

## Does Tasmania Possess a Second Species of Blue Wren (*Malurus*)?

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Some ten years ago I was in charge of a school in the Springfield division of the Scottsdale district—to be more exact, from the beginning of 1911 to the end of 1915. I found this locality rich in Wren life, the rank, grassy flats near the rung-timber areas being in particular the especial haunt of these bonny birds, as well as those tracts where a sluggish creek meandered through an oozy swamp.

During the earlier part of the 1911 nesting season my attention was attracted by the richer colouring of some of the male *Maluri*, and I began to watch them as closely as my limited time permitted. I observed that some of these males wore more resplendent coats of black than the ordinary species (*M. gouldi*), and that, as a general rule, these were accompanied by a female Wren showing darker markings in the tail feathers and a richer brown on the head.

During the years I was stationed in this district, I found several nests of these birds, and all of them were more firmly built, more warmly lined, in which feathers formed a most conspicuous item of the lining, as well as being incorporated into the sides of the nest. Nearly every nest of these birds which came under my observation had worked into it the dark green moss that may be found growing at the foot of many trees and shrubs in damp situations.

On the other hand, the typical species (*M. gouldi*), even when nesting within a few yards of the birds under notice, kept to its usual type of nest in choice of materials, etc.

The eggs with the nests I found differed from the common variety in the warmer flush of their ground; this was retained even after blowing. My sister and I, when speaking of this (to us) new variety, distinguished it by calling it *elisabethæ*—the King Island form.

It does not call for a very vivid imagination to picture some of the Strait Island varieties finding their way to the northern portion of our island, and from there gradually travelling further inland along the rivers.

I endeavoured to obtain the services of someone to shoot a few specimens, but, as a rule, I had to wait the shooter's pleasure, and this did not always suit the easiest time to locate the birds.

A few were procured. I preserved these in spirits, and left several with Mr. A. L. Butler, of Hobart, and the others I took to Melbourne, and showed them to Mr. A. J. Campbell, leaving them with him.

I also took some of both kinds of nests. Mr. Campbell agreed with me that there was foundation for a belief in another variety, but said it would be better to obtain a pair of properly skinned birds. I was not able to do this in the season following; then the wider interests called forth by the war limited the time for field work, and in 1915 I was transferred to the North-West, and have not been able to take a trip to the old haunts since.

A few years ago, in some Devonport notes, written by Mr. Stuart Dove, he remarked on the intense blackness of a male *Malurus*, seen by him on the banks of the River Mersey, between Devonport and Latrobe.

Perhaps some of our local ornithologists may have noticed the differences I have brought forward. I believe Messrs. May and Ashby paid a flying visit to the Scottsdale districts some four or five years ago.

I had hoped to have been at liberty to revisit the Springfield district, but have not been free to do so yet. I have kept a few specimens of the nests and eggs of the two varieties, taking the nests from situations as close to one another as I could in the same season, so that the different choice of building materials might be readily noted. These alone support the suggestion of the presence of either the King Island or Flinders Island form.

I sent some specimens of the nests and eggs to Mr. Mathews, with a few notes. From these he listed a variety, giving as its habitat the Scottsdale and Ringarooma districts. The latter place—a continuation of the same class of country as the former—was included, because in one of my notes to Mr. Mathews, I mentioned having seen a finely coloured male *Malurus*, singing on the roadside in that locality.

I have brought some of the contrasting nests and eggs with me to the Conference, so that those ornithologists, who wish to do so, may have an opportunity of examining them.

#### EXTRACTS FROM MY FIELD BOOK OF 1911

26/9/11.—Saw a Wren to-day which, by its fuller toned plumage, suggested the King Island form.

1/10/11.—Cycled to Bridport. Noticed several more of the darker Wrens.

14/10/11.—Spent this morning watching for specimens of the darker *Maluri*. Saw several which appeared to have the whole of the wing black; others have the black extending, apparently in a line from the chest right down to the tail. In some instances the female accompanying these had dark blue tails; in others the brown appears darker.

In the afternoon my sister and I rode to the flats of the Brid River to hunt for nests of the Tasmanian Native Hen (*Tribonyx*). Whilst doing so, I found a Wren's nest on the margin of an island in the river. She had a dark blue tail.

The nest contained 3 eggs, and was more firmly built than that of a *Gouldi*. Her mate was not about.

Later, on our return, we saw a male *Gouldi* with her. Whilst watching them a fine "new" Wren appeared on the blackberries near by, but the ordinary Wren seemed to be her mate.

This nest with the eggs was eventually sent to the late Mr. Chubb, of the Melbourne Museum, together with a *Gouldi's* nest of the same locality for comparison with others in the Museum.

28/10/11.—Took a nest of Wren found previously on the 21st, when it held 2 eggs. We spent some time watching the birds of this nest, which was warmly made with moss and feathers worked into it.

A skeleton nest, found a week previously, was now completed, and held an egg. It was built in a tussock and adorned with the usual supply of dark moss and dark feathers. Both nests were in tussocks of the R. Brid flats. The first of these two nests was sent to Mr. A. J. Campbell, with a *Gouldi* nest from the same area.