

## Notes on the moa from 1866

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*Science-Gossip An Illustrated Medium of Interchange and gossip for Students and lovers of nature* was a London monthly publication begun in 1865, continuing into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the scientific equivalent of *Notes and Queries* for literary studies. In my hardback collected edition of the 1866 numbers (published in 1867) appear a couple of items relating to New Zealand.

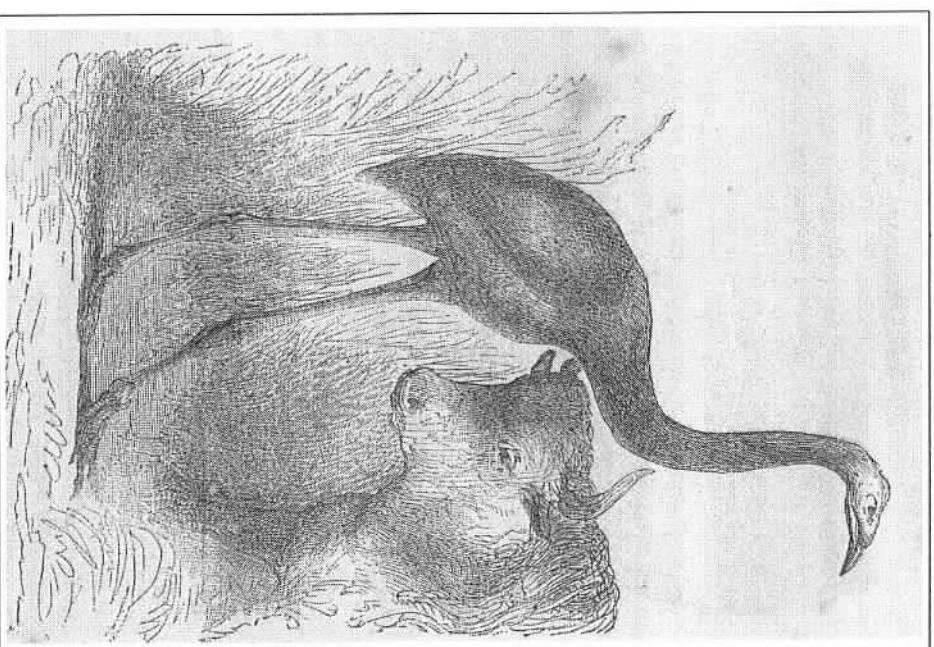
The first is headed "The Moa of New Zealand": "A very interesting volume, entitled, "The World before the Deluge" by Louis Figuier, has recently been translated into English, in a very satisfactory manner, and published in this country [England]. From this work, which is profusely illustrated, we have borrowed a woodcut representing *Dinornis*, restored to what is believed to have been its natural appearance. Writing of the post-pliocene period, the author remarks: "Two gigantic birds seem to have lived in New Zealand during this epoch. The *Dinornis*, which, if we may judge from the *tibia*, which is upwards of three feet long, and from its eggs, which are much larger than those of the ostrich, must have been of most extraordinary size for a bird." The accompanying illustration, however, gives no idea of the solidity of the leg bones, nor the massiveness of the body.

The article continues: "At the meeting of the Zoological Society, held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, Mr H.W. Flower communicated some notes from Dr Hector, Director of the Geological Survey, New Zealand, upon the bones of various species of *Dinornis*, which had been exhibited in the New Zealand Exhibition, recently held at Dunedin."

In a later issue it is reported that among the recipients of a special silver medal struck by the organisers of the New Zealand exhibition was Richard Owen, "for the valuable services rendered to the natural history of New Zealand by his works on comparative anatomy, especially on the anatomy of the moa."

The report concludes with mention of a moa egg that had been put up for auction in England. The highest bid was 120 pounds, but since that did not reach the

reserve, the egg was to be repacked and sent back to New Zealand, "as the owner is not disposed to part with it at the price."



**Postscript:** The above figure is very similar to the illustration of the Lesser megalapteryx on the front cover of *Moa: the dramatic story of the discovery of a giant bird*, Richard Wolfe, Penguin Books, 2003, 249 pp. (Ed.)