

A Remarkable Kingfisher.

There are over fifty species of the halcyonidae or kingfishers; but none is more remarkable than the one shown in our illustration. From its peculiar screaming laugh, not unlike the bray of a donkey, it has obtained the name of "the laughing jackass." Its zoological name is *dacelo*, one species, *d. gigas*, being a large bird, 18 inches long, and endowed with strength and courage; it feeds indiscriminately on any animals of suitable size, whether quadruped, bird, reptile, fish, insect, or crustacean. It is a handsome bird, being brightly colored; and its flight is quick and noiseless. Its powerful bill makes it a very formidable enemy.

The *Illustrated News*, of Adelaide, Australia, from whose pages we select the engraving, gives the following particulars of this interesting bird: "The laughing jackass is almost too well known to need description. His appearance and extraordinary notes are familiar to the inhabitants of every country village. Indeed, he frequently extends his researches into the neighborhood of towns, occasionally taking up his abode for life in some healthy suburb, and punctually entertaining the inhabitants thereof, morning and evening, with a succession of those singular sounds which have rendered his name famous. Although a kingfisher, he never procures his food from the water, after the orthodox fashion of kingfishers, but has more the habits of a bird of prey. Sitting motionless among the lower branches of some tall gum tree unnoticed, and apparently half asleep, he waits, like Micawber, for something to turn up. Suddenly, without noise, he drops off his bough and flies direct to a certain spot, whence he soon returns, bearing in his beak a lizard, a small snake, or perhaps a rat. His acuteness of sight is extraordinary. From his elevated post he seems to miss nothing, and discerns his prey in swamps and crevices, of rocks at a distance that is perfectly astounding. The laughing jackass has the advantage of being able to live on almost anything that presents itself; hence it is always in good condition, and apparently in good humor. It seems, indeed, to pass its life in self-congratulations; and when four or five meet and unite their voices, and they invariably do, morning and evening, the noise would suggest the idea that a party of devils had broken loose and were rejoicing over some piece of successful mischief. But in spite of his carefree, happy life, the laughing jackass has his peculiar duty, and he performs it conscientiously. Snake killing is his specialty; lizards, frogs, beetles, small birds, rats, etc., are his usual food. In fact, nothing comes amiss to him; let snake appear upon the scene, and the laughing jackass recognizes his quarry at once. Never hesitating, he makes straight for it, his agitation being observable by the quivering crest feathers. With some caution, he swoops backwards and forwards, seeking an opportunity to seize the reptile. The snake, with head erect, ready to strike, keeps on the alert. The excitement continues for some time till the bird finally settles down, close by, on the ground. But all his stolid heavy appearance is gone. His wings and tail quiver with agitation and eagerness. Fully alive to the dangerous character of his opponent, he keeps at a safe distance. Flitting round, his head just out of reach, he continues to annoy him, till becoming exhausted, the snake affords him the opportunity he is seeking. With the rapidity of lightning the bird descends upon his prey, then rises in the air, bearing with him the captured snake, neatly held just behind the head, in such a position as to render him perfectly powerless. Rising until he has attained a considerable height, he directs his flight to a more open part of the country, then suddenly banking in the air, he drops the reptile, following it down and reaching the ground almost at the same time. Stunned and bruised, the unfortunate snake is in no condition to renew the contest, and is very soon despatched and eaten by his victorious enemy."—*Scientific American*.

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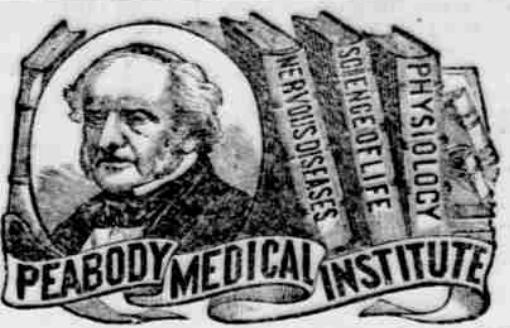
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