

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF PETAL CARRYING AND DISPLAY BY THE SUPERB FAIRY-WREN *MALURUS CYANEUS*. This note documents six observations of petal carrying and displays by male Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus* that were recorded in 1993 and 1994 in the vicinity of a sawmill work yard 3.5 km NW of Lobethal, S.A. (34°53'S, 138°50'E). All males were in nuptial plumage.

1. On 7 May 1993 one male entered the sawmill with a yellow petal in its bill. After a brief period of moving about in a normal foraging fashion it dropped the petal on to bark and offcut debris on the floor of the sawmill. This petal was later identified as a ligule from a daisy flower (probably South African daisy *Senecio pterophorus*).

2. At 1200 h on 27 May 1993 one male was observed moving about the inflorescence of Montpellier broom *Genista monspessulana* with a yellow petal in its bill. From there it flew 50 m across open ground to perch on sawmill offcuts in the vicinity of several uncoloured wrens. This male appeared to watch these birds for about one minute before it was joined by a second male. The two males faced each other briefly in the 'display posture' with raised and flattened crowns (the blue feathers at the rear of the crown and the black feathers of the nape are erect, so that the crown appears flat and the nape appears quite broad), flared ear coverts and lowered tails, before the second male flew off now with a yellow petal in its bill. The first male followed the second in a series of short flights between perches then across an open area and out of view into cover, flying awkwardly while maintaining the display posture. Five minutes later, as a result of a search for the same birds, I found a group of two males and two uncoloured wrens. One male held a yellow petal but was not in display posture. The other male was in display posture and pursuing an uncoloured wren, but did not have a petal.

3. At 1300 h on 29 October 1993 one male entered the sawmill carrying a yellow petal in its bill and dropped it on the ground. This petal was later identified as being from the flower of *Goodenia* sp.

4. Early on the morning of 8 June 1994 a male was observed carrying a yellow petal in its bill. The petal was dropped and I recovered it for later examination. Later in the morning a male (most probably the same individual) came into the sawmill carrying a yellow petal in its bill. I recovered this petal after it was dropped. Both petals were later identified as the standard from the flower of *Genista monspessulana*.

5. At 1100 h on 3 August 1994 a male adopted the display posture near a female and an eclipse male. The displaying male called with short liquid trills. The female gave a similar call whilst briefly adopting

a posture resembling the displaying male. Shortly afterwards the male flew off in pursuit of the female with the eclipse male closely following.

6. On 11 October 1994 two males were observed in the display posture within 1 m of each other along with two females. Whilst calling with short liquid trills each male angled the plane of the flattened crown and flared ear coverts to face one of the females.

DISCUSSION

As well as the observations recorded here, other observations of petal carrying and display were observed but not recorded. I have observed petal carrying by *M. cyaneus* at the sawmill site only infrequently, though I have frequently observed the display posture there and occasionally at other locations. My only other observation of petal carrying by a fairy-wren was made at a site on the eastern fringe of the southern Mount Lofty Ranges where a male Variegated Fairy-wren *M. lamberti* in nuptial plumage carried a yellow petal in its bill. The wren dropped the petal and I was able to collect it and identify it as a petal from the flower of the introduced Soursob *Oxalis pes-caprae*.

Petal carrying and display by *Malurus* spp. has been documented by several authors (Loaring 1948; Hindwood 1948; Rowley 1965). Rowley (1991) suggests that, "petal carrying enhances the attractiveness of the male to females". I believe also that the adoption and presentation of the display posture by male *M. cyaneus* enhances their attractiveness to females, however similar behaviour has been thought to be associated with aggression (Schodde 1982; Schodde and Tidemann 1990). The observations presented here confirm these seldom observed behavioural traits and indicate that *M. cyaneus* prefers to carry yellow petals.

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