

EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE WORLD

#18 DELALANDE'S COUA



Photo: Riccardo Speziari

Delalande's Coua, also known as the Snail-eating Coua and Delalande's Coucal, it is an extinct species of non-parasitic cuckoo from Madagascar. As their common name implies, Land Snails (Gastropoda spp.) were a favoured food of the species. Live birds were only known to science in the early part of the 19th century, and early reports caused some disagreement about their natural range.

There were claims they were found in the coastal areas of northern Toamasina Province as well as in the area of Fito and Maroantsetra and near Toamasina (Tamatave). However, Delalande's Coua was probably restricted to coastal rainforest on the offshore island of Nosy Boraha.

There are fourteen known specimens that exist, all but two taken between 1827 and 1834, many by the surgeon and naturalist Chevalier J. A. Bernier. However, the Paris type-specimen was in the collection of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle before these dates, and one specimen may have been taken as late as 1850. Delalande's Coua (the second-largest Coua of modern times) was very spectacular, this made it a much sought after museum specimen. Its habitat was largely destroyed by deforestation in the course of the 19th century. The introduced Black Rat, *Rattus rattus*, may also have contributed to its demise, by direct competition for food, but there probably was a thriving rat population on Nosy Boraha as early as 1700. Cats were introduced in the 19th century and are a more likely candidate for having a negative impact on the species.



There are some reports that the locals still occasionally hunted the bird for its decorative plumage in the 1920s, but such reports are probably in error, they more likely refer to the Blue Coua, *Coua caerulea*. In 1932, large sums were offered to prominent animal dealers in Antananarivo for specimens of Delalande's Coua, but none were forthcoming. The colour pattern is unique among Couas, this may well show that Delalande's Coua evolved in isolation on Nosy Boraha and didn't occur anywhere else. Specimens stated to be from "Tamatave" probably just indicated the port of shipment, or the locale of the animal dealer who procured them.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia