

The White-breasted Robin

(*Quoyornis georgianus*)

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The absence of the white patch in the wing of the above bird in the coloured plate in the last volume of *The Emu* (plate 32) makes the plate inaccurate, and it is essential that the error be indicated as soon as possible. Mathews, in his *Birds of Australia*, describes this white as follows:—"Inner web of flight quills blackish with a square patch of white on the basal portion, the white narrowly extending along the inner edges." In my own notes (*The Emu*, Vol. XXXII, 1933, p. 237) I wrote:—"The white patches on the basal portion of the inner webs of the flight quills show up as a distinct white patch on the wing when the bird is in repose. On the bird's flying away from one, these white patches show up as a distinct line in each wing. Is this Nature's guide for the bird which lives in dark undergrowth?" Curiously enough, the white patch is omitted also in the bird pictured on the coloured plate in Mathews's *Birds of Australia*. On inquiry from the Perth Museum I was informed that the white patch in the wing occurs in the skin forwarded from the Museum to Mr. Cayley. (See *The*

Emu, Vol. XXXII, p. 297). The plate, however, appears to have been made from a skin in the "Dobroyde" collection in the Australian Museum, Sydney. I have not seen that skin. Both the plates in *The Emu* and in Mathews's work depict the bird in a posture which I have not seen it assume. I had been at pains to point out that the White-breasted Robin has very close affinity with the Yellow Robin, but no one would believe that to be the case if the figure on plate 32 of Vol. XXXII were brought forward as evidence. Personally I have never seen an *Eopsaltria* assume such an attitude.

Quoyornis georgianus appears in the plate to be generally smaller in size than *Q. leucurus*, and according to the measurements given by Mathews, that is what it should be. Mathews's measurements are as follows (in millimetres):

	Total Length.	Culmen.	Wing.	Tail.	Tarsus.
<i>Q. leucurus</i> . . .	160	18	83	62	23
<i>Q. georgianus</i> . .	152	11	77	66	24

Those measurements make the tail of *Q. georgianus* the longer of the two, but the plate does not show it to be so.

The only White-breasted Robin that I have handled was a bird of the year which measured exactly six inches, or slightly longer than the 152 mm. (= 5.98 ins.) given by Mathews. This bird still had some of the nestling plumage, i.e., dark grey feathers with light brown tips on the crown of the head, nape and ear-coverts, with a faint semi-circle of the same across the breast. I think it probable that were a series measured Mathews's length of 152 mm. would be found less than the average.

From the facts that have emerged since I wrote my first note on this bird, it is, as the Editor wrote, "obvious that extensive collecting is still necessary to make the collections in our museums representative." The Director of the National Museum, Melbourne, informed me that there are no eggs of the White-breasted Robin in the collections there!

Absence of good skins must make matters very difficult for the artist. I see that Mr. Cayley had difficulty with another south-western species. In his book on *Australian Finches* he figured *Zonæginthus oculatus* from a specimen collected in 1866. A skin sixty-six years old would not make the best of models. Possibly the skin from which he painted *Quoyornis georgianus* was collected at the same distant date. I now have an opportunity of quoting the reasons Mathews gave (in *The Australian Avian Record*) for separating the White-breasted Robin into a separate genus. These reasons are:—"Differs from *Eopsaltria* in its stronger bill, legs and feet and its shorter and more rounded wings, with first primary proportionately longer, and the fourth, fifth and sixth longest and sub-equal, the second equalling the seventh."