

ON AN UNUSUAL NESTING-SITE OF *SAULOPROCTA*
MELALEUCA.

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A pair of Black and White Fantails (*Sauloprocta melaleuca*) has frequented the garden and the verandahs of my house at Roseville, for the past four years, usually breeding in the trees in the neighbourhood. This year Mrs. North remarked that this pair of birds was always under the wooden screen protecting the breakfast-room window and thought the birds were building there. On the 1st September, 1907, I saw both birds carrying nesting-material, and on making an examination found no less than four nests about one-third built, had been formed on the top of a smooth and painted wooden beam two inches and three-quarters wide under the screen. Three of these partially built nests were afterwards found on the ground, whether pulled off by Sparrows or Starlings, as I know of the destructive habits of these species, or blown off by the wind, I cannot tell. The birds completed the remaining structure, and when I examined it again on the 12th September it contained one egg; as the nest did not feel too firmly attached to the beam, I applied some thin liquid glue to its base. An egg was deposited on each of the two following days, and on the latter the female began to sit. Lowering down each day the upper sash of the window, the panels of which were filled with coloured glass completely obscuring the nest when closed, one could watch while seated at meals only a few feet away, or walking about the room, the birds sharing the duties of incubation. A revelation was the remarkably short time that each bird sat before calling to its mate to be relieved, and as I was just recovering from an accident met with in the field, I had ample opportunities for making observations. The average time each bird sat was a quarter of an hour; once it was as short as four minutes, and once its duration lasted twenty-five minutes. After calling, the sitting bird would keep a sharp look out for its mate, and directly

it appeared in sight left the nest in an opposite direction from that in which the bird about to resume its duties was approaching. On the latter reaching the nest it immediately took possession of it and invariably, while it contained eggs, rubbed each side of its head and bill half way round the outside of the nest, backwards and forwards several times to get rid of the legs and any portion of insects attached to its bill. The bird which we took to be the male, being larger, and sitting higher up in the nest, would respond to either Mrs. North's or my call of "Sweet pretty creature," but would not do so to strangers. The period of incubation lasted fourteen days, the three eggs being hatched on the morning of the 28th September.

The newly hatched young are queer looking yellowish-white creatures with the feather tracts visible on the centre of the head and back. At that early stage of their existence, and only a few hours old, they mutely appealed for food with widely distended mouth. The labours of the parents were now increased, and both birds were busily engaged supplying their wants.

Sanitation is perfect, and cleanliness must be an instinct, for I first observed, when they were five days old, these callow helpless young, with eyes yet unopened, take the voidings of each other in their mouths, when with upturned head and open mouth, it was taken by a parent in its bill and dropped in the garden a few yards away. When the young were ten days old and feathered the voidings were taken direct by the adult when ejected by the young. At this stage the young birds well filled the nest, and were fed by the parents until dusk, when the old pair of birds left them for the night, roosting on an apricot tree in the garden, and returning to feed them early next morning.

The young birds were fed by their parents regularly as a rule three times a day, in the early morning, noon, and just before sundown, both old birds working assiduously to satisfy their cravings, insects being quickly obtained on a manure heap in the garden. Shortly before the young ones left the nest they were fed on butterflies, and, in one instance, with the comparatively large and beautiful blue and black Wanderer (*Papilio sarpedon*) after the wings had been torn off the body. During the whole of the time that the young ones were in the nest, the parents were exceedingly aggressive, swooping down on an intruder and giving vicious snaps with their bills. They chased a Raven away that used at times to come and prowl about the fowl-yard, but on one venturing to chase a Yellow-tufted Honey-eater out of the garden, two young ones of the latter assisted the

parent and the Fantail had to beat a hasty retreat. One young Fantail left the nest when fourteen days old, and the remaining two on the following day. They lived about the garden, roosting at night in an apricot tree, were very tame, and only to be distinguished from their parents when four weeks old by their duller black plumage, narrow brown tips to the upper wing-coverts, and shorter tails.

This is the only instance I have known of the Black and White Fantail, or more popularly known "Willy Wagtail," resorting to a house for the purpose of breeding. It is much more peculiar owing to the fact that the house is surrounded with trees—their usual nesting-place—as far as the eye can see on every side.



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