

## "Colour Transformation" of *Malurus* Species

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In the *Emu* of March 1960 we find a comment by Miss Joan Bradley on the brightly-coloured Wren recorded by Mr. W. S. McColl. Having witnessed colour transformation in the cases of *M. lamberti*, *M. cyaneus* and *M. melanocephalus*, I am decidedly in agreement with Miss Bradley in her suggestion that Mr. McColl's wren could have been *M. lamberti*, as the circumstances mentioned by him would quite possibly bring intruding wrens into the natural territory of others, in which case there would without doubt be conflict among the male birds.

I was extremely interested in the article in the *Emu*, vol. 58, in which the Misses Bradley recorded so completely the many superb Blue Wren families about their home, and it particularly pleased me to see their record of what they term the "blue-and-black" transformation. That is an occurrence that I have observed over a long period of years, the cause of the transformation being excessive excitement such as conflict between males or the effort to draw attention from their nest or young. It is surprising how these birds can alter their appearance by exposing the body feathers to the extent of covering completely the brown of the wings and other duller parts. I have watched *M. lamberti* creep like a mouse along the ground with drooped tail and fluffed body feathers and endeavour to draw attention from the nestlings, which it often succeeds in doing, as one's thoughts are on it alone because of its behaviour and its complete colour transformation. I have witnessed the same with *M. cyaneus* and *M. melanocephalus*. Particularly when males are in conflict does this transformation take place.

I have two very vivid recollections of the behaviour of those species. On one occasion I came on five males of the former species in conflict and all were showing the 'blue-black' phase to a remarkable extent. When I interrupted their battle, all five crept like mice along the ground one behind the other, each with velvety-black bodies and blue heads and with the tails depressed. The second instance was a battle between three Red-backed Wrens which were making a willing fight, each being brilliant orange-red with black heads and tails. It is surprising the amount of red that these birds can expose when in a state of excitement and they are indeed brightly-coloured birds at such times.

Usually when the males are in conflict the females show only mild excitement and, apart from some trilling chatter, do not show over-much interest in the trouble among the males. When the excitement is caused by an intrusion of a human or other source of danger to the nest or young the female will endeavour to decoy the cause of the trouble away from her treasures by doing the creep along the ground in a different direction from that of the male.