

SEXING OF TAWNY FROGMOUTHS: A COMMENT ON SMITH (2002)

Photographs of the Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* accompanying the paper by Smith (2002a) purport to show: a 'female' (front) and 'male' (rear) (Fig. 2); 'male' brooding and 'female' bringing food (Fig. 3); 'female' sitting (Fig. 4); and 'male' sitting (Fig. 5). By the gender criteria in Higgins (1999), the birds in these photographs are mis-sexed and their gender labels should therefore be transposed. Males are larger, larger-billed, and greyer than females; females are smaller, browner (even in the grey morph), have more distinct chestnut malar stripe and 'shoulders', and generally have a darker crown with broader crown stripes. These criteria apply at least to southern and eastern *P. s. strigoides*; inland and western *P. s. brachypterus* is said to be more difficult to sex on current, limited information, with far south-western birds (i.e. in Smith's study area) resembling *strigoides* in plumage (Higgins 1999).

It is a common misconception that frogmouths seen incubating or brooding by day (the larger, greyer sex) are female, but all such birds definitively sexed by dissection (see Higgins 1999) or by capture, measurement and radio-tracking (Körtner and Geiser 1999) are male. This problem has been discussed elsewhere (Beruldsen 1997; Fitzsimons 2001). These considerations bear on gender assignment of frogmouths observed by Smith (1997, 1999, 2001 2002b), with the likelihood that the 'male' was really female and vice versa, observations of 'apparent' copulation, or copulation at dusk (when the individuals would be difficult to distinguish), notwithstanding. The behavioural study by Smith (2001) is especially valuable, but for the likelihood

of mis-sexing and the lack of reference to and comparison with Higgins (1999). For instance, the courtship behaviour attributed by Smith (2001) to the female is likely to have been performed by the male.

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