

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF TWO
WEDGE-TAILED EAGLES

(By REX ELLIS)

I was walking with a friend through some scrub near McLaren Vale on October 30, 1957, when a young light-colored Wedgetailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*) flew up off the ground in front of us. A little further on, a full-grown "Wedgetail" flew off the ground with a small brownish snake, about 2 feet long, held in its talons. The snake hung limply, so we presumed it was dead. The large dark-brown eagle was then joined by the young bird, and together they ascended to about 300 or 400 feet, where they soared for a few minutes.

The young bird then moved in close behind its parent, and tried to snatch the snake from it, without success. The large eagle then turned on the young bird, and buffeted it with its wings, as if angry with it.

The large "Wedgetail" then dropped the snake. The young bird immediately closed its wings and dived after the snake, catching it in its talons about 80 feet below. It then returned to the parent eagle and rolled on its back, with the snake thrust upwards in its talons. The old bird then took the snake out of the young eagle's talons, and the whole process was repeated again.

Still clutching the snake in its talons, the large eagle commenced soaring in large circles. The young bird took up a position a few feet above its parent, and copied its movements. Several times the large eagle dropped, and the young eagle followed it.

While these manouvres were taking place, a pair of Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus notatus*) were endeavoring to reach the eagles. When they were successful they commenced attacking the eagles. At first the eagles tolerated the kites, and then suddenly both eagles rose another few hundred feet. The kites, which were now hardly visible, attempted to follow, but soon gave it up and returned to the scrub.

A pair of Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) were also attacking the eagles at about this time. A little later the eagles disappeared from view.