

MALURUS LEUCONOTUS, Gould.

White-backed Superb Warbler.

Malurus leuconotus, Gould in Proc. Zool. Soc. 1865, p. 198, and Handb. Birds of Aust., vol. i. p. 332.

I BELIEVE that up to the present time there has not been a single species of the genus *Malurus* found in any other country than Australia and the adjacent islands; but wherever a voyager may step on shore on the coast of that continent, whether it be at Port Essington or Cape York on the north, at the Swan on the western coast, Rockingham or Moreton Bays on the east, Victoria and South Australia or Tasmania, he cannot take a lengthened walk into the interior without meeting with one or other of the numerous species of these lovely birds, popularly known as Superb Warblers. They are, indeed, to be found in every district, even in the sterile interior. None were known to Linnæus or his contemporaries; but one of them attracted the notice of the voyagers of the latter part of the last century, and was figured in White's 'Voyage to Botany Bay,' at page 286. White's figure, however beautiful may be the bird it portrays, did not lead us to suspect that so many other species of the form would be discovered, or that the whole would constitute a very distinct subfamily; for so the *Maluri* may in justice be considered. In their structure, in their style of colouring, and in the changes to which they are subject, they appear to be isolated from most other known birds, and seem to be naturally divided into several sections. First there is the lovely *Malurus coronatus*, which for the present stands alone as the largest and as having the most beautifully coloured crown of any of the other members of the genus. Secondly, the *M. Lamberti*, *M. elegans*, *M. pulcherrimus*, and *M. amabilis* constitute a section distinguished for the variegated character of their plumage. In a third may be arranged the *M. splendens*, *M. melanotus*, *M. callainus*, *M. longicaudus*, and *M. cyaneus*. Fourthly there is the Red-backed *M. melanocephalus*, and *M. cruentatus*; fifthly, the white winged *M. leucopterus*, *M. leuconotus*, and *M. cyanotus*, if the bird discovered by Quoy and Gaimard, in the "Voyage de l'Uranie," on Dirk Hartog's Island should prove to be different from the species found in New South Wales, which I think probable,—a doubt I could have cleared up if their original specimen had been in existence; but on inquiry at Paris I found it was not; sixthly, the new species lately described by me from Cape York under the appellation of *Malurus hypoleucus*, and which differs from all others in having the entire under surface of a uniform buffy white. These numerous species, and others which I believe remain undiscovered, are somewhat allied to *Amytis* and *Stipiturus*: but none of the members of these latter genera change their plumage according to the season, or differ materially in the colouring of the sexes; on the other hand the transformations which the *Maluri* undergo and the consequent difference of colour in the same individual at opposite seasons of the year are most surprising.

I wish it were in my power to give some authentic information respecting the true habitat of the fine bird figured on the accompanying Plate; but I can only say that a single example was forwarded to England in company with the beautiful plumed *Lophophaps* I have named *leucogaster*, by Mr. Galbraith, of Machrihanish station, South Australia, to his sister Mrs. Craufuird, of Budleigh Salterton, Devon, in whose possession it now remains. In all probability the interior of South Australia is its true home. It is a longer-tailed bird than the *M. leucopterus* vel *cyanotus*, and has the back silvery white, while that part is blue in the bird from New South Wales.

The entire head, neck, under surface, rump, and tail deep blue; back, shoulders, greater and lesser wing-coverts and secondaries silky white; primaries brown; bill black; feet brownish black.

The figures are of the natural size.