

MALURUS MELANOTUS, *Gould.*

Black-backed Wren.

Malurus melanotus, Gould in Proceedings of Zool. Soc., November 10, 1840.

THE only place in which I observed this extremely rare species was the Belts of the Murray in South Australia; but although it was there tolerably abundant, it was so extremely shy and distrustful, that the few specimens in my collection, and which in all probability are the only examples in Europe, were obtained with the greatest difficulty. It was most frequently observed on the ground, particularly in the small open glades and little plains by which the outer belt of this vast scrub is diversified. The period of my visit was in winter, consequently the specimens I collected were all out of colour, or more properly speaking, divested of the rich blue and black plumage of summer, in which state a single specimen has been forwarded to me by one of the party that accompanied His Excellency Colonel Gawler and Captain Sturt, when those gentlemen visited the Murray in 1839. It is a most interesting species, inasmuch as it possesses characters intermediate between the *M. cyaneus* and *M. splendens*, having the blue belly and conspicuous pectoral band of the latter and the black back of the former; from both, however, it differs in the length of its toes, which are much shorter than those of its near allies: this difference in structure exerts a corresponding influence upon its habits and actions; for while the others run over the ground with great facility, the Black-backed Wren far exceeds them in this power; hence arose the great difficulty of procuring specimens. Instead of exerting any power of flight, they effected their escape by the extraordinary manner with which they tripped over the small openings and through the scrub, each troop appearing to have a leader, and keeping just beyond the range of the gun: this shyness was rather remarkable, since I and my party were probably the only white persons they had ever encountered; like the Chestnut-backed Ground Thrush, they would appear to have an instinctive dread of man.

The male in summer has the crown of the head, chin, throat, abdomen, upper part of the back, upper and under tail-coverts beautiful metallic blue; ear-coverts verditer-blue; lores, back of the neck, band across the breast and lower part of the back velvety black; external margins of all the wing-feathers green; tail bluish green, indistinctly barred with a darker tint, and slightly tipped with white; bill black; irides and legs blackish brown.

The female has the lores and circle surrounding the eye reddish brown; all the upper surface brown; under surface brownish white; wings brown; tail green, each feather slightly tipped with white; bill reddish brown; feet brown.

The male in winter has the bill black, like the *M. cyaneus*.

The figure is that of a male and female of the natural size.