

SITTELLA ALBATA, Ramsay.

White-winged White-headed Sittella.

Sittella leucocephala, Ramsay, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1875, p. 600 (nec Gould).

—— *albata*, Ramsay, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1877, p. 351.—Id. Proc. Linn. Soc. N. S. Wales, ii, p. 192.

THE genus *Sittella* contains the Australian representatives of the Nuthatches of the northern parts of the Old and New Worlds, and is represented on the continent of Australia by seven species, five of which have been described by me; one species is found in New Guinea. It may readily be believed that a considerable number of specimens have passed through my hands; and it is just possible that I may have handled examples of the present new species; but if so, I never noticed the distinction between it and *Sittella leucocephala*. It would, indeed, require a careful examination of a specimen to notice the difference between these two species; for the white spots on the quills (instead of reddish ones, as in *S. leucocephala*) are only seen on spreading the wing. Mr. Waller, to whom I am indebted for lending me a fine specimen of *Sittella albata*, tells me that he was skinning it, when the white spots on the underside of the quills attracted his attention, as he did not remember to have seen them in *S. leucocephala*, with which species he was well acquainted. On pointing out this difference to Mr. Ramsay, that gentleman re-examined his series, and discovered other specimens in his possession from Port Denison, which he described in 1877 as *Sittella albata*.

The geographical ranges of the two species above mentioned do not seem to me to be exactly understood as yet; for Mr. Ramsay gives the range of *S. leucocephala* as the Wide-Bay district, New South Wales, and the interior province, while the new *Sittella albata* is said to come from Port Denison and Rockingham Bay. I understood Mr. Waller to say that he had procured his specimens near Brisbane; and it may be possible that *S. albata* ranges as far south as the neighbourhood of that town.

Mr. Ramsay, in his paper "On the Birds of N.E. Queensland," first identified the present species with *S. leucocephala*, and observes that it is far from being rare there, being usually met with in open forest country over the whole of Northern Queensland as far as Cooktown. Its habits and actions and nidification do not differ materially from those of the other members of the genus. The notes of all closely resemble each other.

The following is Mr. Ramsay's description of the species:—

"Head and neck, a small spot at the base of the primaries on the underside of the wing, a band through the wing as far as the ninth quill, the upper tail-coverts, and the tips of all the tail-feathers except the centre two snow-white; under surface ashy white, with a broad dark brown stripe down the centre of each feather; under tail-coverts of a darker brown, tipped and margined anteriorly with white; back and scapulars brown, darker in the centres of the feathers; wing- and tail-quills blackish brown, the former crossed with a white band as far as the ninth quill; bill at the base, the legs and feet, and skin round the eye yellow; remainder of the bill black. Length 3·7 inches, wing 3, tail 1·5, tarsus 1·7, bill 0·5, bill from gape 0·7."

The figures in the Plate are drawn from a single specimen lent to me by Mr. Waller, whose kindness in showing me many fine species of Australian birds during his recent visit to England I have much pleasure in acknowledging. The birds are represented of the size of life; and I have ventured to introduce into the Plate a representation of the nest of a *Sittella*, which I believe to be that of the present bird, as it was sent to me from the part of the country which this species inhabits. I have never before had the opportunity of figuring one of the nests belonging to any member of the genus; but Mr. Ramsay states that the nidification of all the *Sittellæ* is of a similar character, "the nest being placed in an upright and usually dead fork of some high branch; it is made of fine strips of bark with a large quantity of spiders' webs, with which small scales of bark, resembling that of the branch in which it is placed, are felted on so carefully as hardly to be detected, even at a comparatively short distance; the rim is very thin, the nest open above, and very deep."