

Field Notes on Three Species of *Malurus* (Blue Wrens).

By A. M. MORGAN.

Malurus lamberti assimilis (*Blue-breasted Wren*)—This bird inhabits the drier parts of the State. It is fairly common in the Murray scrub, on both sides of the Flinders Range, and on Yorke's Peninsula. A nearly allied sub-species inhabits the Gawler Ranges.

Dry water courses and scrubby sandhills are its favourite homes. They are never to be seen on the open plains. They are rather shy, and consequently not easy to observe. The song is a kind of trill-like "chicity, chicity, chicity, &c.," uttered very rapidly seven or eight times. Both sexes sing, the notes being alike.

When the male is courting his mate he erects the feathers of the head, puffs out the breast feathers, half spreads the

*After writing the above Dr. Morgan reminded me of a strange trait in this birds' character which I had often noticed but had forgotten, namely, the habit of clinging on to the stems of gumtrees and pulling off the bark in search of insects after the manner of *Climacteris* (Tree creepers).—S. A. W.

wings, and depresses the tail. At these times the song is a subdued churring noise.

Both sexes assist in building the nest, but the female does most of the work, the share of the male being confined to bringing a piece of material now and then.

The nest is built either on or close to the ground between the stems of some thick bush or in the small twigs of a fallen shrub. Externally it is composed of old dried grass stems, and the lining is rabbit fur, with a few horsehairs. A nest found at Kallioota, Lake Torrens, measured—height, 6 inches; egg cavity, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, hole of entrance 2 inches \times $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The hole of entrance is placed near the top, and the eggs or setting bird can just be seen without enlarging it. Three nests found building at Kallioota were all deserted, and the material carried away, although none of them was touched or even closely examined. I found in all five nests at Kallioota between August 2nd and August 21, 1912. The eggs are two to four in number. Their food consists largely of ants, though they will eat any kind of small insect.

Malurus cyanotus (*White-winged Wren*)—This is a bird of the saltbush plains. I believe they are to be found in all parts of South Australia where these plains exist. Samphire or blue bush flats are also favourite haunts. The male can often be seen perched on the summit of a bush uttering his song and then diving down again out of sight. The female is more retiring. The song which is uttered by both sexes is like a very miniature spring rattle.

The nest is placed in a salt or blue bush six to eight inches from the ground, and occasionally in the thin twigs of a fallen shrub at the edge of the plain. It is made of fresh dried grasses and thin saltbush twigs and lined with rabbits' fur and an occasional feather. In one I found a feather of the narrow billed bronze cuckoo. The nest is completely domed, and the hole of entrance, near the top is small and round, so that the setting bird or eggs are completely hidden.

The eggs are three or four in number. In one nest I found an egg of the narrow billed bronze cuckoo, together with three of the host. I found eight nests at Kallioota between August 10 and August 25, 1912. In one case the male was not in full plumage, having no blue feathers and only

a few white ones upon the wings. They are not at all shy about their nests. Two I found building and put my finger into, subsequently had eggs laid in them. Their food consists of ants and other small insects.

Malurus melanotus callainus (*Turquoise Wren*)—This bird likes the scrub-covered sandhills or thick, low scrub of any kind. They rarely wander on to the plains. The brilliant male is a very conspicuous object, and not at all shy. The male when courting the female ruffs out the feathers of the head and breast and spreads the wings in the same way as *M. lamberti assimilis* and utters the same kind of churring note. The ordinary song of both sexes is like "chic, chic, chic, chicity, chicity, chicity," uttered very rapidly from the top of a small bush or dry branch of a shrub. They spend much of their time on the ground hunting for ants and other small insects.

The female does most of the nest building, the male occasionally contributing a piece of material. I found five nests at Kallioota between August 15 and August 25, 1912. They were all built upon the ground in the end twigs of fallen bushes. All these nests were largely built of sheep's wool mingled with a few pieces of dry grass and herbage. The lining was of rabbits' fur. The nest is only semi-domed. The eggs or sitting bird are plainly visible without disturbing the nest. Two nests which I found building were not deserted. A nest found building on August 15 contained three slightly incubated eggs on August 28, so I should think it took about ten days in the making. One nest contained an egg of the narrow billed bronze cuckoo, together with two of the host. The eggs are three or four in number. In all the nests of these three species which I found, the female was sitting.
