

THE KEEPING AND BREEDING OF FAIRY-WRENS

By Adrian Knaggs

There are 8 species of Fairy-wrens in the genus *Malurus*. The species I keep are the Superb Fairy-wren and the White-winged Fairy-wren. In the latter species, I keep the mainland variety, which are blue and white; the other sub species, which are from Dirk Hartog Island, are black and white. I have had the White-winged Wrens for about six months and have not bred them yet as I got them at the end of their breeding season. The information I am going to write about is a basis for all wren species.



The Superb Fairy-wren is a great “starter off” softbill. They aren’t a lot of hard work as long as you put the effort in. In terms of housing, the best aviary to put them in is a fully planted flight ranging from 4m square or even bigger. With the planted side of things it needs to be very heavily planted so that they can hide, because when they feel threatened, the first thing they do is they dart straight into the plants or

the brush so you also need plenty of brush on the walls. The Superb Fairy-wren mixes well with finches so you shouldn’t have any trouble from them at all. However, some of the other Fairy-wrens are vicious killers when in breeding colour.

In terms of feeding you can feed them egg and biscuit mix, Madeira cake, and live food i.e. mealworms, crickets, maggots, termites and etc. You will know when they have got young in the nest because the live food will disappear quickly when fed and this means you need to supply these supplements daily and in large amounts. They can either be fed daily as mentioned above or every second day because sometimes they over fill themselves and then the food is spoiled. Like I mentioned about the live

food disappearing quickly when young ones are in the nest in the above text there are a few other tell tale signs to tell you that they are breeding. The other one is that the female will become very secretive and the male will hang around in one particular spot of the aviary all day. They can have up to two or four chicks in each clutch and they may have two broods or even a third. The best thing about them is that you can have up to one male, with three females in a family situation. However I have found that as soon as the young ones are independent you should remove them, otherwise the male will kill them.

The males are in full colour for about nine to ten months of the year and then they moult into an eclipse plumage resembling the female. When males moult it only takes them about a week, but older birds take longer. The female alone builds and incubates the eggs while the male guards the nest and provides the food for both the young ones and the female. Sometimes the males will not really do their job in the way they should: i.e. they won't provide feed to the nest, so the female does all the work. I call this a slack bird. When they are like this its best to leave them alone and do their job. The breeding song of these birds is one you can't describe unless you keep them, but it can be heard up to thirty metres away and even more.

I hope I have explained enough about them for you to try and keep them I've outlined as much as I can and I do encourage you to buy them they are beautiful birds to keep and start off along an exciting experience in softbills.