

Notes on the Moulting of the Blue Wren

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The appearance of small black blotches on the breast and back of a male Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) in the brown plumage phase inspired the hope that the writer might be able to observe the changes from day to day until the moult was complete. Owing to special circumstances, he had all day at his disposal, and was so situated that whenever a Wren announced its presence in or near the garden by its cheery song, he could commence observation almost immediately.

This ideal of daily observation, however, was not to be, owing to the fact that the principal party concerned not realising his temporary importance failed to present himself regularly for examination, and could only be inspected on the dates given below. It should not be deduced from this, however, that he was keeping out of sight as much as possible while the process of moulting was going on, as on the average the visits before and after the moult were no more frequent.

Of course, without keeping the bird in captivity, one cannot be absolutely positive that the individual noted one day is identical with the one seen the day before. But I think it is generally acknowledged that individual Blue Wrens, like many other birds, keep more or less strictly to one particular "territory." Hence, if a certain number of them visit a particular garden day by day in company, one can be reasonably sure that they are the same ones. When the writer came here on May 1, 1929, three Wrens in brown plumage visited the garden together. One was distinguishable as a male by his blue tail. From about a week later onwards, however, one was missing. It is the male of the remaining pair which is referred to in the notes below. In each instance he was accompanied by the female. It should perhaps be mentioned that these were not the only Wrens observed. On just one occasion, May 18, a solitary male in apparently complete blue and black coat was noticed.

The following diary entries are somewhat amplified for the sake of clearness:—

June 6.—The male Wren shows small blotches of black on breast and back, contrasting with the whitish and brown respectively.

June 7.—Black blotches are slightly more conspicuous to-day.

June 10.—Only caught glimpse of male at about eight yards' distance. Black was conspicuous, and blue also was quite obvious on side of head.

June 14.—Saw Wrens again. Moults considerably advanced. The blue patch on either side of head and neck is clearly defined, and appears to be pure blue in colour. Blue patch on crown though clearly defined, is sprinkled with a residue of brown. Blue band across back is present, but incomplete in colour and extent. Black appears complete, except on the lower back, where it is still brown.

June 17.—Black can now be seen on lower back, and the moult seems to be complete.

It is difficult to get a good view of a Wren's rump, owing to the position of the tail, unless one can look down from above. Thus the actual date at which the black on lower back, rump and upper tail-coverts was complete was not determined.

Olive-backed Oriole. — A pair of Olive-backed Orioles (*Oriolus sagittatus*) which I found nesting at Eltham Heights in October were among the most timid birds before the camera with which I have had to deal. In spite of the presence for some days before the nest of a tripod nine feet high, topped with a dummy camera, they caused me hours of waiting, when I eventually substituted the camera for the dummy. One only of the pair—the male apparently—would actually go to the young in the nest; the female was content to sit upon a limb nearby, where she remained for anything up to half an hour without moving.

In the intervals between feeding the young, the male was accustomed to make a complete circle of the nesting area, flying from tree to tree over a radius of about a quarter of a mile—his progress could be followed by the notes—and after thus having encircled his district would return with food. Once he set out upon this flight I resigned myself to a wait of almost an hour, for that was the average time of his absence. The female perched tantalisingly in a tree overlooking the nest, uttering no sound, until the male returned.

The young were most precocious. Although but half-fledged they left the nest and fluttered to the ground. We spent some time trying to replace them—vainly, as it turned out to be, for when we left they had climbed to the limbs surrounding the nest where the parents were watching them.—M. S. R. SHARLAND, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.