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**The Top of the Top End: John Gilbert's Manuscript Notes for John Gould on Vertebrates from Port Essington and Cobourg Peninsula (Northern Territory, Australia); with Comments on Specimens Collected during the Settlement Period 1838 to 1849, and Subsequently**



## The Top of the Top End

John Gilbert's Manuscript Notes for John Gould on Vertebrates from Port Essington and Cobourg Peninsula (Northern Territory, Australia); with Comments on Specimens Collected during the Settlement Period 1838 to 1849, and Subsequently

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### ABSTRACT

The inlet of Port Essington, and the Cobourg Peninsula within which it lies, comprise the most important site for the discovery of new Australian vertebrates. The existence of a remote British naval colony there between 1838 and 1849 allowed many early Victorian natural history collectors to visit the area, the most significant being the ornithologist and artist John Gould's assistant John Gilbert (who also wrote extensively about the local fauna) and the 13th Earl of Derby's collector John MacGillivray. Other naturalists made later expeditions to collect on the Cobourg Peninsula, notably in 1879, 1948 and 1954, and the Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory has made collections there in recent years. CSIRO organised several expeditions there between 1961 and 1968. The resulting vertebrate specimens were located during searches of more than 20 museum collections in eight countries, and are here listed where possible, along with extensive remarks on type specimens and type status. Information from documents which relate to natural history collecting on the Cobourg Peninsula (located in the archive collections of these museums, together with those of four libraries) is also included. Manuscripts and specimens collectively give crucial faunistic and ecological details for this remote tropical locality, over a period of more than 170 years. Generally the authors have refrained from making formal nomenclatural changes in this monograph resulting from their reappraisal of type material, although several cases are flagged for reconsideration. In particular, incorrect earlier lectotypifications for *Porzana leucophrys* Gould, 1847, *Charadrius mongolus* Pallas, 1776, *Dacelo cervina* Gould, 1838, *Smicrornis flavescens* Gould, 1843, *Rhipidura isura* Gould, 1841, *Ptilotis flava* Gould, 1843 and *Amadina ruficauda* Gould, 1837 are noted. *Dicrurus bracteatus* Gould, 1843 replaces *Dicrurus baileyi* Mathews, 1912. *Hiaticula inornata* Gould, 1846 is shown to be a synonym of *Charadrius mongolus* Pallas, 1776, not *C. leschenaultii* Lesson, 1826.

KEYWORDS: Port Essington, Cobourg Peninsula, Northern Territory, vertebrates, species distribution, ecology, museum collections, John Gilbert, John MacGillivray.

† John Calaby died, after a long illness, in 1998.