Moresby, on the south eastern coast of New Guinea, and from there we will try and penetrate into the interior, and ascend Mount Owen Stanley (13,000 feet high), or perish in the attempt. Of course the natives are hostile, and fevers abound, but we are all young, and, I flatter myself, foolish, and daring enough for anything... So now for 'death or glory... Our party will be the first English speaking expedition that has attempted to penetrate into the interior. I say English speaking, for our doctor is an American, consequently if any good result follows our attempt, America will share the honour... You will doubtless think this an unnecessary and dangerous, if not foolish, affair, but my inclinations are that way, so I may as well indulge in my natural propensities, and someone must go first... If things go well we anticipate stopping some years in New Guinea, so that in all probability I will never again return to civilisation —Yours, &c., W. F. Petterd' (Petterd 1875a,b).

Dr James also wrote a letter that was forwarded to *The Sydney Morning Herald* by Dr Alfred Roberts and subsequently published as follows:

'Sirs,—The enclosed extracts from a letter I recently received from Dr. James, the surgeon of the *Chevert*, will probably interest your readers. The energy and courage with which Dr James and his plucky companions have entered upon their difficult enterprise is worthy of all praise, and will certainly command our best wishes... Although the party is small and its means are limited there is every reason to hope that, with steady perseverance this off-shoot of the Macleay expedition will lead to important discoveries, as well as enrich our collections of natural history.—Alfred Roberts. 16 October 1875' (James & Roberts 1875).

Extracts of Dr James' letter dated 18 September 1875.

'Instead of returning to Sydney with the *Chevert*, I am preparing to return to New Guinea with the twofold purpose of exploring as much as possible, and for making a scientific collection'.



'To assist me in this project I have two associates—a Mr Petterd, who is one of our present [*Chevert*] expedition, and a thoroughly competent collector and taxidermist, with a Mr Knight who is a fine bushman, a strong energetic young man, and somewhat of a botanical collector. The latter belongs to Sir William Macarthur's party.' [Dr James is referring to MacArthur's botanical collectors who accompanied the *Chevert* (Fulton 2016b). Felix Knight joined the *Chevert* Expedition in August 1875, at Darnley Island.<sup>2</sup>]

'We are making preparations entirely upon our own limited resources, and though at first sight it may appear foolhardy, yet, upon considering the circumstances, our prospect is a very flattering one.'

'We hope by going vigorously to work, be able to within three months to make sufficient collection to send off to Sydney, that through it we may not only receive a small amount of working capital, but interest some gentlemen of means and lovers of natural science sufficiently to induce them to lend us assistance to continue our investigations and collections' (James & Roberts 1875).

The returning expeditioners financed their own return and were transported in the missionary steamer *Ellangowan* (Anon. 1875c). Petterd wrote to French who in turn sent the letter to *The Queenslander* newspaper. Petterd wrote:

'We have a good fit-out, fine arms, rations, and some kanakas. We intend to collect everything. Of course we risk our lives from sickness, and the natives are not of the most trustworthy disposition. This affair is organised entirely independent of Mr. Macleay, from our own slender resources, kindly assisted by Captain Onslow, R.N., and Reedy (Sir W. Macarthur's man). Every man on the ship has made us some little present from friendship, and to start us on our perilous journey. Mr. Macleay is going to give us some ammunition, so that considering we are young men ready for anything, if the gods favour us we must do something' (French & Petterd 1875).

## The offshoot expedition breaks up

The offshoot expedition broke up before it even started collecting. Various newspaper reports inform us that this little band of expeditioners split by stages, with the fragments going in different directions. No doubt the heat and humidity combined with infections and fever proved challenging for these determined explorers. Lawrence Hargrave's personal diary gave the first hint of disharmony within the small group. Hargrave was a young man of 25 at the time, and inclined to openly express his frustrations in his private diary. This entry, made while still at Somerset and dated 26 September to 10 October 1875, states: 'The doctor, Petterd and I are stopping with Broadbent, the doctor sulky and seems useless for roughing it.'<sup>6</sup>

By 23 October the correspondent for *The Queenslander* informs us that the party had broken into two or three small groups. 'The *Chevert* offshoot expedition were conveyed across by this little craft [across Torres Strait to New Guinea aboard the *Ellangowan*] consisting of Dr. James, Mr. Knight, Mr. Petterd, and Mr. Hargraves. Besides this party, Mr. O. C. Stone, a gentleman lately from England, athirst for adventure, and Mr. Broadbent, a taxidermist, took passage for the same almost unknown region. They all land at Port Moresby, and strike out from there in directions which suit their fancy, and feet, most' (Anon. 1875c).

William Petterd, publishing his memoir of the New Guinea explorations in May 1876, mentioned the break up and named the remaining members of his party. 'The small party

organised on the *Chevert* having collapsed, I joined that of a Mr Stone... Our party consisted of Messrs. Stone, Broadbent, Hargraves and myself (Petterd 1876).’ [Dr James and Felix Knight were absent from this list.]

Petterd was discussing the period after arriving at Port Moresby before leaving on their various quests. More news by the *Brisbane Courier’s* correspondent at Somerset, dated 26 November 1875 states: ‘Dr. James and Mr. Knight, spoken of in my last, are quartered on Yule Island, having forsaken Port Moresby, with the description of it being no place for collecting. ‘Bareness and sterility describe the country,’ writes Dr. James privately to myself. The other portion of the *Chevert* people... Mr. Hargrave, Mr. Stone, and Mr. Petterd are quartered, I understand, at Port Moresby, as also Mr. Broadbent, and will strike out from there when opportunity offers.’

Hargrave’s diary provides some exact dates: on 31 October 1875 he wrote: ‘In the afternoon Petterd and Knight said Dr James was disgusted with their partnership and thought they did not treat him with sufficient respect Ha! Ha!’

Hargrave’s petulance and youth are again clearly evident in his diary entry. By the next day Hargrave confirmed that Dr James and Knight planned to shift to Yule Island aboard the *Ellangowan* and had loaded their traps aboard that day. They steamed out on Friday 5 November 1875<sup>6</sup>.

A wait of nearly four months followed (until 13 March 1876) for more news of Dr James, when again Dr Alfred Roberts wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Roberts informs that food and supplies were sent as relief to those of the *Chevert* Expedition who continued in New Guinea, with most falling to Dr James and Mr Knight. This letter can be summarised:

‘Sir,—In December last a few gentlemen kindly subscribed a small fund to purchase stores for the relief of Dr. James and his companions or companion, and I have sent an expenditure statement of the collection for insertion in your paper...

The utilisation of the fund was entrusted to Captain Onslow and myself, and every article purchased was carefully selected by us...

In a long letter which I received from Dr James by the last mail, he states that nearly all the stores had arrived safely, and had proved most acceptable. He and his companion had, it appears, become much reduced in strength and seriously ill, before they received them, but had picked up remarkably after a few days improved diet.

It is much to be regretted that Mr Knight (Dr James’ companion) has been compelled to return to Sydney, for the restoration of his health, and I fear the want of companionship will prove a heavy trial to Dr James during the present hot and unhealthy season.

Mr. Knight visited me upon his arrival, and, I am glad to say, will soon be well again. During conversation with him, I ascertained that all the articles sent proved to be of a useful character, but he thought a supply of beads would have been very useful for trading purposes... Mr Knight especially mentioned that the preserved meat sent by the Sydney Meat Preserving Company was of a very superior character in every way, and that with care, they were able to keep an opened tin until the third day.

I am, yours, faithfully, Alfred Roberts’ (Roberts 1876).

Octavius Stone called on Dr James and Felix Knight on Yule Island, in February. He had not seen them since the conclusion of the *Chevert* Expedition when he had helped ferry them across to Port Moresby. He wrote: ‘Both looked mightily changed in appearance since they landed there three months before. Then they were in the most robust health, but now they were so emaciated, and altered by attacks of fever and ague, and insufficient nourishment



in consequence of having run short of provisions, that at first sight I scarcely recognised them. In addition to fever, his assistant was suffering from a large sore on the calf of his leg, caused by knocking it against a mangrove root, the severity of which had increased daily, until it had become serious' (Stone 1880).

Stone gave some supplies to Dr James and he dined with him on the island 'in a new grass house he [Dr James] had just completed.' Afterward Stone conveyed Felix Knight to Somerset (Stone 1880). Dr James was seen again in June by Andrew Goldie in transit from Somerset to New Guinea aboard the *Ellangowan*; Dr James disembarked at Yule Island (Moore & Mullins 2012).

Following Knight's departure Dr James entered a partnership with a Swede, Carl Thorngren, to collect zoological and other specimens (King 1909). Thorngren had arrived much earlier in the Torres Strait, in 1871–72. He had been working with the mission ketch *John Knox*, which conveyed the first batches of the London Missionary Society's teachers to New Guinea. His crew had deserted him and he had sold the *John Knox*, bought the seven-ton cutter *Mayri* and subsequently joined Dr James (Wetherell & Abel 1998, Moore & Mullins 2012).

## Death of Dr James

Dr James was speared and killed on 23 August 1876, on board the *Mayri* near Yule Island, by natives from mainland New Guinea. News broke in Sydney in late September (Anon. 1876c) and details were published in October. The police magistrate at Somerset, Mr Henry M. Chester, wrote to Dr Alfred Roberts who in turn forwarded the letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Chester wrote:

'Dear Sir.—It becomes my painful duty to announce to you the death, on the 23rd August, of Dr. James, late of the *Chevert*, in whom you were interested. It appears that he had lately joined Mr. Charles Thorngren who owned a boat called the *Mayri*, and they had gone together in the boat to the mainland opposite Yule Island with a crew of seven natives of islands in Torres Straits. The survivors give the following account of the catastrophe:—

Just before daylight two canoes full of New Guinea men were seen approaching the boat. The crew called Thorngren, and asked for firearms, but he, thinking they were merely coming to trade, refused to give them. While Dr. James and Thorngren were trading a native suddenly struck the latter with a club, smashing his skull and knocking him overboard. Dr. James shot one man with his revolver, but was almost immediately thrust through with a spear and killed. The boat's crew got their guns, and succeeded in beating off their assailants after two of their number had been speared. They say they shot about ten of the New Guinea men. They dived for the body of Thorngren, but, the water being muddy, they were unable to recover it. They then got under way, and that evening buried the body of Dr. James on a sandbank' (Chester 1876).

In October 1876, Alfred Roberts received Dr James' final letters, of which he only shared a small part with *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Roberts' extracts highlighted Dr James' optimism, although with the knowledge of Dr James' death the optimism conveyed a melancholy note.

'SIR,—I received the enclosed letter by the steamship *Somerset* yesterday; it tells its own sad tale. Three letters from Dr. James, written at different times, and his will were

enclosed with it. From the latter it is evident that he had reason to be, and was, very sanguine of material success in his undertaking. The natives of Yule Island, where he had established a home, welcomed him warmly upon his return from Somerset, and rendered him every assistance; he had already visited some new localities, and among them "Aroi," the natives of which speak a different language or dialect. At this place he secured five specimens of the new bird of paradise, two being males in full plumage. The concluding paragraph of his last letter is as follows:—'My health is good at present, the weather fine, and, the prospect of my remaining in good health favourable...By the time I write again I hope to have accomplished something worth telling' (Roberts 1876).

A letter from Dr James to his sister Emma survives in the Univ. of Virginia Library. It was written more than a year before his death and provides a glimpse into his thoughts while aboard the *Chevert*. Dr James' letter allows us to engage with both the times and the unusual locality. It permits us to gain a sense of his mind as he reaches out to a larger world; such a context enables us to deepen our engagement with the spirit of exploration in that remote place and time.

'Darnley Island, Torres Strait, July – 31 – 1875.

My Dear Sister,

This letter is a strange locality from which to date a letter. A small mountainous island situated between North Australia and New Guinea, inhabited by savages so low in the scale of humanity that they are scarcely beyond the use of the "Palm leaf"...

Oh! with what unspeakable pleasure I look forward to the time when after arriving at home again, I shall call you again all up around the cheerful old hearth in the sitting room, and whilst the familiar ticking of the faithful old clock marks the flight of time, read to you... of my tour and adventures in that strange and almost unknown island where the glorious Bird of Paradise, arrayed in all its gaudy plumage reigns king of the avifauna...

If you are an old maid when I return, not a thing will you get. So there's a great inducement to make a change. That's a change which – by the way – I shouldn't object to myself, if I were once more within the friends of dear old Loudon. I think it would be a very consoling change – a change which would put a quietus upon my prodigality and wandering... With sincere affection, yours – W.H.J.'

### Dr James' collections

Overall 99 birds, three mammals plus some Coleoptera and Lepidoptera (beetles and butterflies) are known to have been collected by Dr James (Table 1). Of the three known mammals, two Allied Rock-wallabies represented a new species, of which the holotype is in the Macleay Museum (Ramsay 1877, Fulton 2016a). George Masters (1875) attributed two new species of Australian birds to Dr James. These are currently recognised as the subspecies Torresian Grey Shrike-thrush *C. h. superciliosa* and Robust Mangrove Golden Whistler *P. m. robusta*; the type specimens are currently in the Australian Museum, Sydney, on loan from the Macleay Museum. Other type specimens collected by Dr James include: *Phonygammus jamesii*, holotype (Sharpe 1877: 181); *Tanysiptera microrhyncha*, three syntypes (Sharpe 1878: 311); and *Melidora collaris*, holotype (Sharpe 1878: 313). Richard Bowdler Sharpe, curator of birds at the British Museum, named *P. jamesii* in honour of Dr James. It is currently regarded as a subspecies of Trumpet Manucode *P. keraudrenii jamesii*. This

TABLE 1

Collections of Dr James. Current scientific and common names are given along with the name used by the authors when the collections were first published. Current scientific names follow del Hoyo & Collar (2014, 2016). Collection locations and dates are taken from those published by R. B. Sharpe. Transcription errors were detected in some of the collection years given by Sharpe (1878), specifically some were after Dr James’ death. These are marked by an asterisk (\*) and retain the month given by Sharpe; in most cases these were one year out with no reason to doubt the month; however, one was given as 1865, instead of 1875: Sharpe’s *Actitis hypoleucos* (Common Sandpiper). Abbreviations: *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e* in italics denote individual specimens; and s.e. denotes the compass point south-east. Museum acronyms and locations: MM = Macleay Museum, Sydney; AM = Australian Museum (on loan from the Macleay Museum); NHMUK = Natural History Museum, Tring.

Taxa	English name	Original name	Location & Date
<b>Chevert Expedition</b>			
<b>Mammals</b>			
Ramsay (1877), Fulton (2016a)			
<i>Petrogale assimilis</i>	Allied Rock-wallaby	<i>Petrogale assimilis</i>	♂ & ♀ Palm I.—2 June 1875 (MM)
Anon. (1875b)			
<i>Spilocuscus maculatus</i>	Spotted Cuscus	<i>Cuscus maculatus</i>	Somerset—23 June 1875 (MM)
<b>Birds</b>			
Masters (1875)			
<b>CAMPEPHAGIDAE</b>			
<i>Colluricincla harmonica superciliosa</i>	Grey Shrike Thrush	<i>Colluricincla superciliosa</i>	♂ Cape Grenville—16 June 1875 (AM)
Masters (1875), Fletcher (1929)			
<b>CAMPEPHAGIDAE</b>			
<i>Pachycephala melanura robusta</i>	Mangrove Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala robusta</i>	♀ Somerset—20 June 1875 (AM)
<b>PARADISAEIDAE</b>			
<i>Lophorina magnificus</i>	Magnificent Riflebird	<i>Craspedophora magnifica</i>	2♂ & 3♀ Somerset—25 June 1875 (MM)
<b>Dr James New Guinea</b>			
Sharpe (1877)			
<b>PARADISAEIDAE</b>			
<i>Phonygammus keraudrenii jamesii</i>	Dr James’ Trumpet Manucode	<i>Phonygamma jamesii</i>	Aleya—April 1876 (NHMUK)
Sharpe (1878)			
<b>COLEOPTERA AND LEPIDOPTERA</b>	unknown	unknown	Yule Island
<b>ANATIDAE</b>			
<i>Tadorna radjah</i>	Radjah Shelduck	<i>Tadorna radjah</i>	<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> & <i>c</i> . Nicura— <i>a</i> . December 1875, <i>b</i> . March 1876, <i>c</i> . April 1876
<b>COLUMBIDAE</b>			
<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps chrysochlora</i>	<i>a</i> . Aleya, <i>b</i> . s.e. mainland— <i>a</i> . *April 1876, <i>b</i> . 29 February 1876
<i>Ducula mullerii</i>	Collared Imperial Pigeon	<i>Carpophaga muelleri</i>	♂ s.e. mainland 8 miles from Yule I.—November 1875
<i>Ducula pinon</i>	Pinon Imperial Pigeon	<i>Carpophaga pinon</i>	Mainland e. of Yule I.—February 1876
<i>Alopecoenas jobiensis</i>	White-bibbed Ground Dove	<i>Phlogaenas jobiensis</i>	<i>a</i> . s.e. mainland, <i>b</i> . no label— <i>a</i> . 29 February 1876
<i>Goura scheepmakeri</i>	Southern Crowned Pigeon	<i>Goura albertisii</i>	<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i> , <i>d</i> & <i>e</i> . s.e. mainland—*February 1873
<i>Ptilinopus coronulatus</i>	Coroneted Fruit Dove	<i>Ptilinopus coronulatus</i>	<i>a</i> . s.e. mainland, <i>b</i> & <i>c</i> . Aleya— <i>b</i> & <i>c</i> . April 1876

**CAPRIMULGIDAE**

*Aegotheles bennettii*  
*Caprimulgus macrurus*

Barred Owlet-Nightjar  
 Large-tailed Nightjar

*Aegotheles bennetti*  
*Caprimulgus macrurus*

*a* & *b*. Aleya—April 1876  
 Yule I.—April 1876

**ARDEIDAE**

*Butorides striata*

Striated Heron

*Butorides javanica*

♂ Yule I.—December 1875

**ACCIPITRIDAE**

*Haliaeetus leucogaster*

White-bellied Sea  
 Eagle

*Haliaeetus leucogaster*

♀ Yule I.—January 1876

*Haliastur indus*

Brahminy Kite

*Haliastur girrenera*

Mainland e. of Yule I.—February 1876

*Macheiramphus alcinus*

Bat Hawk

*Macheiramphus alcinus*

♀ Low Nicura—1 April 1876  
 (NHMUK)

*Aviceda subcristata*

Pacific Baza

*Baza reindwardti*

♀ s.e. mainland 8 miles from Yule I.—  
 November 1875 (NHMUK)

*Pandion cristatus*

Osprey

*Pandion leucocephalus*

2 ♂ Yule I.—December 1875

**RALLIDAE**

*Megacrex inepta*

New Guinea Flightless  
 Rail

*Tigrisoma heliosylos*

mangroves of Aleya—March 1876

*Porphyrio melanotus*

Australian Swampphen

*Porphyrio melanopterus*

no label

**CHARADRIIDAE**

*Pluvialis squatarola*

Black-bellied Plover

*Squatarola helvetica*

♀ Yule I.—November 1875

**SCOLOPACIDAE**

*Actitis hypoleucos*

Common Sandpiper

*Actitis hypoleucos*

♂ Yule I.—\*December 1875

*Numenius madagascariensis*

Eastern Curlew

*Numenius cyanopus*

♂ Yule I.—December 1875

**PSITTACIDAE**

*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*

Red-cheeked Parrot

*Geoffroyius aruensis*

♂ mainland—January 1876

*Psittaculirostris desmarestii*

Large Fig Parrot

*Cyclopsittacus cervicalis*

Eucalyptus range—February 1876

*Trichoglossus haematodus*

Rainbow Lorikeet

*Trichoglossus massena*

*a.* ♂ & ♀ s.e. mainland—January 1876,  
*b.* Eucalyptus range—February 1876

**CUCULIDAE**

*Centropus menbeki*

Greater Black Coucal

*Centropus menebeki*

Aleya—April 1876

*Centropus phasianinus*

Pheasant Coucal

*Centropus spilopterus*

3 ♂ *a*, *b*, & *c.* Yule I.,—Nov & Dec  
 1876, *d.* Nicura—\*December 1875

*Chrysococcyx lucidus*

Shining Bronze  
 Cuckoo

*Lamprococcyx lucidus*

Aleya—April 1876

*Eudynamis orientalis*

Eastern Koel

*Eudynamis*  
*cynocephala*

3 ♂ Yule I.—\*December 1875

**ALCEDINIDAE**

*Ceyx azureus*

Azure Kingfisher

*Alcyon lessoni*

♂ s.e. mainland 8 miles from Yule I.—  
 November 1875

*Ceyx pusilla*

Little Kingfisher

*Alcyon pusilla*

♂ Aleya—\*April 1876

**HALCYONIDAE**

*Dacelo gaudichaudi*

Rufous-bellied  
 Kookaburra

*Dacelo gaudichaudi*

♂ Nicura—November 1875

*Dacelo leachii*

Blue-winged  
 Kookaburra

*Dacelo intermedius*

♂ & ♀ *a* & *b.* s.e. mainland—January  
 1876, *c.* ♀ Port Moresby—\*November  
 1875

*Tanysiptera galatea*

Common Paradise  
 Kingfisher

*Tanysiptera*  
*microrhyncha*

*a.* ♀ s.e. mainland 8 miles from Yule  
 I., *b* & *c.* Aleya—*a.* November 1875, *b*  
 & *c.* \*April 1876 (*a*, *b* & *c* NHMUK)

*Todiramphus chloris*

Collared Kingfisher

*Melidora collaris*

*a.* ♂ no label, *b.* ♀ Low Aleya, *c.* ♀  
 s.e. mainland—*b.* February 1876, *c.* 29  
 February 1876 (*c* NHMUK)

*Todiramphus sanctus*

Sacred Kingfisher

*Halcyon sanctus*

♀ Yule I.—April 1876

**BUCEROTIDAE**

*Rhyticeros plicatus* Blyth's Hornbill *Rhytidoceros ruficollis* *a* & *b*. Aleya—March 1876

**PITTIDAE**

*Pitta sordida* Hooded Pitta *Pitta novaeguineae* *a*. ♂ Aleya—\*April 1876, *b*. Aleya—\*April 1876

**MALURIDAE**

*Malurus alboscapulatus* White-shouldered Fairy-wren *Malurus alboscapulatus* ♂ Nicura—December 1875

*Malurus cyanocephalus* Emperor Fairy-wren *Todopsis bonapartii* *a*. s.e. mainland—February 1876, *b*. ♂ s.e. mainland 8 miles from Yule I.—November 1875

**MELIPHAGIDAE**

*Ramsayornis modestus* Brown-backed Honeyeater *Glyciphila modesta* ♂ s.e. mainland—December 1875

**CAMPEPHAGIDAE**

*Coracina melas* New Guinea Cuckooshrike *Edoliosoma melas* Aleya—April 1876

**PACHYCEPHALIDAE**

*Pseudorectes ferrugineus* Rusty Pitohui *Rectes ferruginea* *a*. Aleya—April 1876, *b*. ♀ Nicura—December 1875 (*a* or *b* NHMUK)

*Pachycephala* sp. whistler sp. *Pachycephala* sp. Aleya—April 1876 (NHMUK)

**ORIOLIDAE**

*Oriolus szalayi* Brown Oriole *Oriolus striatus* ♀ Port Moresby—\*November 1875

**ATAMIDAE**

*Cracticus cassicus* Hooded Butcherbird *Cracticus cassicus* *a* & *b*. Aleya—April 1876

*Cracticus mentalis* Black-backed Butcherbird *Cracticus mentalis* ♂ Nicura—December 1875 (NHMUK)

**CORVIDAE**

*Corvus orru* Torresian Crow *Corone orru* ♂ Yule I.—November 1875 (NHMUK)

**MONARCHIDAE**

*Arses telescopthalmus* Fritled Monarch *Arses telescopthalmus* *a*. ♂ Nicura—\*December 1875, *b*. Nicura, *c*. ♀ s.e. mainland (*c* NHMUK)

*Myiagra alecto* Shining Flycatcher *Piezorhynchus nitidus* *a* & *b*. ♂ & ♀ Yule I.—\*November 1875, *c*. Yule I.—April 1876

**PARADISAEIDAE**

*Manucodia ater* Glossy-mantled Manucode *Manucodia atra* 2♂ *a* & *b*. Yule I.—April 1876, *c*. ♂ s.e. mainland—January 1876

*Paradisaea raggiana* Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise *Paradisaea raggiana* ♂ & ♀ Aleya—April 1876

**CISTICOLIDAE**

*Cisticola exilis* Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola ruficeps* *a*. ♂ Yule I & *b*. ♀ Yule I.—*a*. November 1875, *b*. December 1875

**STURNIDAE**

*Aplonis metallica* Metallic Starling *Calornis viridescens* ♂ Yule I.—\*November 1874

*Mino dumontii* Yellow-faced Myna *Eulabes dumontii* ♀ Aleya

**NECTARINIIDAE**

*Cinnyris jugularis* Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris frenatus* ♀ s.e. mainland



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'I offered Roberts £50 for Dr James' collection from Hall Sound. The offer was promptly declined.' (Wednesday, 31 May 1876).<sup>2</sup>

Twelve of Dr James specimens now reside in the Natural History Museum at Tring. R. Bowlder Sharpe originally identified and described Dr James' birds stating that there were two more new species from New Guinea, namely Common Paradise Kingfisher '*Tanysiptera microrhyncha*' (now *T. galatea*) and Collared Kingfisher '*Melidora collaris*' (*Todiramphus chloris*) (Sharpe 1878, British Museum 1906: 384–385). However, these birds were described earlier and were not new. Near the start of Sharpe's (1878) paper describing James' birds he stated, 'A melancholy interest attaches to the present collection of Dr. James; for it is at once the first, and last, that we shall receive from him.' He also noted, in contrast to Macleay's comments, that 'all the skins were very well prepared' Sharpe also noted from Dr James' notes that the specimens of invertebrates (Coleoptera and Lepidoptera) were collected on Yule Island.

### Collecting locations in New Guinea

The birds that Sharpe described were collected on Yule Island and the New Guinea mainland around Hall Sound (Sharpe 1878) (Fig. 2). This general area was already known



Figure 2. Dr James' collection locations around Yule Island, New Guinea.

to Sharpe through the exploration of Signor D'Albertis and the published work of Count Salvadori and D'Albertis (1875). Sharpe gave descriptions of the collection sites, which were taken from Dr James' notes forwarded with the specimens by Dr Alfred Roberts (Sharpe 1878). The precise location of these sites has been determined by following Dr James' notes and using William Macleay's journal<sup>2</sup> and Lawrence Hargrave's diary<sup>6</sup>. Dr James' Coleoptera were collected at the north-west extremity of Yule Island (08°46'28.24"S, 146°30'40.52"E) and his Lepidoptera at an unknown location he described as 'low Yule Island in thick scrub' (Sharpe 1878).

Yule Island (08°49'05.7"S, 146°32'00.9"E) is c.8 km long north to south and 2 km wide east to west, with Hall Sound to the east and the Coral Sea to the west.

Aleya (08°51'34.6"S, 146°35'17.3"E) is a short salt arm (rivulet) passing through an extensive mangrove situated inside the south headland of Hall Sound.

Nicura village (08°47'49.9"S, 146°37'24.4"E) is approximately 750 m from the Ethel River, which flows into Hall Sound. Lawrence Hargrave guessed it was '3/4 mile off'<sup>6</sup> the Ethel River. Dr James had learned of this village when he first visited it with the *Chevert* Expedition in August 1875 (Fulton 2012). There is a village in the same location today, spelt Nicora. Beehler & Pratt (2016) noted variant spellings of Nikura and Nkora. In 1875, Nicura was the local peoples' name for both the Ethel River and the village (Bennett & D'Albertis 1875, D'Albertis 1880: 276). While Dr James collected variously around Nicura village, he gave particular mention to certain sites and one in particular: The village 'is bounded... on the east by the valley of the Nicura, which is a low swampy country, in the main, supporting a very heavy growth of scrub and forest trees. It is in the latter locality that birds abound' (Sharpe 1878).

South-east mainland (08°51'00.3"S, 146°33'56.9"E): Dr James collected specimens on the mainland south and south-east of Yule Island, from as far afield as 13 km south of Yule Island. The coordinates given here are for the southern head of Hall Sound on the New Guinea mainland. He also visited other sites, which are described in Sharpe (1878) and include: Selena a salt arm or rivulet, and Paiton a large village north of Yule Island. No collections have been found for these sites by this study.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Miss Emma James to Mrs Julian C. Jordan April 12, 1946; transcribed by D. S. Horning, 1995, transcript in Macleay Museum, Univ. of Sydney. Original letter held in Special Collections of Univ. of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>2</sup> William John Macleay's personal journal; transcribed by D. S. Horning, 1995, transcript in Macleay Museum, Univ. of Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> Pers. comm. from Jan Wolfley, Senior Assistant Librarian, Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Carson City, NV.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from US Consul J. H. Williams to John L. Cadwalader, Assistant Secretary of State, Washington, 14 March 1877; transcribed by D. S. Horning, 1995, transcript in Macleay Museum, Univ. of Sydney. Original letter held in Special Collections of Univ. of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>5</sup> Unpubl. notes of the author.

<sup>6</sup> Private diary of Lawrence Hargrave held by the Power House Museum, Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from W. H. James to William Macleay 7 August 1875. Original letter held in Special Collections of Univ. of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Museum Board Minutes 1 September 1893 and 2 March 1894.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsay Papers ML 2278 1(2). Private Letter Book 2 1875–78 to Dr W. H. James, Somerset, Cape York, 1 January 1876.

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