

# BIRD IN THE HAND

by H. J. de S. Disney, photographs by Howard Hughes, Australian Museum, Sydney.

## Satin Bower-bird

*(Ptilonorhynchus violaceus)*

### Sexing and Ageing "Green" Birds

This "Bird in the Hand" gives some indication of the difficulties of sexing and ageing "green" Satin Bower-birds. It is based on the detailed notes of Mrs Reta Vellenga and her husband and on their finding that the male does not assume full adult plumage until its seventh year.

A pale yellow colour on the underparts is not a sexual character, but indicates that the feathers are new and fresh. This yellow is rapidly lost.

### JUVENILE

Male and female similar. Body feathers soft and loose textured, quickly moulting into first year plumage.

**Underparts:** Whitish with dark brown crescents.

**Wings:** Dark brown with buff tips to lesser, median and secondary coverts.

**Scapulars:** Dark brown with white centre shafts.

### FIRST TO THIRD YEAR BIRDS AND ADULT FEMALE

These plumages are all similar, although with experience, differences may be distinguished. There are no clear cut characters and most measurements overlap.

The following characters are given to distinguish these birds from fourth year males.

**Bill:** Dark brown.

**Iris:** Purplish blue.

**Wings:** Innermost secondaries and secondary coverts with well marked to slight white tips. A wing length of 160 mm or less indicates a female, but many females measure more than 160 mm. Males are always more than 160 mm.

**Underparts:** Pale yellow with dark crescents, the yellow being lost and becoming dirty white.

**Chin:** Pale yellow, when fresh, becoming dirty white.

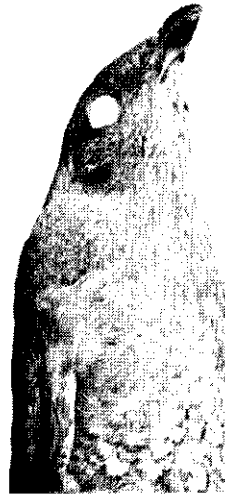
**Ear Coverts:** Shafts and centres yellowish buff, becoming whitish with dark outer edges to feathers.



*First year bird.*



*Adult female.*



*Fourth year male.*



*Older male, showing bill change and some blue feathers.*

#### FOURTH YEAR MALE

- Bill:** Dark brown.
- Iris:** Blue with purplish round pupil.
- Underparts:** Yellow wash when fresh but this is soon lost becoming dirty white.
- Chin:** Green with small whitish spots and streaks.
- Throat:** Green with whitish streaks.
- Breast:** A collar of green with scattered whitish spots.
- Ear Coverts:** Brownish, sometimes with very slight pale streaking on the centre shafts. This becomes more obvious with wear.

After the fourth year, the male is still in "green" plumage, but the bill starts to assume the pale yellow colour with a blue grey base of the adult male. Blue or partially blue feathers gradually appear in the plumage of both the body and wings until the full satin blue plumage is attained.

#### SUMMARY

In the first few years birds of both sexes are similar but in the 4th year the male has a noticeable green collar on its lower throat and breast.