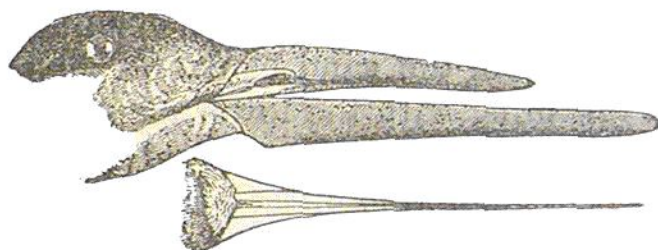


that is, in a plane at right angles to that of a spoonbill or duck. It is as flat and elastic as an ivory paper-cutter, and the lower mandible, differently from every other bird, is an inch and a half longer than the upper. In a lake near Maldonado, from which the water had been nearly drained, and which, in consequence, swarmed with small fry, I saw several of these birds, generally in small flocks, flying rapidly backward and forward close to the surface of the lake. They kept their bills wide open, and the lower mandible half buried in the water. Thus skimming the surface, they plowed it in their course: the water was quite smooth, and it formed a most curious spectacle to behold a flock, each bird leaving its narrow wake on the mirror-like surface. In their flight they frequently twist about with extreme quickness, and



dexterously manage with their projecting lower mandible to plow up small fish, which are secured by the upper and shorter half of their scissor-like bills. This fact I repeatedly saw, as, like swallows, they continued to fly backward and forward close before me. Occasionally when leaving the surface of the water their flight was wild, irregular, and rapid; they then uttered loud harsh cries. When these birds are fishing, the advantage of the long primary feathers of their wings, in keeping them dry, is very evident. When thus employed, their forms resemble the symbol by which many artists represent marine birds. Their tails are much used in steering their irregular course.

These birds are common far inland along the course of the Rio Parana; it is said that they remain here during the whole year, and breed in the marshes. During the day they