

Notes on the Splendid Blue Wren

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The following is a record of the field notes made in the Vasse River area, Busselton, Western Australia, by S. R. White in 1934, and by V. N. Serventy and S. R. White in the summer of 1942-43, on the Splendid Blue Wren (*Malurus splendens*).

BREEDING DATA

Date

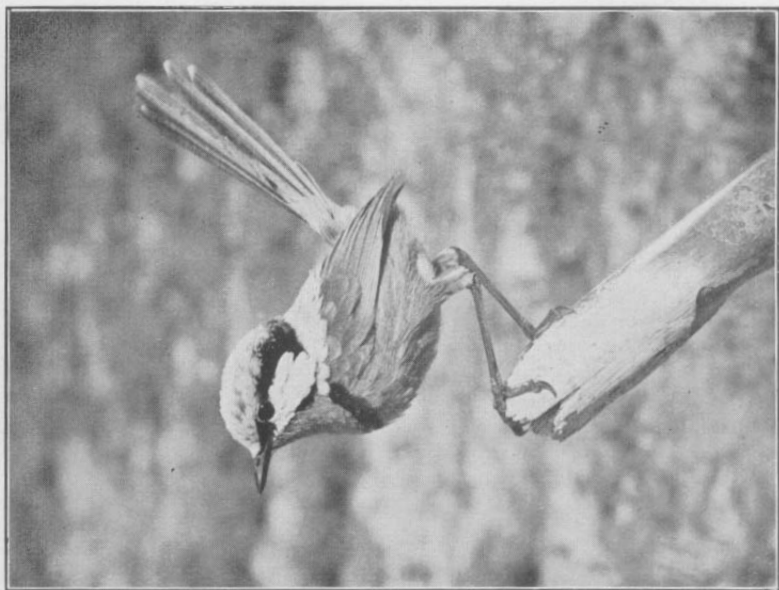
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|--------|---------|--------------------------------|--|
| 5/9/34 | 2 eggs. | 1 egg of Golden Bronze-Cuckoo. | In dead acacia. |
| 7/9/34 | 2 eggs. | ditto. | In a low shrub in the sandhill area along the beach. |
| 7/9/34 | 3 eggs. | | ditto. |
| 9/9/34 | 3 eggs. | | ditto. |
- 29/11/42
3 eggs. This nest was situated in an area of samphire bush about an acre in extent, in which two pairs of Wrens had been watched at intervals for some months. The area is invariably flooded during the winter months, and usually dries out by early November.
- 3/12/42
3 well-developed young, on the wing, were located in a swampy area. The nest from which they had apparently departed some weeks previously was situated in a *Melaleuca* tree, about seven feet high.
- 13/12/42
3 eggs. This nest was located in the same area as that indicated above, and may have been that of the same pair of birds, as the first nest disappeared before the young had hatched. It was later filmed in 16 mm. movie colour by Mr. Poignant.

The shyness of the birds and their quick movement gave the impression of more than a pair of birds, as they would appear at different places with amazing rapidity. The male rarely appeared anywhere near the nest after the first attempt to decoy us away had been made.

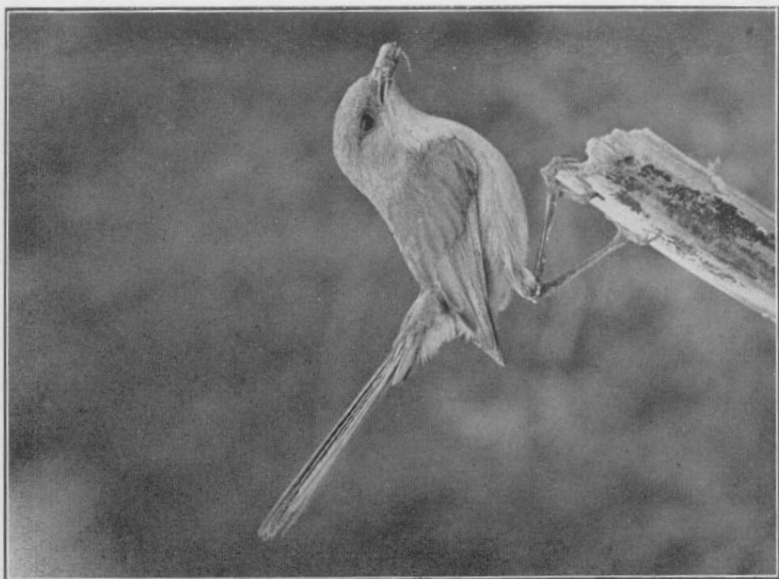
8/1/43

2 young. This nest was built in a clump of dead *Melaleuca* about five feet high, and bordering the dried-out estuary bed. The young vacated it on the following day, but were captured upwards of a week later, when Mr. Poignant took coloured movie shots of the male. Observations made over a period of a week, on this family, indicated the limitations of their territory. The birds seldom wandered more than thirty yards from the small clump of three or four trees near the nest, and even this movement was confined longitudinally to the rushes, samphire and debris along the bank. The damp estuary bed was a favourite feeding area, where the birds seemed to experience little difficulty in capturing an abundance of small larvae, and winged insects. Both parents assisted in feeding the young, although most of the work fell to the female.

Both parents made use of the decoy display when agitated by our close approach to the young. The fledgelings showed considerable aptitude in the art of escape, and once they had fluttered down to ground level were not easy to locate. They propelled themselves over the tangled terrain of sticks,



Male Splendid Blue Wren.



Female Splendid Blue Wren.

Photos. by S. R. White.

grass and samphire in a manner closely resembling the decoy display of the parents, and once beneath the foliage were difficult to discern by reason of their colour.

A possible explanation of the similarity between adults in decoy display and young birds is that the clash of the drives of self preservation and race preservation produces a temporary breakdown. A regression to a juvenile form of response results. Several times we were deceived into pursuing the female adult. The reaction, therefore, has a definite survival value.

The following extract from 'Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow,' by Margaret Nice, *Transactions of Linnaean Society of New York*, vol. VI, is of interest in this connection :

'The situation predator-near-nest releases the nest-protective display, the function of which is to call attention to the parent and away from the young. If the predator follows the bird the stimulus continues until the predator is no longer near the nest. If the predator remains by the nest, the stimulus is increased and the bird returns to display near the predator until the response tires. The bird certainly does not consciously imitate a sick or wounded individual. The display is part of the bird's repertoire of instinctive actions, yet it is not employed absolutely blindly; the bird responds to different enemies differently and its subsequent behaviour differs according to the response of the enemy.

'The intensity of the reaction typically increases during the mating cycle. Some birds, as Mourning Doves and shore birds, may show it with eggs, especially well-incubated eggs. With many birds it is at its height when the young are leaving the nest.'

The sense of territory seems well developed in this species as, even after the young are able to move fairly freely, the birds remain in the nesting area. However, this aspect we have not studied in any detail at present.

Rare Visitors in New Zealand.—Readers may be interested in the occurrence of two species which I have personally had the good fortune to come across in the Wellington provincial district, New Zealand—the Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) and Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*). In company with Mr. A. S. Wilkinson, another member of our Union, I saw a party of four Royal Spoonbills preening their feathers on a river-bank, on November 20, 1943. The birds looked like a family party—two adults and two juveniles. It was ascertained subsequently that two birds had been seen in a neighbouring area throughout the winter. Previously, only single birds of this species had been recorded in New Zealand—on six occasions, dating from 1861 to 1934.

As to the Glossy Ibis, one was seen on November 17, 1943. It also had been known to be present in the district for the previous four years.—R. H. D. STIDOLPH, Masterton, New Zealand, 28/2/44.