

Common Name/Scientific name: Red-backed Fairy-wren / *Malurus melanocephalus*

Red-backed Fairy-wrens are commonly seen in grassy areas of northern and eastern Australia. They are among the least faithful birds in the world, with extra-pair mating commonplace — the result is that the eggs in any given nest are often fathered by various different birds. These fairy-wrens are often seen in flocks, with one colourful bird surrounded by a bevy of brown ones, which comprise females, males in non-breeding plumage and young birds.



Description: While many of Australia's fairy-wrens feature various shades of blue in their plumage, the adult male Red-backed Fairy-wren is equally as striking when in breeding plumage, but with an eye-catching patch of red feathers on its back and rump, contrasting with the rest of the plumage, which is glossy black. Like most other fairy-wrens, when in non-breeding plumage the males are brown above and off white below. Females and juvenile birds also have brown upperparts above and whitish underparts.

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: Red-backed Fairy-wrens usually feed on small insects that are pecked from the foliage of shrubs or trees, among grass or from the ground among accumulated leaf litter. They regularly forage together in pairs or small family groups

Breeding and Nesting: Three or four white eggs with brownish spots are laid in a domed nest that is made from grass and strips of bark, and lined with fine grass, rootlets, feathers and fur. Only the female incubates, but both parents, along with a band of helpers, feed the nestlings.

Similar species seen in the gardens: Adult males are unmistakable when in breeding plumage, but females, males in non-breeding plumage and young birds could be mistaken for Variegated Fairy-wrens in similar brown plumages.

