

BIRD IN THE HAND

By H. J. de S. Disney and drawings by Sondra Beresford, Australian Museum, Sydney.

RAOU No. 631 New Holland Honeyeater
(*Meliornis novaehollandiae*)

AGING AND SEXING

Warning: Characters given for sex and age differences are not necessarily valid for other species of Honeyeater, even though closely related. Differences must be found and checked for each species.

SEX: It is well known the males are larger than the females, and that this can readily be seen in paired birds. However, there is an overlap in total length measurements and it is difficult to take this measurement with accuracy in live birds. Wing and tail measurements may vary slightly by a millimetre or two, but here also is overlap. The measurement which is easiest to take and gives sufficient difference is that of the stretched wing span.

Wingspan measurement used here is the extreme measurement with the bird placed on its back over the ruler and the wings held by the carpal joints. The primaries are brought parallel to the ruler and stretched out as far as possible. Properly done this does not harm the birds as the same birds have been handled in cages and measured this way every month for over a year.

Total Length—

Females: 160-176mm (generally about 165-172).

Males: 165-193mm (generally about 175-185).

Tail Length—

Females: 67-78mm (generally 72-75).

Males: 67-85mm (generally 79-82).

Wingspan—

Females: If under 230mm stretched with primaries fully emerged as juvenile or other age must be a female. 1st year birds: under 230. 2nd year birds: under 230, but sometimes can be stretched to just over (233mm measured).

Males: Juveniles: Over 230mm, usually 231-232. 1st year: Over 230mm, usually about 235. 2nd year: Over 230mm, usually over 240.

AGE. By plumage.

Juvenile—

Iris: Dark grey.

Bill: Dark brown—black.

Gape: Obvious, whitish yellow.

Head: Crown dark brownish; crown streaks dirty white and not very distinct.

Mantle: Brownish with no black and white streaks.

Rump: Brown without dark streaks.

“Beard”: Indistinct and greyish.

Breast: Greyish white with dark brown streaks.

Belly: Dirty white.

Wings: All wing coverts dark brown, primary coverts often with slight yellow edging.

First Winter (Post Juvenile):

This is obtained by a complete moult of all feathers except the primary coverts, which are usually not moulted or only partially. This moult starts 3-4 weeks after the young leave the nest and about one month later the body plumage is very similar to adult, but may still retain some juvenile feathers on back of crown and rump. This moult is fully complete in about three months.

Juvenile rump feathers can also often be seen in other species of honeyeater, which otherwise superficially appear in adult plumage, e.g. Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Meliphaga chrysops*).

Iris: White.

Bill: Black.

Gape: None.

Head: Crown black with well marked white streaks.

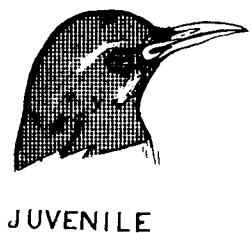
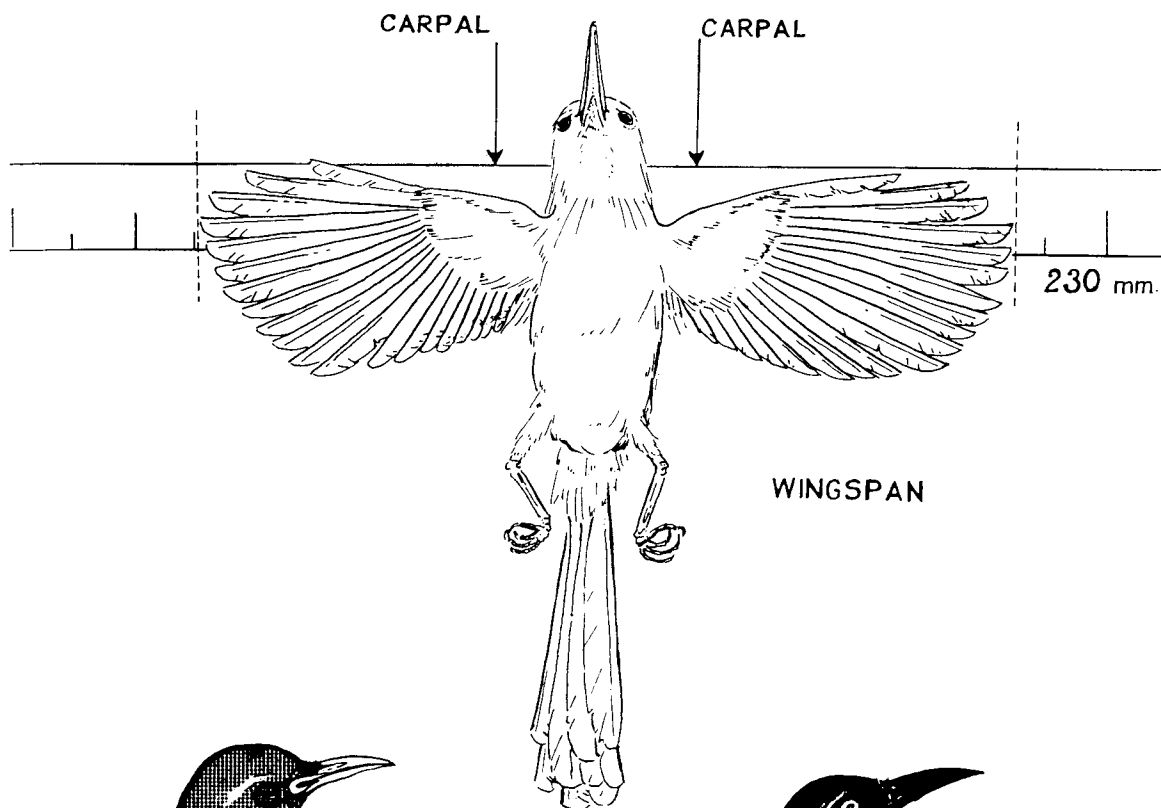
Mantle: Black and white streaks.

Rump: Brownish with dark streaks.

“Beard”: Long and white.

Wings: All coverts black, except primary coverts are usually still brown and juvenile or with only a few black coverts, and contrasting with secondary coverts. The primary juvenile coverts often with still slight yellow edging.

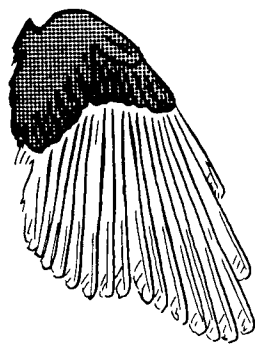
Adult. Similar to 1st winter, but primary and secondary coverts all black and not contrasting. Primary coverts with no yellow edging. After breeding a full moult is carried out and all wing feathers may become very brown before being renewed.



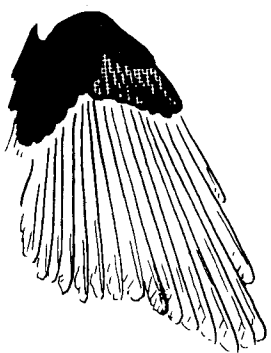
JUVENILE



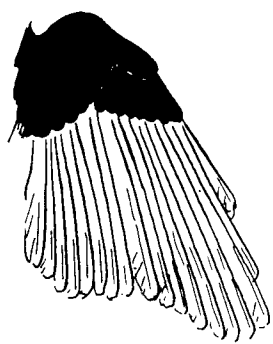
1ST WINTER



JUVENILE



1ST WINTER



ADULT