Brood Patches

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Examination of the brood or incubation patch may prove both rewarding and helpful to banders. It could indicate sex and maturity where only one of a pair is known to incubate; and it could also elucidate the share of incubation duties where this is not clear. Dimorphism does not necessarily preclude incubation capability nor does monomorphism automatically include it.

Briefly, the brood patch is situated between the ventral feather tracts (pteralae) which are separated by areas of almost naked skin (apteria). These apteria bear sparse down in some species but in others they are well covered. This down is shed with the formation of the brood patch but a bare abdomen does not mean that a bird is incubating. Physiological changes are also necessary. The area becomes engorged with blood (vascularized) and swelling occurs (oedema).

When the eggs have hatched and the nestlings are no longer dependent on the body warmth of the brooding parent, the brood patch subsides and becomes wrinkled and scaley but remains unfeathered until normal moult.

An examination of nidicolous nestlings clearly indicates the pteralae and apteria.

Where the female alone incubates, confusion sometimes occurs because some males sit on the eggs for a period. It is doubtful that this serves any purpose other than protection of the eggs, possibly from predation. In this case, it appears that the female covers the eggs at night when they are most likely to suffer from a temperature drop.

Banders who are constantly handling birds should soon learn to recognise a true brood patch as opposed to merely an unfeathered area. Proven non-brooders and pre-breeders should be compared with brooders, and examination should be made both in and out of the breeding season.

A complete and detailed picture is neither possible nor desirable in a short note of this nature. Some of the references which follow should be studied to gain familiarity with the subject which does not appear to have been studied extensively. There is very little reference to it in the Australian literature.

Bibliography

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Recovery Data

Some items in "Recovery Round-up" are forwarded by individual banders, a few are received from outside sources, but the majority are received from the Secretary of the Australian Bird-banding Scheme, and this is greatly appreciated. However, it is not practical for the Banding Office to forward copies of all recoveries, and interesting ones are occasionally missed.

This can be avoided if banders forward to me details of any recoveries or retraps concerning movement or longevity which they consider may be suitable for inclusion in "Recovery Round-up".

Items for the particular species should be checked in recent issues, as a guide in deciding suitability. If in doubt, send the details anyway. In order to avoid possible errors, the "Report to Bander" form should be forwarded to me if possible; these will be returned promptly.

—Hon. Editor