

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

Contact Jim at: beautifulbirds@y7mail.com

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE RED-BACKED FAIRY-WREN



The first time my young granddaughter, Anwen, saw the male of this species she said it should be called the "Magnificent" Red-backed Fairy Wren! It is the smallest of the fairy-wrens at 11cm with about half the length being its erect black tail.

The Red-backed Fairy-Wrens spend most of the cooler parts of their day foraging for food (60%), being vigilant (14%) and preening and chilling-out (17%). Foraging is most common in long grass where they prey on grasshoppers, moths, spiders, ants, wasps and cicadas. For very brief periods they forage on the ground and in low trees where they eat seeds and fruit. To break up the foraging sessions they rest in small trees where they must exercise extreme vigilance for predators: magpies, kookaburras, and butcherbirds. When they wish to spend time preening their feathers and chilling-out in safety they do this deep inside thorny shrubs which

deter predators.

Because they are group-living and cooperative breeders they are rarely alone. Both day and night are spent foraging and roosting together in groups of up to ten. They also react together in defence of their territory or in alarm when predators approach. The group consists of a breeding pair, several non-breeding adults and some young birds from the previous year's brood.

In the breeding season, the whole group helps the breeding pair. The additional adults and young assist in the feeding of nestlings and in tending the fledglings. When they are feeding nestlings or fledglings, the adults eat very small items themselves, and carry larger ones, such as grasshoppers and crickets back to the nest. What a communal day they have!

Happy Birding!

– Jim

Image: Red-Backed Fairy-Wren by Mike Ford ©