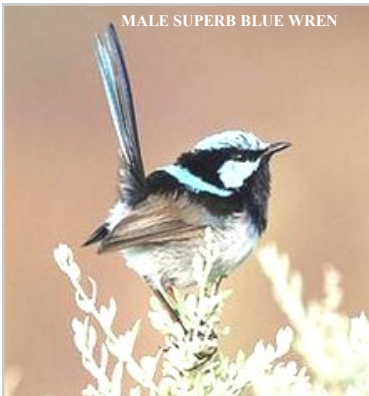


THE GENUS MALURUS

FAIRY-WRENS

THE AUSTRALIAN SPECIES



Malurus is a genus of small birds, with predominantly bright plumage and “sticky-up” tails in the Maluridae family. There are twelve members of the genus, nine of which are endemic to Australia.

The members of the genus being:

White-shouldered Fairy-wren (*Malurus alboscapulatus*)*

Lovely Fairy-wren (*Malurus amabilis*)

Purple-crowned Fairy-wren (*Malurus coronatus*)

Emperor Fairy-wren (*Malurus cyanocephalus*)*

Red-winged Fairy-wren (*Malurus elegans*)

Broad-billed Fairy-wren (*Malurus grayi*)*

White-winged Fairy-wren (*Malurus leucopterus*)

Red-backed Fairy-wren (*Malurus melanocephalus*)

Blue-breasted Fairy-wren (*Malurus pulcherrimus*)

Superb Fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*)

Variiegated Fairy-wren (*Malurus lamberti*)

Splendid Fairy-wren (*Malurus splendens*)

*denotes New Guinea endemic.

The individual species are of a similar size, and share similar diets and behaviour. The smallest is the Red-backed which is 100-130mm in length, while four species, the Purple-crowned, Superb, Red-winged and Blue-breasted, are at the other end of the size scale, but are still only just 130-150mm.

Fairy-wrens, which are commonly referred to as “Wrens”, or Blue Wrens, are most often seen slinking through the undergrowth or perched on a branch, or fence, flicking their tail. The Superb Blue Wren, *M. cyaneus*, is the most well known in southern Australia, while other species occupy most of the mainland and Tasmania. They occupy habitats ranging from arid scrublands to deep rainforest.

The family is notable for several peculiar behavioural characteristics. They are socially monogamous and sexually promiscuous, meaning that although they form pairs between one male and one female, each partner will mate with other individuals and even assist in raising the young from such pairings. Males of several species pluck petals of conspicuous colours and display them to females the reason for this behaviour is not fully understood, but has probably evolved as part of the courtship ritual.

The song of fairy-wrens is both complex and melodious. The Superb and Splendid have, in addition to the alarm calls common to - and universally understood by - most small birds, another call which is used when a predator is encountered. This, "Type II Vocalization", is song-like and used when Butcherbirds, genus *Cracticus*, or other predatory birds are nearby. It is not a warning call, and its purpose is unknown.

THE GENUS MALURUS

1 THE LOVELY WREN

Malurus amabilis



Photo: "Aviceda"

The Lovely Wren is found on coastal Cape York Peninsula south to about Townsville, where it frequents subtropical or tropical dry forests and subtropical or tropical moist lowland forests. They belong to the group known as the "chestnut-shouldered malurus group", which consists of the Blue-breasted, Variegated and Red-winged species.



Lovely Wrens are, like most of the Malurus family predominantly insectivorous. They eat a wide range of small creatures, such as flies, weevils and various larvae, as well as small quantities of seeds, flowers, and fruit. Their foraging, termed 'hop-searching', occurs on the ground or in shrubs and trees. Because this foraging practice renders them vulnerable to predators, they tend to stick fairly close to cover and forage in groups. Nestlings, in contrast to adult birds, are fed a diet of larger items such as caterpillars and grasshoppers.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

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