



Red-backed Fairy-wren, *Malurus melanocephalus*, Variegated Fairy-wren, *M. lamberti*

What do they look like? Small birds about 10 cm long with long tails which they hold upright. Adult males are brightly coloured: Red-backed Fairy-wren – black with a bright red back; Variegated Fairy-wren – blue and black head with red patch on shoulders. Females and some males are brown and difficult to tell apart.

Where do they live? Red-backed and Variegated Fairy-wrens are common across the region in open forests and woodlands. Between them, these fairy-wrens cover most of the Australian mainland. They live in thick shrub and grass cover.

What do they need to live, eat and breed? Fairy-wrens live in small parties and are absolutely dependant on dense, diverse vegetation for cover, feeding and breeding. They are weak fliers over long distances. They are insectivorous, usually moving through shrubs and grasses gleaning caterpillars, spiders and other small invertebrates while constantly making high-pitched contact calls to stay in touch with their flock. The nest is a very small ball of woven grass in thick vegetation, usually less than a metre off the ground. Currant Bush (*Carissa* spp.) is a particular favourite for nesting.

When might I see (or hear) them? High-pitched, reeling call is the most common sign, especially mid-morning. Usually seen fleetingly as they move between areas of cover.

What management actions affect this species? Overgrazing, introduced grass monocultures, clearing, wildfire and introduced weed infestations (especially Rubber Vine) threaten fairy-wrens because the density and diversity of the shrub and grass layer is very important to them. Maintaining a patchwork of different grazing and fire regimes on your property and some areas where fire and grazing is absent will help to maintain fairy-wren populations.

How do they benefit the land I manage? Because they feed on insects, especially caterpillars and moths, fairy-wrens form part of that invaluable group of birds which help keep insect numbers in check.

Similar species. White-winged Fairy-wren (*Malurus leucopterus*) is found in more arid areas and Lovely Fairy-wren (*Malurus amabilis*) lives in wet tropics areas.

