

SATIN BOWERBIRD



- *Satin Bowerbird (male) adding stick to wall of bower.*

Photo: E. Slater

Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*

Sexing and Ageing

Although the adult male Satin Bowerbird is easily identified by its glossy blue-black plumage (see frontispiece), this plumage is not attained until the seventh year. Prior to that the birds of each sex resemble one another in having green plumage. This guide should help distinguish such birds, and is based on the detailed notes of Mrs Reta Vellenga and her late husband.

A pale yellow colour on the underparts is not a sexual character, but simply indicates that the feathers are new and fresh; it is soon lost.

Juvenile

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

Underparts: Whitish with dark brown crescent shaped markings.

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 birds have very similar plumages, although, with experience, differences may be distinguished. There are no clear-cut characters and most measurements overlap.

Bill: Dark brown.

Iris: Purplish blue.

Wings: Innermost secondaries and secondary coverts with slight to well marked white tips. Birds with a wing length of 160 mm or less

are female, although many females have wings larger than 160 mm. The wings of male birds always exceed 160 mm.

Underparts: Pale yellow with dark crescent shaped markings. The yellow is soon lost, 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.

Fourth Year Male

Bill: Dark brown.

Iris: Blue with purplish round pupil.

Underparts: Yellow wash when fresh, soon becoming dirty white.

Chin: Green with small whitish spots and streaks.

Throat: Green with whitish streaks.

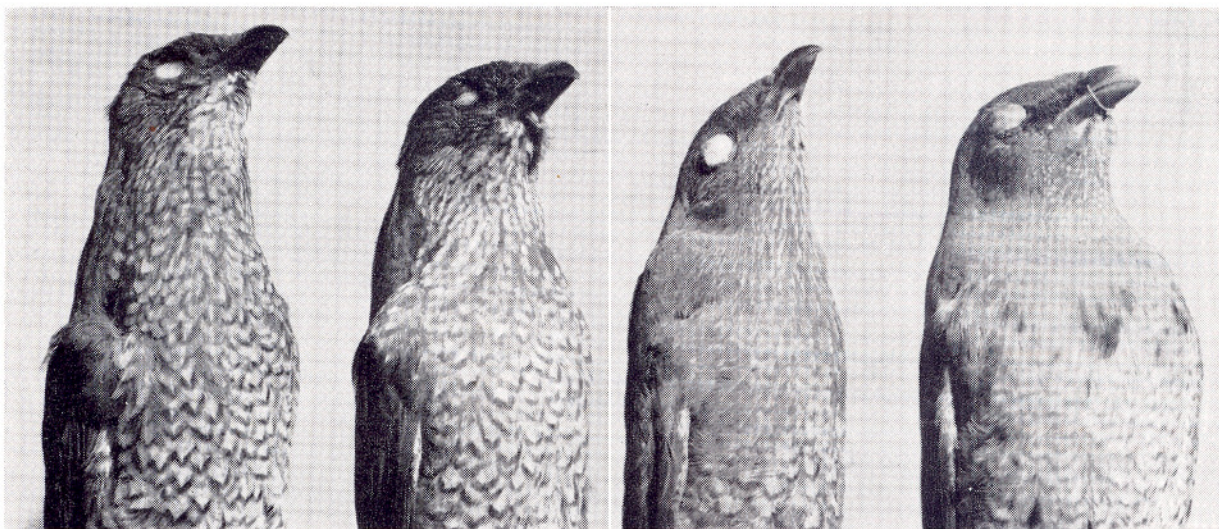
Breast: A collar of green with scattered whitish spots.

Ear coverts: Brownish, sometimes with very slight pale streaking on the centre shafts. Streaking 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 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-black plumage is attained.

SUMMARY

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



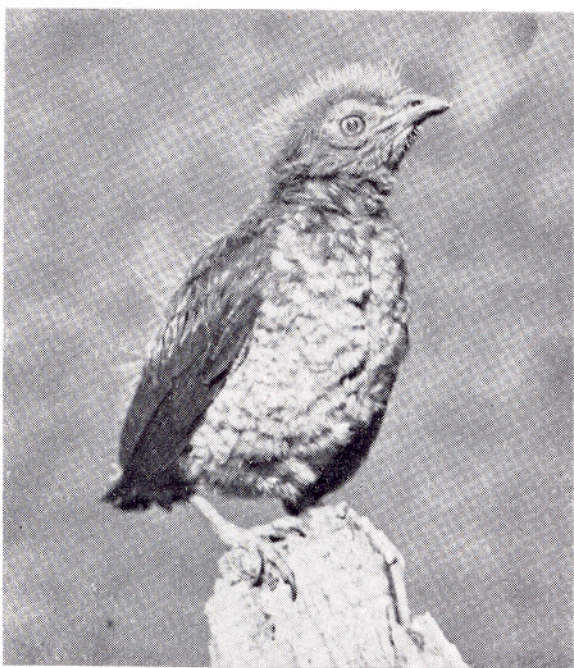
First year bird

Adult female

Fourth year male

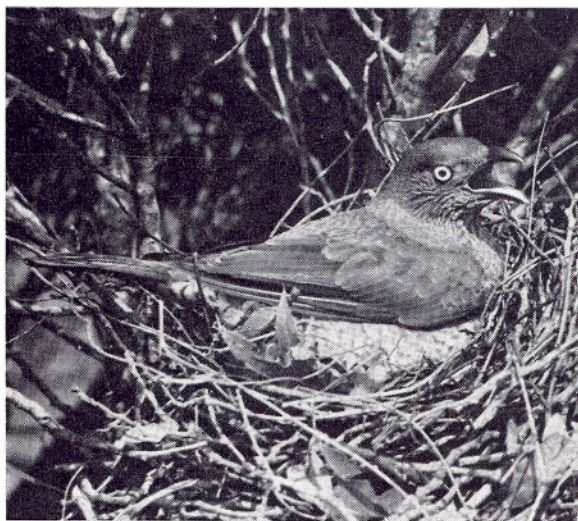
*Older male, showing
bill change and some
blue feathers.*

Photos: H. Hughes



• *Satin Bowerbird (fledgling).*

Photo: A. J. Elliott



• *Satin Bowerbird (female) on nest.*

Photo: N. Chaffer

