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ACQUISITION OF NUPTIAL PLUMAGE IN THE RED-WINGED FAIRY-WREN *Malurus elegans*

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Changes with age and season in the plumage of male Red-winged Fairy-wrens *Malurus elegans* were recorded as part of a study based on more than 600 colour-banded individuals whose age and social history were known. The chestnut lores of juvenile males showed traces of black as early as 39 days after hatching. The earliest record of completely black lores was at 117 days. All young males showed traces of black in the lores by their first April. More than 80 per cent of males did not acquire full nuptial plumage (= Full Plumage, FP) in the breeding season until they were two years old; at one year old, most were half blue or less. Males moulted into their brilliant FP progressively earlier as they became older; a few remained blue all the year. Males in FP in April–July were probably at least four years old. Some juveniles moulted their primaries in the autumn of their first year, but most did not. Information on the timing of changes in plumage suggests criteria for ageing this species at different times of the year.