

The world of Jan Brandes, 1743–1808

DRAWINGS OF A DUTCH TRAVELLER IN BATAVIA,
CEYLON AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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the banks of the Kali Besar or Ciliwung, the river that ran through Batavia. Doubtlessly sharks were often caught by fishermen in the coastal waters of the Java Sea, and eaten by the inhabitants of Batavia. One can imagine the inquisitive Brandes, dressed in his black minister's garb, examining and drawing the shark amidst the fishermen, vendors and bustling crowd on the early morning market.

Probably catches such as these attracted the curious inhabitants of the city, and maybe even the scientifically minded. Apparently Brandes had some time to make a drawing of the shark from different angles and with some precision. The description remains rather short, and understandably contains no information about the shark's behaviour and habitat. What Brandes calls 'holes' in the jaws of the shark are of course the gill clefts, of which the hammerhead indeed has five. His drawing can withstand heavy criticism even today. Contemporary illustrations, such as that of J.F. Blumenbach, whose purpose was to reproduce good illustrations, are a real disaster and are based on a stuffed specimen of a hammerhead with a distorted head.² Brandes renders the form of the head and most other details with his customary talent for precision and realism. The indentures of the fins, even up to the triangular teeth, are realistically represented.

S.J. DE GROOT

1. Smith and Heemstra, *Smith's sea fishes*, 96-97.

2. Blumenbach, *Abbildungen naturhistorischer Gegenstände*, 99.

Birds

INTRODUCTION (PLATES 142-156)

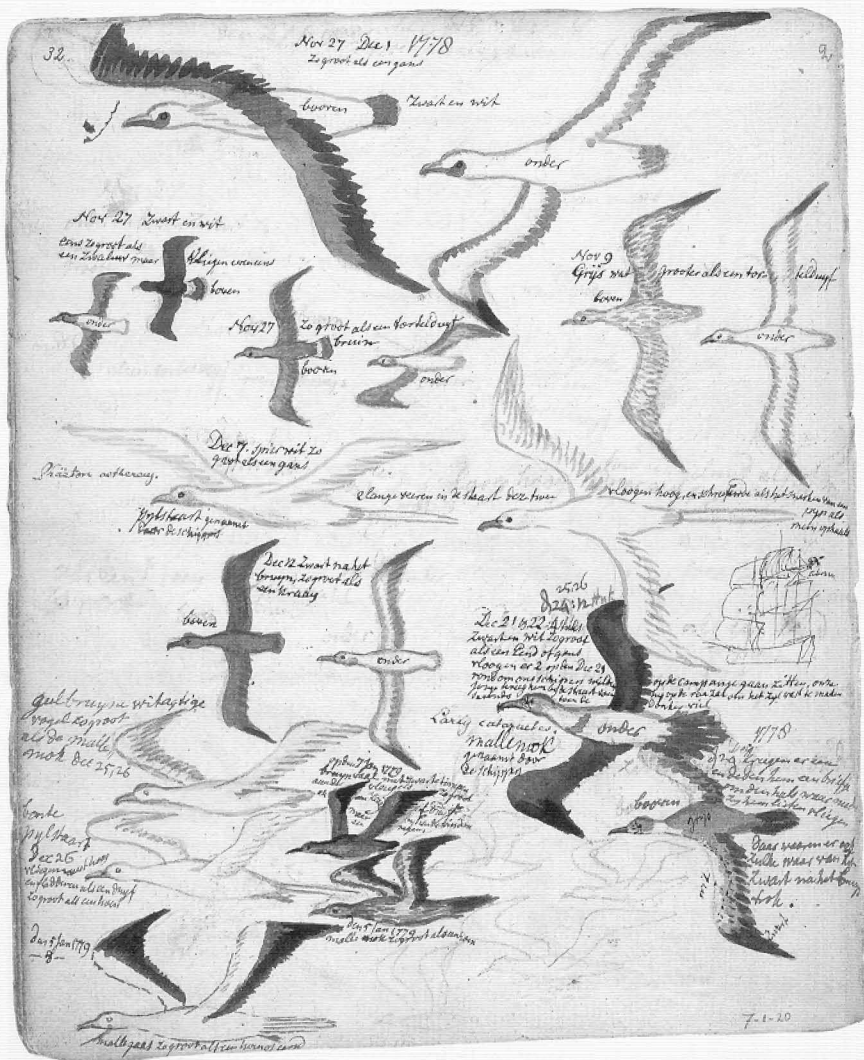
Brandes had more than just a passing interest in the study of birds. In contrast to the small number of fish and mammals found in the sketchbooks, Brandes depicted about 35 different kinds of birds, observed in all the different countries he visited. He apparently enjoyed looking at the various species that could be seen flying around the houses in which he stayed, and studying their behaviour. The birds in the drawings by Brandes can all be identified without too much effort. He was a good observer of his subjects and he drew them faithfully, with the different shades of colour and typical postures, often accompanied by a comment on their song. With only few exceptions, he did not take the time to add a land-

scape or to portray the birds in their natural surroundings.

From the drawings alone it is difficult to see if these were made from dead birds or from living specimens. In general, it is very difficult to sketch a bird when it is flying around, because it rarely perches long enough. Brandes had a good eye for detail and most of the characteristics of the birds in his drawings are correctly depicted. He may have drawn birds in nature, or in the aviary or cage in which they were kept alive. In the majority of cases, he would have used dead birds for his studies, however much he tried to give the impression that they were alive in their natural habitat.

Judging by a rather true-to-nature depiction of a swallow in an allegory composed in 1777 and some notes on the song of finches made in the same period, when he was a minister in Doetinchem, Brandes had already developed some interest in drawing and studying birds previous to his departure for the Indies.¹ But clearly his passion fully burgeoned during the sea voyage on the East Indiaman the *Holland*. Sitting on the quarterdeck Brandes filled pages of his sketchbook with all kinds of seagulls and other seabirds to be seen from his ship.

On his arrival in Batavia in 1779, Brandes already owned a small collection of live birds, mostly canary birds, which were presented to him by fellow Lutherans at the Cape. In the following years he apparently started collecting Indonesian birds too, live as well as stuffed. On 10 September 1784, when depositing an amount of money with the Company, Brandes was approached by the cash dispenser, Gijsbert Jacob Welgevaren, who commissioned him to stuff some birds for an unnamed mayor of Amsterdam. He must have known of Brandes' collection or of his – or rather his slaves' – skills in preparation. Welgevaren promised him hundred rix-dollars for the job and brought him 'three birds of paradise, two parakeets and two cockatoos' to be stuffed. Welgevaren must have supplied more birds later. Brandes may also have used some birds from his own collection, as he sent some species which he already had depicted before taking the assignment, such as the nightjar and the quail (see Plates 144 and 145). In October Brandes listed 21 types, of which he sent some thirty stuffed specimens to Holland. All the birds are designated by Dutch names, without further scientific classification. It is likely that these lists were meant to be studied in conjunction with the bird specimens, because otherwise it would have



Birds seen from the East
Indiaman Holland, 1778.
Water-colour over sketch in
pencil, Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam, inv.nr.
NG-1985-7-1-20.

been very difficult to be sure which species was indicated by a certain name.

During the same months he was working for Welgevaren, Brandes purchased several cockatoos to keep as domestic pets. In one of his drawings showing the interior of the living room in his home near Batavia, we see them on perches suspended from the wall or from the ceiling (see Plate 28). Notably, he paid a considerable amount of money for these birds, about twenty rix-dollars. Normally a frugal man who seldom indulged in personal luxury items, Brandes had probably spent some of the money he had earned by Welgevaren's commission.

It is possible that Brandes also had an aviary in or near his house. There is another of his sketches showing a row of bird cages.² Although this may have been a design for a kind of box in which to transport live birds on board a ship, it at least shows that Brandes was engaged in keeping a number of live birds. When he left Batavia, Brandes tried to take some of his live birds back to Europe. Most of them did not survive the sea voy-

age: in October 1786 while at the Cape, Brandes mentions that 'only five are still alive'. Apparently Brandes used his stay on the estate Vergenoegd to enlarge his collection of stuffed animals, relating that he stuffed 'some birds for pleasure'.³ Apart from the dead specimen, he managed to take a large cockatoo alive to Sweden, where he continued to enjoy its company.

We know very little of Brandes' collection of stuffed birds, what he collected or how he displayed the contents of his, presumably small, cabinet of natural history specimens. He could have preserved insects and bird skins flat in a drawer if his mind was purely on scientific pursuits, but this is unlikely, because in most cases these collections were intended to be admired and enjoyed. There are no traces of any stuffed birds in the drawings of the interior of his house, or elsewhere, but he may have kept them in a special room. After Brandes settled in Sweden, his friend Sven Ingemar Ljung wrote to Professor Carl Peter Thunberg in Uppsala about the collection. In 1798 he stated that Brandes had a good selection of birds and that he himself had received 54 'Chinese birds' from him.⁴ Many of these smaller private collections changed hands after the owner's death. If the specimens were auctioned, some kind of record may have been compiled of the contents in the sales catalogue. Many, however, were dispersed by other means and we will never know who owned what, or why. That seems to have been the case with Brandes' cabinet, although the more important items, like the birds from China, could have been given to Ljung at some stage. Ljung's bird collection was bought by Gustaf von Paykull (1757-1826), a marshal at the Swedish court, who eventually donated his extensive collection of natural history specimens to the Swedish authorities, to become the foundation of the Riksmuseet in Stockholm. It is just possible that one or more specimens of birds once owned by Brandes may still be in this institution. Ljung himself specialized in insects and other small animals, many of which were later sold to the University of Lund and to the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, Mass.⁵

Ljung carefully examined the animal drawings made by Brandes and wrote the scientific name on each of them. Although he may have suspected quite quickly that a few represented birds were as yet unknown to science, he did not rush into print. He took his time, maybe to ensure that he was correct by studying other books and articles on similar subjects. Ljung was a careful worker.

Out of fourteen papers that he wrote for scientific journals in Sweden, there are three about birds from Java, illustrated with monochrome plates based on the sketches by Brandes. Strangely enough, the originals of the engravings of these three species of birds are absent from the sketchbook. Maybe they will still be found at some later stage. However, the study of birds was still very much in its infancy and Ljung is still credited today as the first author to propose the names for these three species, the bay-banded cuckoo, the three-toed woodpecker, and the band-bellied crake.⁶

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. RMA, inv.nr. NG-1985-7-1-18 and page 26 in the same sketchbook.

2. RMA, inv.nr. NG-1985-7-6.

3. KJB, Brandes to Determeyer Weslingh, 10 Oct. 1786.

4. Löwegren, *Naturaliekabinett i Sverige*, 340.

5. Löwegren, *Naturaliekabinett i Sverige*, 360.

6. See Ljung, 'Picus javanensis', 'Cuculus musicus' and 'En ny fogel, Rallus paykulii'.

142

Bay-headed bee-eater

Sitting on the veranda of his house near Batavia in Java, overlooking his plantations, Brandes could have witnessed the small flocks of bee-eaters congregating on the branches in the trees. From these resting places, the birds swoop down to catch flies and butterflies, an act which is accompanied by a loud noise made by the beak. Brandes described this habit quite well and there is no doubt that he recorded it from his personal observation. Bee-eaters are characterized by their swooping flight in search of bees, wasps and other insects, as well as by their predominantly green plumage and long slender bill. The family of the bee-eaters (Meropidae) is represented by a large number of colourful species throughout the tropical and temperate regions of the Old World. The drawing shows a bay-headed bee-eater designated *Merops leschenaulti* in the nomenclature of Linnaeus.¹ Ljung mistook the bird for *Merops viridis* (blue-throated bee-eater) named by Linnaeus in 1758.

Brandes says that he caught these birds using bird-lime. One wonders if it was a normal practice in those days to coat branches in the gardens with bird-lime to catch birds. If Brandes, or his slaves, resorted to this custom, they probably did

so to eat their prey. The bird in the drawing looks quite life-like, but of course Brandes could well have sketched it after it was caught, because he had seen them flying around in the garden. It is remarkable that he mentions two birds in the text at the top of the drawing. Actually, both the remark at the bottom and the second name added by Ljung, 'Certhia viridis?' (probably meant to be a kind of sunbird) seem to pertain to a sketch which is now absent from this page in the sketchbook.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. We want to thank Dr René Dekker from the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden for the identification of the species.

143

Bird of paradise

When Jacob van Heemskerck negotiated a treaty with the rulers of Ambon in 1599, he took time to satisfy his curiosity about the birds of paradise, which even then were known to live in the region. He learned that these birds were most common on the island of Ceram, that they always flew against the wind, and that they were never caught alive. It was easy, however, to kill them, because when these birds wanted to drink, they gathered in a large flock, and once clustered above a pool of water, one of the birds drank alone first and the others followed. When a little poison was added to the water in the interval between the first bird and the rest of the flock, the majority would then die and were collected by the local inhabitants. They discarded the flesh and legs, as they were only interested in the skin and the feathers which were used for decorating hats and clothing.¹

The few specimens that reached Europe during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries were greatly treasured by owners of cabinets of natural history for their rarity and aesthetic qualities, but those with feet attached were especially esteemed. When Linnaeus named the greater bird of paradise, the *Paradisaea apoda* in 1758, he referred to this lack of feet (Latin: *apoda*), even though by his time complete specimens were not as rare as they had once been.

Brandes had heard about another method of killing the birds without damaging the skin and the feathers. One man would knock the bird down with blunt arrows for another to collect it

142

Bay-headed
bee-eaterWater-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 x 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-40.



'Deeze twee gevangen met lym in Batavia den 29 maart 1785, hy vangt koornbouten en vliegen al vliegende in de lugt, en zet zig telkens op een hooge verdorde tak van een boom om te rusten, schirpt als een belletje waare groote' 'Merops viridis g.' 'Certhia viridis?' 'waare groote, zingt of liever fluit, leeft van wormtjes in de boomen'

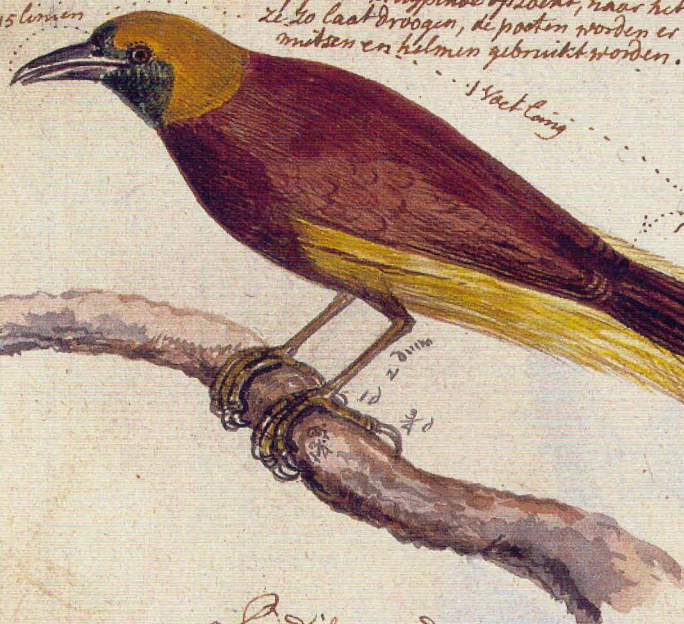
These two were caught using bird-lime in Batavia on 29 March 1785. He catches dragonflies and flies while in flight, and he will alight on a high withered branch of a tree to rest, he makes noise like a bell, life-size.

Merops viridis g.

Certhia viridis?

Life-size, sings or rather whistles, lives on grubs from the trees.

15 lijnen

*Paradisaea apoda.*

De twee staart vieren zijn uit als baluntes, maar zijn effectieve veeren, over twee voet lang, die als kaal en verslechten uitkomen, staan recht uit, en kunnen niet door de vogel krom getrokken worden, zo als men zegt, luiten waerheid, om er zig mee aan de boom te hangen, hy heeft een klein bruin staartje en bruine vleugels, en groote grove gele poeten, met groote kromme sterke en scherpe nagels. Ik heb er zo 12 stuks dood gehad, die afgetrokken waren met de poeten, & vleugels, haer raan, en een houtje door de neus gaaten om ze daar by op te kunnen hangen. De Indianen meenen dat zy door deze playra schoot vrij zijn.

Dit staart recht uit en is 2 voet lang

143 Bird of paradise

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,
19.5 x 15.5 cm.
Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam,
inv.nr. NG-1985-7-1-32.

'Paradys vogel komt van Ambon, en de specery Eylanden in Oost Indien, men zijde mij dat de Inlanders in een boom daar zy veele nesten in hebben, een bedekte hutje maaken, waar in een man gaat zitten, stil, en als de vogel in de boom komt om te zitten, hy dezelve met klyne stompe pylen doot schiet, zo dat zy op de aarde vallen, waar onder een andere hutje is voor een man, die ook zagtjes ze kruypende opzoekt, haar het vel aftrekt, en een stokje door de bek er in steekt en ze zo laat droogen, de pooten worden er zelden aangelaaten, omdat zy voor pluimen op de mutsen en helmen gebruikt worden. De twee lange zwarte kaal afgesleetene veeren in de staart zyn 2 voet lang. De geele bos veeren langs de buyk en langs de staart komt niet uit de staart, maar uit de zyden van de buik beneden de borst. de staart is apart, zo als by andere voogels.'

The bird of paradise comes from Ambon and the Spice Islands in the East Indies. I was told that the natives make a covered hut in a tree containing many nests, then a man will sit inside, quietly, and when the bird comes to perch in the tree, he is shot dead with small blunt arrows. Then the bird falls on the ground, where another hut has been constructed for somebody, who crawls quietly, collects the bird, and removes the skin, then puts a stick through the beak and lets it dry. The feet are rarely left attached, because the feathers are used for caps and helmets. The two long, black, thinned feathers in the tail are two feet long. The yellow bunch of feathers along the belly and near the tail is not part of the tail, but comes from the sides of the belly beneath the breast. The tail is separate, as in other birds.

and take off the skin and feathers. He too mentioned that the legs were usually discarded, but at the same time stated that he had seen a dozen of these bird skins complete with legs and wings. There must have been a lively trade in all kinds of birds of paradise, which live only on the Moluccan islands and in New Guinea. This is immediately evident from the fact that Brandes had seen such a large number of specimens. One wonders how many of these were sent to Europe to be sold to the growing number of cabinet owners. We should imagine that Brandes kept at least one, if not more, for his own small collection of bird skins.

When Brandes was at the Cape of Good Hope, he asked his legal proxies in Batavia to forward to him six birds of paradise and four bats.² He stipulated that they should be freshly bought and not moth-eaten. He gave instructions intimating that one of his former slaves in Batavia, a woman called Timang, knew how to prepare them correctly. Brandes did not state for which purpose he wanted the birds or the bats, but the reference to the latter is surprising, as bats could hardly have had much commercial or intrinsic value.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. De Jonge a.o. (eds), *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag* 11, 422.

2. KJB, Brandes to De Elwijk and Ter Schegget, 10 Oct. 1786.

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Nightjar

This is a lively drawing of a rather dull-looking bird. Brandes made a good effort to show the specimen at its best, with a beautiful round black eye, an open mouth ready to start calling, and bright, well-marked feathers. The bird is a nightjar, and therefore belongs to a large family occurring almost world-wide in a large variety of species, all nocturnal and similar in habits as well as appearance. On the basis of its locality Brandes must have seen the savanna nightjar, which was named *Caprimulgus affinis*. The specimen in the sketch looks as if it is still alive, ready to fly away to start looking for food, and it is yet more evidence of how carefully Brandes observed the animals in his neighbourhood.

Nightjars are not particularly rare, but they are only seen occasionally, often sitting on the road, because they are unobtrusive and hidden by darkness. Maybe Brandes had a small colony of

them in his garden. He knew that they only come out in the evening, at the same time as the bats, and in fact the nightjar, like them, also flies around in search of insects and other small creatures to eat. Brandes noticed that there were two kinds of call. One a repeated chucking sound, which must have annoyed him endlessly when he was trying to enjoy a quiet evening in the garden. A second kind of call was heard only when there were two birds together, presumably in the mating season, which sounded like the call ('laugh', Brandes wrote) of a cuckoo. Brandes not only had a good eye and ear, but he was interested enough in birds to observe them and remember their habits over a period of time. He did not attempt to generalize his sightings or to compare different species, he just recorded what he saw, both in text and in sketch.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

145

Blue-breasted quail

This quail was probably quite common in the areas in Java where Brandes lived. It is a master in hiding in grass and is often first noticed when it suddenly explodes at your feet and then flies away straight in front with rapid movements of the wings before dropping back into cover a short distance ahead. The bird is a male of the blue-breasted quail, which was known to Linnaeus in 1758 as *Tetrao chinensis* and is now called *Coturnix chinensis*. It is one of the large family of Phasianidae, which includes not only quails, but also partridges and pheasants. Although birds of this family are found all over the world, Southeast Asia has the greatest number of species. Brandes noted that the males with their bright colours differ from the females. On another page of his sketchbook, also in January 1785, he depicted another – or perhaps the same – male, describing it as an 'Oost-Indisch patrijsje' (small East Indian partridge).¹

Quails and partridges are often hunted as game in temperate climates, but this is impractical in Asia, because they are usually found in dense forests. There is no evidence that the birds were ever domesticated, although it is believed that the quails and partridges of Southeast Asia were the ancestor of all domestic chickens. Quails were known as a delicacy and a good source of food, for which reason the people in Java often tried to trap them. Brandes was obviously interested in ways



Caprimulgus (europaeus &) javanensis

5 Julii 1784

Een nacht Vogel, die een geluyd maakt, op de grond in de maane schyn zittende, als of men met een haamer op een helderluydent plankje sloeg: tjuk tjuk tjuk 1000 maal agter elkander, en ook lagt als een koekkoek, wanneer zyn paar in de maneschyn by hem komt zitten. Leeft van vliegen, keevers en muggen, die hy in de maaneschyn telkens opvliegende vangt. Overdag ziet men hem niet, maar alleen s' avonds als de vleermuyzen uitvliegen. hy is een wynig grooter als hier afgebeeld is; dog net zo van couleur en vlakken.

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Nightjar

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,
19.5 x 15.5 cm.
Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam,
inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-96.

'Caprimulgus (europaeus &) javanensis'

'5 Julii 1784'

'Een nacht vogel, die een geluyd maakt, op de grond in de maane schyn zittende, als of men met een haamer op een helderluydent plankje sloeg: tjuk tjuk tjuk 1000 maal agter elkander, en ook lagt als een koekkoek, wanneer zyn paar in de maneschyn by hem komt zitten. Leeft van vliegen, keevers en muggen, die hy in de maaneschyn telkens opvliegende vangt. Overdag ziet men hem niet, maar alleen s' avonds als de vleermuyzen uitvliegen. hy is een wynig grooter als hier afgebeeld is; dog net zo van couleur en vlakken.'

Caprimulgus (europaeus &) javanensis.

5 July 1784.

A night bird, which makes a noise, sitting on the ground in the moonlight, as if somebody were hitting a resonant timber with a hammer: chuk chuk chuk, a thousand times in succession, and it laughs like a cuckoo when its mate comes to sit with it in the moonlight. It lives on flies, beetles and mosquitoes, which it catches by the light of the moon, flying up many times to do so. The bird is never seen by day, only in the evening when the bats fly around. He is a little larger than depicted here, but he has the same colour and spots.

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Blue-breasted
quailWater-colour over
sketch in pencil,

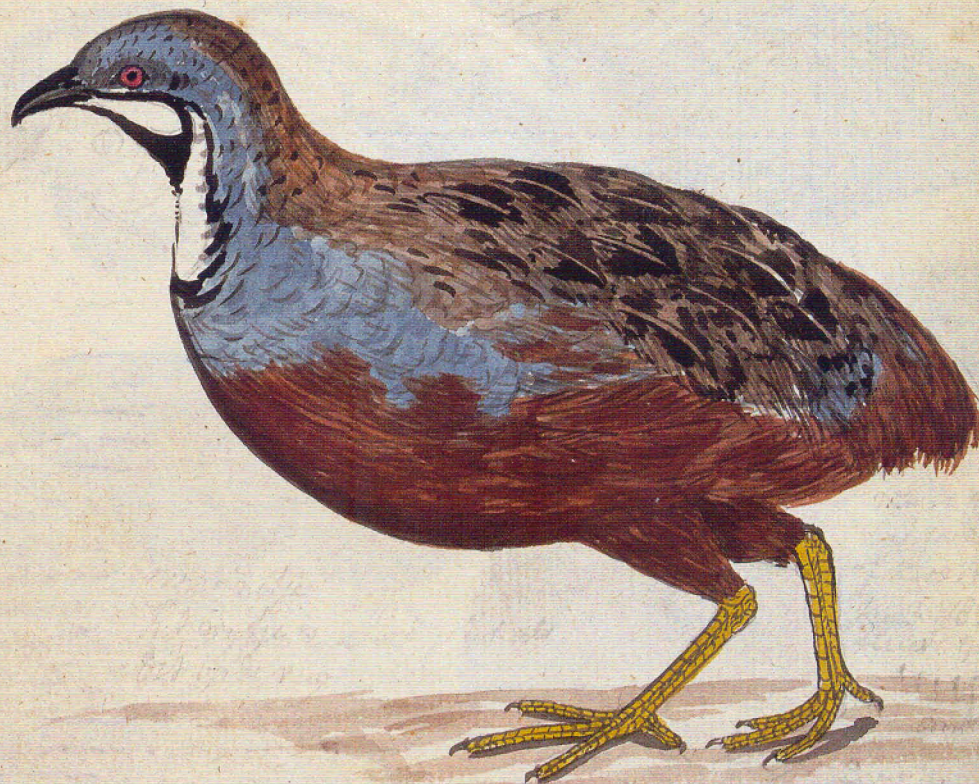
19.5 × 15.5 cm.



Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv.nr. NG-1985-7-1-90.

Oost Indische quartels Mannetje. Het wyfje is geheel grys zo als het mannetje op
waare groote, getekend den 3 Jan. 1785 de rug uitziet. *Tetrao sinensis* 141



hy fluit op tweederly wyze 1, 2, 3, 4 5  ook anders  alsof hy fluite
pipiko

7-1-90

10.

'OostIndische quartels mannetje. Het wyfje is geheel grys zo
als het mannetje op de rug uitziet.

'waare groote, getekend den 3 Jan. 1785'

'Tetrao sinensis.'

'hy fluit op tweederly wyze 1,2,3,4 5 ... ook anders ... alsof hij
fluite pipiko'

East Indian quail, male. The female is completely grey like
the colour on the back of the male.

Life-size, drawn on 3 January 1785. *Tetrao sinensis*.

He whistles in two ways 1,2,3,4 5 ... also different ... as if he
were whistling pipiko.

to find quails since he depicted and described a small flute presumably used by the people in Ceylon to lure the birds to places where they can be caught.² To make the instrument which could be used efficiently for this purpose, it had to reproduce the bird's call exactly. Brandes studied how it sang and noted that there are two calls, one a little longer than the other. He even noted its musical setting.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. RMA, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-101.

2. RMA, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-91.

146

Birds from Ambon

We can almost follow Brandes on his regular visits to the market in Batavia, where there must have been a booming trade in caged birds and other pets. Many of these birds came from the Moluccas in general and from Ambon in particular, rather than from Java itself. This is an indication that the Moluccans had mastered the art of capturing birds without harming them too much, probably because they had practised on the valuable and much sought-after birds of paradise. Many birds found in the market would have been bought to be eaten or to be used for medicinal purposes. Brandes, however, also kept some of them alive in an aviary, which afforded him enormous pleasure and allowed him to study their behaviour intimately.

This drawing is dated 30 October 1784, the same day on which he sketched the cockatoo found on Plate 147. Brandes depicted six birds of five different species. The birds all appear alive and well. Quite certainly they are the same birds Brandes had bought on 4 and 25 October 1784, each bird costing him between two and four rix-dollars. And most likely he also depicted them in the upstairs room of his house (see Plate 28). Obviously Brandes spent considerable time studying his pet animals.

All these birds can be easily identified, with a male and female purple-naped lory (*Lori domicella*) at the top, flanking a chattering lory (*Lori garrulus*) between them. The lower line depicts from left to right a white cockatoo (*Cacatua alba*), a red lory (*Eos bornea*), and an Edward's lory (*Trichoglossus haematodus*). All these species belong to one large family comprising parakeets, lorikeets, and cockatoos (Psittacidae), found on all

continents except Europe. Those depicted by Brandes came from Ambon or possibly from other islands in the Moluccas. The colourful, popular birds differ little in their habits in the wild, being wonderful climbers and often gathering in large flocks.

There must have been many other Europeans in Batavia who kept birds in cages or in aviaries in their gardens. Brandes allows us to identify the species which were available to them and gives us a glimpse of a regular early trade in wildlife.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

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Cockatoo

Parrots and cockatoos have been favourite aviary birds for a long time. They are pretty and clever, they can learn to mimic human speech. Above all, they are hardy and long-lived. Marco Polo brought back sixty parrots from China.¹ Although it may have taken a bit longer for the fashion to spread, these birds were certainly not uncommon as pets in the eighteenth century. There were some living in the menagerie of Blau Jan in Amsterdam in 1751 and probably could be seen in quite a number of privately owned aviaries in Holland and elsewhere in Europe.²

Brandes purchased his specimen of the salmon-crested cockatoo from Ambon in Batavia on 25 October 1784, presumably at one of Batavia's markets. He kept it in an upstairs room of his house (see Plate 28). He reported that the bird was able to speak, but does not inform us if he was the one who taught it, and if it spoke Dutch, or Malay, or perhaps even Swedish? Brandes enjoyed the company of his talking cockatoo, made several sketches of it, and listened to its chatter. He liked the bird so much that he made a special effort to take it with him back to Europe and it was a good traveller, as it survived the long journey via Ceylon, the Cape of Good Hope, and Holland to their final destination in Sweden. Even there, the bird still lived for many years, despite the change in climatic conditions.

Brandes drew the bird on 30 October 1784, about four years before the species was officially named *Psittacus moluccensis* by Johann Friedrich Gmelin in the thirteenth edition of the *Systema naturae* of 1789. Today it is referred to another genus and called *Cacatua moluccensis*. The notes on this page tell us something of its own history.

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Birds from
Ambon

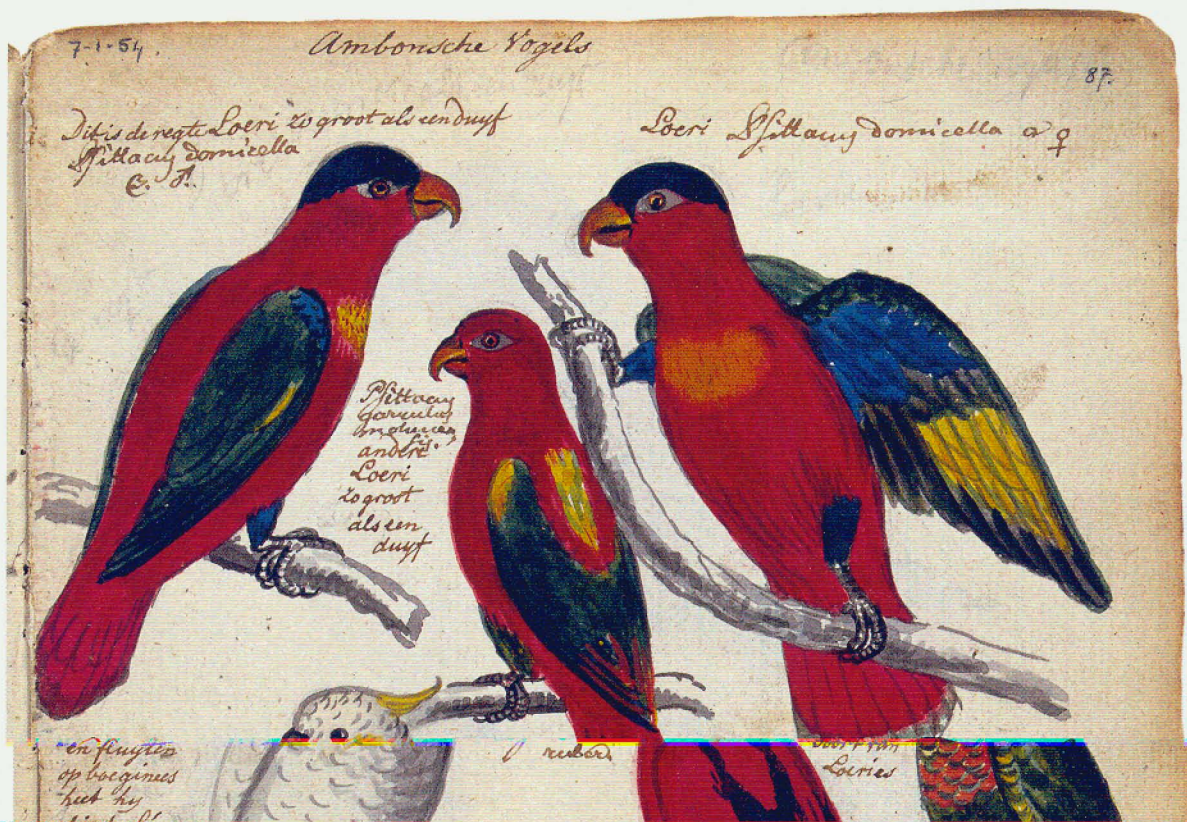
Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 x 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-54.



147

Cockatoo

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 x 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-51.



'Ambonsche groote kakatoe, op boeginees genaamt Béka zo groot als een hoen. Deeze heb ik uit Oost Indien na Zweeden gebragt en aldaar lang gehad hy was roodagtig wit, met carmozyn roode veederen onder de lange kuyf veederen, hy kon spreken en grof fluiten als een mensch geteekend den 30 october 1784.
Psittacus moluccensis.'

Large cockatoo from Ambon, called Béka in the Buginese language, as large as a chicken. I brought it with me from the East Indies to Sweden, where I kept it for a long time. It was reddish white, with crimson red feathers under the long feathers of the crest. It could talk and whistle like a man.
Drawn on 30 October 1784.
Psittacus moluccensis.

The bird was drawn in 1784. However, the text can only have been added many years later, in Sweden, because Brandes refers to its longevity. The date for the sketch must have been taken from his diary or from a notebook, otherwise he could not have remembered it in such detail. There is another sketch on the reverse of the same sheet, without annotations, where the cockatoo is shown in an excited state with a raised crest and spread wings.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. Kisling, *Zoo and aquarium history*, 34.

2. Loisel, *Histoire des ménageries* II, 52.

148

Blue-eared kingfisher

This is a nice drawing of a kingfisher, one of the colourful and beautiful birds which were commonly seen in the vicinity of Batavia. There are many kinds of kingfishers (family Alcedinidae) distributed over all continents, easily recognizable by their upright posture, their habit of sitting motionless on a branch or a stone, powerful beaks, and bright plumage. While all species in Europe live near streams and catch fish by diving into the water obliquely (hence the name), some Asian kingfishers are found in the forest and eat insects.

There is no evidence that Brandes ever caught a kingfisher and kept it alive near his house. Although he may have seen or owned a stuffed specimen, he could also have made this sketch from a wild bird. In that case, he must have watched the bird at the side of a stream, observing and drawing and even getting its measurements relatively right. It shows that he had a keen eye, because it is not often that the bird will sit still long enough for a drawing to be completed.

Brandes depicted a blue-eared kingfisher, also called *Alcedo meninting*. When Ljung classified and named the animals in the sketchbooks, he used the combination *Alcedo caeruleo-cephala*, which literally translates as 'kingfisher with a blue head'. *Alcedo* is the name of the genus of kingfishers provided by Linnaeus in 1758, who differentiated seven species from various countries. Apparently, the specific name 'caeruleo-cephala' was Ljung's own invention, not copied from another eighteenth-century source. The scientific nomenclature of animals is bound by very strict rules, devised to guarantee the greatest

possible stability of names. In this case, these stipulate that Ljung's nomenclature is invalid, because it has never been printed in a well-defined set of possible publications. This was only realized in the nineteenth century, by Thomas Horsfield writing in 1821 that the blue-eared kingfisher, found from India through Southeast Asia to the Philippines, had to be distinguished from the other known species.

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149

Wagtail with fruit

Although one wonders, here as elsewhere, why Brandes picked this particular bird to be sketched when he was in Ceylon, he did a good job of portraying the forest wagtail, called *Dendronanthus indica* by Johann Friedrich Gmelin in 1789. It is a Chinese bird which migrates to Ceylon and South India from September to April. Wagtails form one large family with the pipits (Motacillidae) and are found world-wide. Wagtails walk or run on the ground, displaying a backward and forward motion of the head and a constant up and down movement of the tail. The forest wagtail is often seen perching in trees, swaying the whole body and tail stiffly from side to side. Brandes was correct in saying that it does not hop around like other small birds, but in fact walks over the ground with little flutters into the air to catch a passing insect. The bird has nothing to do with the fruit, a 'poisonous apple', drawn by Brandes two weeks later.

At the time that Brandes made the drawing, on 29 November 1785, he was living in the country house of Daniel Ditloff, Count Van Ranzow, on the outskirts of Colombo in Ceylon. He must have seen this bird in the garden walking around among dead leaves or undergrowth in search of tiny insects. He says that it ate flies and caterpillars, but may have guessed rather than observed this himself. When the forest wagtail is alarmed, it flies up to a nearby branch, without making any sound, wags its tail about, and after a while will resume feeding.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

148

Blue-eared
kingfisher

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-61.



'batavisch visvangend vogeltje waare groote'
'Alcedo caeruleocephala.'

A bird which catches fish, from Batavia, life-size.
Alcedo caeruleocephala.

Wagtail with fruit

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,
19.5 × 15.5 cm.
Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam,
inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-48.



'Ceylons Vogelty, het marcheerd als een kwikstaart, huft niet, leeft van vliegen en rupsen. Nov 28. 1785.

Todus plumbeus?

'Ceylonsche adams appel. is vergiftig, het vringt een de keel toe, zodat men in 3 dagen niet eten of drinken kan. 29 Nov 1785.'

Bird from Ceylon, it marches along like a wagtail, does not hop, eats flies and caterpillars. 28 November 1785.

Todus plumbeus?

Ceylonese Adam's apple, is poisonous. It constricts the throat, after which you cannot eat or drink for three days. 29 November 1785.

Paradise flycatchers

It is not surprising that Brandes was charmed by the agile movements of these birds darting after flies or twisting and turning in the air with the two long streamers in the tail fluttering in the breeze. He saw the paradise flycatcher in Ceylon where it is a common bird. It had first been described by Carolus Linnaeus in 1758. He named them *Corvus paradisi*. Linnaeus used a very limited number of genus names in his natural system. This had to be amended when new species were discovered, when known species were better investigated, and more recently when genus names have been taken to give information about the affinities and evolution of the birds. Taxonomists take for granted that species often shift from one genus to another for theoretical reasons. In this case, Ljung placed this flycatcher in the genus *Muscicapa* with the specific name *paradisi* taken from Linnaeus, while today we use the combination *Terpsiphone paradisi*. Ornithologists recognize two subspecies in Ceylon, one resident, the other migrating south from the Indian mainland in winter only, but they are very difficult to tell apart in the field.

Both the birds depicted by Brandes were males, having the two long streamers in the tail, with the difference in the colour of the upper parts attributable either to different subspecies or to the age of the animal. Although Brandes sketched them life-size, he had no space for the streamers which can reach a length of about 40 cm. Female flycatchers are different in appearance, lacking the long feathers in the tail and with a smaller crest on the head. The males of the paradise flycatcher usually sit in the higher branches of trees, often opening and shutting their feathers in a scissor-like movement. They make short aerial sallies after insects, often returning to the same branch afterwards, their fluttering ribbons presenting a spectacle of exquisite charm. Brandes recorded the fashion among ladies for decorating their heads with the long feathers of the tail, which was probably popular during the period that he visited Ceylon. Certainly the populations of the flycatchers were not severely depleted because of this practice.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

Crowned pigeon

Crowned pigeons with their beautiful blue-coloured body and remarkable crown of feathers on the head have been much sought after as aviary birds. They live in New Guinea and the Moluccan islands, from where many birds were exported during the period in which Brandes travelled in the Indies. The crowned pigeons have been severely hunted for a long time, to the point that they have become very rare in their original habitat. Brandes was correct in writing that crowned pigeons are larger than chickens, about the size of a small turkey. He did not elaborate on and we do not know what happened to this particular specimen.

By the time that Brandes sketched the bird on the *Stavenisse* during the journey from Ceylon to the Cape of Good Hope, the Crowned Pigeon was already well known. It had been described by Peter Simon Pallas, when this Russian scientist worked on a collection of stuffed birds sold by Adriaan Vroeg in The Hague in 1764 and he named it, rather obviously, *Columba cristata*, later amended to *Goura cristata*.¹ Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society in England and owner of a large cabinet, went to see the menagerie at the Cape of Good Hope in 1771 and saw a group of crowned pigeons in the gardens.² These are just a few instances, because the trade in these animals, both dead and alive, must have been enormous.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. See Rookmaaker and Pieters, 'Birds in the sales catalogue'.

2. Rookmaaker, *The zoological exploration of southern Africa*, 33.

Chestnut munia

As part of the despatch for the unnamed mayor of Amsterdam, through mediation of Gijsbert Jacob Welgevaren, Brandes had sent four stuffed species to Europe of what he called 'rice birds'. All of these were sent in pairs, very likely each consisting of a male and a female. These two birds probably match a couple of 'rice birds brown with a black chest and a white belly' described on the list for Welgevaren. They are a male (left) and a

150

Paradise flycatcher

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 31 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-38.



'glinsterd als zilver. waare groote. muscicapa paradisi á femina? 9 Nov 1785 Ceylons Vogeltje, waarvan de dames de twee lange staartvederen op het hoofd draagen'

Glistens like silver. Life-size. Muscicapa paradisi α femina? 9 November 1785. Ceylonese bird, of which the ladies wear two long tail-feathers on their head.

151

Paradise flycatcher

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 31 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-39.



'1785. 9 Nov Ceylons voogeltje muscicapa paradisi β. mas.?'

9 November 1785. Ceylonese bird Muscicapa paradisi β. mas.?

152

Crowned pigeon

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-119.



'kroonvogel'

'Alcedo cristata β.'

'zo groot als een kalkoen'

'geteekend op het O.I. Comp.^s schip Stavenisse den 24 Febr
1786 [...]

Crowned pigeon

Alcedo cristata β.

The size of a turkey.

Drawn on the VOC ship the Stavenisse on 24 February 1786.

153

Chestnut munia

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,
19.5 x 15.5 cm.
Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam,
inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-33.



'Rystvogeltjes mannetje en wyfje, getekend den 16 april 1786
op Zee naby de Kaap de goede hoop na gestorvene
voogeltjes.'

Rice birds, male and female, drawn on 16 April 1786, at sea
near the Cape of Good Hope, after birds that had died.

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 x 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-56.



'Caapsche Canarivogels, waare groote'

'Fringilla Canaria. groengeele Caapse Canar[i] vogel, zingt schreeuwende op een toon.'

'Fringilla Alario. Bruyne Caapse Canari vogel, heeft een zagt sissende stem, maar leerd ook de slag van andere vogels'

'Caapsche spreeuw Loria capensis.'

'Caaps Cijse. ziet uit als een geelegors en zingt ook byna zo. Fringilla Citrinella.'

Cape canary birds, life-size.

Fringilla Canaria. Yellow-green Cape canary bird, sings harshly in one tone.

Fringilla Alario. Brown Cape canary bird, has a soft sputtering voice, but also learns the song of other birds.

Cape sparrow, Loria capensis.

Cape siskin. Looks like a yellow bunting and sings in almost the same way. Fringilla citrinella.

female of the chestnut munia (*Lonchura malacca* in Linneaus' nomenclature).

Understandably Brandes described the chestnut munia and other species of munia as 'rice birds', although the bird officially named the rice bird is a completely different species. Munia can still be observed flying in large flocks – by the hundreds as Brandes mentions on another drawing of a munia – over the rice fields in Indonesia.¹ Since they eat rice, as well as seeds and cereals, they are considered a great nuisance by farmers. Children are often deployed to protect the crops, chasing away the flocks by shouting and wielding noise-making devices.

Brandes too will have had trouble with munia and probably caught them when foraging in the paddy fields on his estate. Nevertheless he liked them enough to keep them alive and even to take them to Europe with him when he left Batavia in August 1785. Unfortunately for Brandes, the two tiny birds depicted here did not survive the sea voyage from Ceylon to the Cape of Good Hope. He recounted that he made the drawing from the dead animals, depicting them as he remembered them when they were still alive.²

Many sailors and passengers tried to take live birds home, either to keep or to sell. Some birds could even be sold for their skins, but only if somebody could prepare the skin and if the birds were colourful enough or strange enough to have some market value. Brandes gives us only a fleeting glimpse of this practice, but we certainly get the impression that the decks of the ships returning home were full of animals in all sorts and shapes. There were also the occasional larger mammals, even elephants, but the smaller types would have been far more numerous.

The ships were eagerly awaited by owners of cabinets in Europe. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Albertus Seba, for instance, was able to assemble an extensive and unique cabinet of naturalia and medicines by visiting the incoming ships on the IJ in Amsterdam, just a few steps away from his house and shop in the Haarlemmerstraat.³

There is nothing particularly exciting about these two small birds in the drawing. Why somebody had taken the trouble to catch them and keep them alive in the first place remains a bit of a mystery, but then again, there was probably a market for every animal that reached the shores of Europe alive. People liked the unknown, although the grander species would obviously have fetched far better prices than small ones like this.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. RMA, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-101.

2. We want to thank Dr René Dekker from the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden for the identification and further information on the species.

3. Pieters, 'Het schatrijke naturaliën-kabinet', 22.

154

Cape birds

On the outward voyage from Holland to Batavia in 1778, Brandes spent a few weeks at the Cape of Good Hope, where he became acquainted with the members of the Lutheran church congregation. When it was time to leave, he was laden with presents, among which there were '2 Cape canaries variegated, a siskin (from the Cape), a yellow Cape canary'. The variegated canaries were presented in a cage with four compartments.¹ Considering the similarity in the names found in the caption to this drawing to those in the list of presents dated 1778, it is quite likely that Brandes depicted these particular birds here. He took them with him to Batavia. Several of them survived several years, enabling Brandes to make comments on their song. Apparently he was quite fond of them as he noted in his diary when they died: the siskin in June 1781 and the green canary 'died of starvation' in December 1781.²

The fact that the people in Cape Town decided to include some live birds among the presents shows that Brandes must have been interested in birdlife even at this period of his life, and more particularly that he liked to keep them alive in an aviary. All the birds in this drawing would have been suitable for this purpose.

The four birds in this drawing can be easily identified from the drawings. On the lower right we see a yellow-rumped widow or *Euplectes capensis*, which belongs to a widely distributed group of bishops and widows. Widows live in woven nests in large colonies, similar to those of weaverbirds, and congregate in large flocks in the Cape region during the breeding season from August to November, when the polygynous males outnumber the females by several to one. The other three birds in the drawing are members of the family of canaries and buntings (Fringillidae), which occurs in a great variety of species all over the world. On the right hand of the top branch we can see the Cape siskin or *Pseudochloroptila totta*, and on the left there is a male of the black-headed canary or *Serinus alario*, while the Cape canary or *Serinus canicollis* is on the lower left. All of them

were already known to and described by scientists in Europe. These are common birds around the Cape and this is reflected in their names. The early colonists tended to give names used in Europe to animals and birds which resembled the species already known to them. We certainly notice this in the 'sparrow' and 'siskin', even though in many cases the names are not applied correctly and there is no scientific similarity between the birds in Africa and those in Europe.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. RMA, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2, sketchbook page 169.

2. DJB, 21 June and 16 Dec. 1781.

155

Capped wheatear

The capped wheatear is a small, but conspicuously coloured little bird, the size of a robin. Brandes may have enjoyed following its movements around the house of Johan Georg Lochner where he lodged in the vicinity of Stellenbosch. These birds migrate south from other parts of Africa at the end of the year and are known to breed around the Cape from September to January. This drawing is dated 25 July 1786, when some specimens might still have been present in the region, otherwise Brandes may have killed one earlier and kept the skin. In that case, however, one would need to discover why he chose this particular species of bird. He drew only about ten species of birds at the Cape and this was obviously decided by chance or opportunity rather than by special design. Capped wheatears can be seen perching on a rock, bush, or termite mound, from where they fly to the ground to catch insects. When they land on their perch, they bow in an exaggerated fashion and swing the tail up and down. As usual Brandes remarked about their song and emphasized that they imitate other birds and even sheep. Although their usual song is a harsh but melodious whistling sound, it is in fact known to mimic other birdsongs.

In 1778, Robert Jacob Gordon also made a drawing of it, preserved in the Gordon Atlas in the Rijksmuseum, on which he remarked that these birds usually sing at night and imitate the sound of many other types of bird.¹ Ljung called the bird *Motacilla pileata* after J.F. Gmelin in 1789, which is still in use today after a change in the genus to *Oenanthe pileata*. The vernacular name 'schapewagter' may have been imported from

Europe, but it is still commonly used in Afrikaans today for this bird and for its relative the European wheatear or *Europese skaapwagter*.²

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. RMA, inv. nr. GA 235. See Rookmaaker, *The zoological exploration of southern Africa*, 100.

2. Roberts, *Birds of southern Africa*, 508-510.

156

Orange-throated longclaw

The orange-throated longclaw is a common bird around the Cape of Good Hope. Like the other species of longclaws it can be seen walking around in pairs or small groups taking big steps, chasing insects or scratching open the termite mounds in search of food. The bird was known to Linnaeus who named it *Alauda* (now *Macronyx*) *capensis* in 1766. Brandes could have seen it on his host's farm at Vergenoegd. Longclaws of the genus *Macronyx* are only found in Africa and they are easily identified by the long claw at the back of their feet.

The vernacular name *kalkoentje* (little turkey) had been used at the Cape for a long time, it was probably introduced soon after the arrival of the Dutch in the middle of the seventeenth century. All the birds shown on drawings made at the Cape are common types, which Brandes could have seen in the garden without too much effort. If he did indeed draw them while they were flying around, he must have been a good observer to be able to get all the details correct. On the other hand, he may have tried to catch a few, to look at them more closely, or even to have had them stuffed for his collection of birds. It is certain that he did not depend just on dead birds that may have been brought to him, because in all cases he commented correctly on their song.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

155

Capped wheatear

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-110.



'Schaapewagter of Caapsche nagtegaal, bootst allerly geluyd van dieren na, zit by de huizen op de daaken, en op de daaken, en grond, eet wormtjes en keevers. waare groote. Cabo 25 Julii 1786. Ik heb hem hooren maken het geluyd van een schaap, Eendvogel, patrijs &c. Motacilla pileata.'

Schaapewagter [shepherd] or Cape nightingale, mimics all kinds of sounds of animals, lives near the houses, on roofs, and on the ground; it eats small grubs and beetles. Life-size. Cape 25 July 1786. I have heard him making the sound of a sheep, a duck, a partridge, etc. Motacilla pileata.

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Orange-throated
longclaw

Water-colour over
sketch in pencil,

19.5 × 15.5 cm.

Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam,

inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-57.



'Caapsch Vogeltje, kalkoentje genaamt, geteekend den ...
1786'

'waare groote.'

'Alauda capensis.'

Bird from the Cape, called kalkoentje, drawn on ... 1786.

Life-size.

Alauda capensis.