

Order Passeriformes, Family Sylviidae, Genus
Malurus.

Malurus cyaneus leggei—Southern Blue Wren.

Adult Male.—Crown of head, feathers on side of lower mandible extending below the eye, cheeks, ear coverts, and a broad crescent-shaped patch on upper back cerulean blue; a broad line from lores passing above the eye velvety black, joining the broad collar of the neck, which is similarly coloured. Back, rump, and upper tail coverts velvety black. Under Surface.—Throat and upper portion of breast blue black, narrowly margined below by a velvety black band, remainder of breast, abdomen and under tail coverts greyish white. In some individuals the greyish white feathers of the breast are washed with blue. Flanks greyish buff, washed with light blue; thighs greyish brown. Wings.—Primaries brown, outer webs of secondaries and upper wing coverts washed with blue. Tail.—Blue, darker above than below, indistinctly narrowly barred with dark blue and tipped with white. Bill.—Black, legs and feet brown. Immature males resemble females in plumage.

There is still some doubt regarding the seasonal changes of plumage in the male blue wren. It is certain that fully plumaged males are to be seen in plenty at all seasons of the year, and it is also known that captive birds have changed to the brown plumage in winter, to resume their full plumage again before the spring; on the other hand individual males have been watched throughout the year and observed not to change at all. The probabilities are that all males do not change every year. It is also probable that all birds do not

change at the same time, and the period in winter plumage being short the moult, as it were, overlaps. Old males in winter plumage are distinguishable from the females by the black bill and the absence of the brown feathers about the lores and eyes.

Adult Female.—The whole of the upper surface, wings and tail brown, under surface greyish white; rufous feathers encircling the eye. Bill and legs reddish brown.

Total length, 4.85 inches. Wing, 2.05; tail, 2.45; tarsus, .9; bill, .49.

Distribution.—All the southern coastal parts of South Australia, as far west as Warrow, but nowhere extending far inland and never found in salt bush country. Favourite situations are well-wooded gullies, with thick undergrowth. They are also common on the Adelaide Plains and coastal sandhills, where there is good cover for them. Most gardens of any size in the city and suburbs have a resident pair or two. They are very local, each family having its own particular run, from which they drive away all intruders of their own species.

Habits.—Early in spring they are to be found in small flocks, generally consisting of a full-plumaged male and four to seven females and young males. From this fact they have gained an undeserved reputation for polygamy. The males are pugnacious and fight one another whenever they meet. They will even fight their own reflections in a mirror or window. They will sometimes band together for mutual protection. On one occasion three newly-fledged young were disturbed from some bracken, and at once three fully plumaged males appeared, and each went to the assistance of a fledgling. At mating time the male shows much excitement, puffing out the ear coverts, erecting the feathers of the crown and the back and shoulders; with the wings half spread and the tail depressed, displaying all his beauties for the captivation of the female, who for her part does not appear to be much impressed.

Food.—This consists of ants, aphides, small moths and insects. When semi-domesticated they will eat bread and cake crumbs. The greater part of the food is taken on the ground or in the branches of the undergrowth. Occasionally a flying insect is taken on the wing. The tail is carried erect and vibrated up and down and from side to side when moving slowly. When chasing an escaping insect it is carried horizon-

tally. They move on the ground by a series of long hops, and when pressed can get up an extraordinary pace.

Nest.—This is built near or even upon the ground in some thick bush or long grass, but if no suitable bush be handy they may build at a height of 5 or 6 feet. The nest is made externally of dried grasses and lined with fur or feathers. The opening is large and near the top, the back of the nest being brought over to form a hood. The female sits on the nest with the tail carried over her back. The male does not sit, but assists in building the nest and feeding the young. He also feeds the female whilst sitting. They are favourite hosts of the narrow billed bronze cuckoo. The eggs are usually three, rarely four in number. The ground colour of blown eggs is white; the spots are bright brick red, sometimes large and scanty, sometimes small and plentiful. Most eggs show a more or less distinct ring of spots at the thick end. The breeding season lasts from September to January, and during this time two and sometimes three broods are reared.

Average measurement of 10 eggs, 1.71 cm. x 1.29 cm.

Largest egg, 1.75 cm. x 1.35 cm.

Smallest egg, 1.70 cm. x 1.25 cm.

Song.—A melodious trill uttered from the top of a small bush or tuft of grass. Both sexes sing, but the male more than the female. At pairing time the note of the male is quite different from the usual one, being then a sort of running note difficult to describe.
