

Notes on the Wrens (*Malurus*) of Western Australia

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Through the kindness of our member, Major H. M. Whittell, I have been able to peruse Mr. George Mack's interesting "Revision of the genus *Malurus*," in *Memoirs of the National Museum, Melbourne*, No. 8, and I find I can add a little further information with regard to the distribution of several Western Australian species.

***Malurus pulcherrimus*.**—Mr. Mack writes: "A mere strip of country on the line of the 20-inch rainfall between Wongan hills and Stirling Ranges appears to be the extent of its range." I was introduced to this *Malurus* about 30 years ago by the late A. W. Milligan during a trip to the Wongan hills, a year after he had re-discovered it in the Stirling Ranges. A series of specimens, now in the Perth Museum, was obtained, and as I prepared the skins, the colouration of the adult male was firmly impressed on my memory. A few weeks previously I had collected adult males of the typical *M. assimilis*, so that the deep indigo-blue of the throat and breast of *M. pulcherrimus* in contrast with the velvety black of the same parts of *M. assimilis* was at once apparent. About six months later I was at Norseman, a locality 250 miles to the north-east of the Stirling Ranges and 125 miles from the south coast, with an erratic rainfall varying between seven and fourteen inches. I found parties of typical *M. pulcherrimus* within a radius of five miles around the township, my rambles not extending further, and I collected several adult males to make my identification doubly sure. From the nature of the country further east I hardly think Norseman is the easterly limit of the range of this Wren. Some two years later I again met with *M. pulcherrimus* near Arrino, a locality about 100 miles north of the Wongan hills. I wish it to be clearly understood that the deep indigo-blue of the throat and breast is apparent in all lights, and is equally perceptible in *M. elegans*, a near neighbour of the first-named. The two, where their ranges overlap, are easily distinguished on account of the silvery-blue shade of the feathers of the lower back and rump of *M. elegans*. The late A. W. Milligan obtained this Wren at Toll's Creek, a watercourse running north from Mt. Toolbrunup, in the heart of the Stirlings. *M. elegans* rather keeps to the coast and is always found near water, especially where large clumps of sword-grass are growing. Its range is more restricted as far as we know, than that of *M. pulcherrimus*. "Marsh Wren" or "Aquatic Wren" would be appropriate names for this Wren. "Red-winged" is not distinctive enough. I could never distinguish any difference in the voices of the three Wrens mentioned. The cadence is brief and the notes

are flat in contrast with the notes of *M. splendens*, which is a neighbour of all three.

Malurus splendens.—The range of this Wren is wide but rather erratic. I obtained specimens at Lake Way, and Mr. C. G. Gibson met with others about 50 miles to the north of Coolgardie, but those are both very isolated colonies, and perhaps point to a long-past wider distribution. I have seen individuals hopping about the beach on the south coast.

Malurus amabilis.—When I visited the Fitzroy River, West Kimberley, I was frequently asked by stockmen and others, "Had I seen the Wrens in which the whole family were blue?" I was not fortunate enough, the season being an exceptionally dry one, but I have no doubt this Wren occurs on the Fitzroy, the evidence on further inquiry being unanimous.

Malurus leuconotus.—The White-winged Wren has an immense range in this State. Its northern limit extends to the deGrey River and its tributaries. Nowhere have I found it more numerous than around the arid region of Lake Austin on the Murchison goldfields, where it favours the sandbanks and extensive samphire flats on the margins of the barren lake bed. It must be an adaptable little bird to endure the severe cold of the winter months and the torrid heat of summer, where temperatures of from 90 to over 100° are of frequent and prolonged occurrence. Fresh water, too, is scarce. Strange to say it is far less plentiful in the more equable climate of the west coast sand plains. It is found on the Coolgardie goldfields. The range of its congener, the Black-and-white Wren (*Malurus leucopterus*) in being restricted to Dirk Hartog and Barrow Islands, is most curious, the former being only one mile at its southern extremity from the mainland where the Blue-and-white form occurs. The difference in plumage cannot be climatic, and the Blue-and-white individuals on the Peron peninsula, twenty miles away, are almost as isolated. Perhaps we have an instance of the survival of a once more-wide-spread form. The voices of the two species are identical. If one imagines a toy sewing-machine being run at a high rate of speed the resultant sound would resemble the sustained reeling notes of these Wrens. In the extreme north their place is taken by the Red-backed Wren, which inhabits the tracts of spinifex (*Triodia cunninghamii*). I found this Wren near the Fitzroy River. It appeared to me to be rather a silent species.

Malurus coronatus.—This Wren is sure to attract attention by its loud notes, which differ strikingly from those of all other Wrens I have encountered. The bay-coloured ear-coverts and generally-paler plumage of females and immature birds is at once apparent. I only found it by the margins of the Fitzroy River, where it favoured the thickets of *Pandanus aquaticus*.