

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-05009-8 - An Account of the Petrological, Botanical, and Zoological Collection Made in Kerguelen’s Land and Rodriguez  
During the Transit of Venus Expeditions 1874–75  
Alfred Edwin Eaton  
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An Account of the Petrological, Botanical, and Zoological Collection Made in Kerguelen’s Land and Rodriguez During the Transit of Venus Expeditions 1874–75

The Kerguelen Islands, known also as the Desolation Islands, lie in the extreme south of the Indian Ocean. By the late nineteenth century they were still relatively unexplored, but they represented a fascinating puzzle: although the Islands were four thousand miles away from South America, they shared the same species of flora. Rodrigues, an island off the coast of Madagascar, was also a point of increasing interest among naturalists. While most archipelagic islands then discovered were volcanic, explorers noted that the caves of Rodrigues were formed of limestone, and that most local species were not indigenous. Like the Kerguelen Islands, they provided some of the first clear evidence that modern sea-levels were much altered from those of prehistory. Naturalists visited both locations as part of the expeditions to study the transit of Venus in 1874. Originally published in 1879, this collection of essays is a comprehensive catalogue of their findings.

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN, in the year 1874, Her Majesty's Government determined to despatch several expeditions to observe the Transit of Venus, the Council of the Royal Society resolved to request the Treasury to attach naturalists to those destined for Kerguelen's Land and Rodriguez, two of the least explored and most inaccessible oceanic islands of the southern hemisphere; and a Committee, consisting of Sir J. D. Hooker, Professor Huxley, and Mr. P. L. Slater, was appointed to

scientific objects to be obtained by a naturalist's visit to Kerguelen's Land are of equal importance to those which Rodriguez will yield, we cannot but regard it as in every respect most desirable that the rare opportunity of sending a collector to Kerguelen's Land should not be lost."

Her Majesty's Government acceded to the request preferred by the President and Council; and subsequently, on their recommendation, the Treasury sanctioned the appointment of four naturalists, three to Rodriguez and one to Kerguelen's Land. Those selected for the work in Rodriguez were Dr. I. B. Balfour, who was charged with the duties of botanist and geologist; Mr. George Gulliver, who was directed to investigate the Fauna generally; and Mr. H. H. Slater, whose special duties consisted in the exploration of caves and in collecting the remains of extinct animals. The naturalist attached to the Kerguelen's Land expedition was the Rev. A. E. Eaton, who was well qualified to bring to bear his experience of the Arctic fauna and flora upon those existing in the southern hemisphere under parallel physical conditions.

The collections and observations made by these naturalists fulfilled the expectations of the Council. A Committee appointed to consider the best means of rendering the collections serviceable to science, recommended that they should be entrusted to competent persons for examination and description, and that their reports should be published as a separate volume of the Philosophical Transactions. This recommendation was adopted by the Council, who requested Sir J. D. Hooker and Dr. Günther to undertake the editing of the work.

With regard to the specimens, the Council directed that complete sets should be reserved for the National Collections, and that the remainder should be distributed to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, the Government Museums of Natural History in Edinburgh and Dublin, the University Museums of Oxford and Cambridge, and other Institutions.

By Order of the President and Council.

Burlington House,  
March 1879.

G. G. STOKES, } *Secretaries,*  
T. H. HUXLEY, } *Royal Society.*

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