

« BIRD IN THE HAND »

Ageing and Sexing Endemic Tasmanian Honeyeaters

by D. G. Henderson and R. H. Green

The data for ageing and sexing the four species — Yellow-throated Honeyeater *Lichenostomus flavicollis*, Strong-billed Honeyeater *Melithreptus validirostris*, Black-headed Honeyeater *M. affinis* and Yellow Wattlebird *Anthochaera paradoxa* — presented here has been assembled from the Tasmanian Museum, the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston and the R. H. Green personal collection. We are grateful to David Milledge for critical comments and for some notes on ageing the four species.

Specimens in which the sex was not established at the time of preparation have been discounted. Total body weight is expressed in grams, wing length (in millimetres) was taken with the wing flattened and straightened and bill length (in millimetres) is for the total length to the angle at the front of the skull as illustrated in Disney *et al.* (1974:5-6). These measurements have been selected because they are considered to be those most easily taken by banders working alone in the field. The figures in brackets represent the mean \pm two standard deviations, thus 50% of the birds would be expected to fall within this range. However breeding females may show a marked weight increase during egg production (see Lane 1976).

YELLOW-THROATED HONEYEATER

Lichenostomus flavicollis

Biometrics

Male:

Weight (42) 28-40 g (32.6 ± 4.5 g)
Wing (32) 99-113 mm (106.2 ± 7.6 mm)
Bill (33) 19-22 mm (20.2 ± 1.4 mm)

Female:

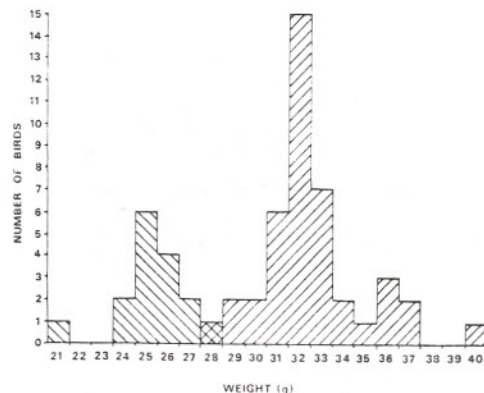
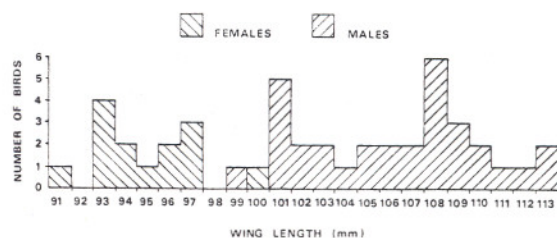
Weight (16) 21.5-28.5 g (25.3 ± 3.0 g)
Wing (15) 91-100 mm (94.7 ± 4.8 mm)
Bill (15) 17-19 mm (18.6 ± 1.4 mm)

Sexing

Males tend to be larger than females and there is almost complete separation by weight (males ≥ 28 g; females ≤ 28 g), and by wing length (males ≥ 99 mm; females ≤ 100 mm). (see Fig. 1).

Ageing

The nape of juvenile birds has a brown wash; in older birds, the nape is grey. Eye colour is also dark brown in young birds but is deep red in adults. The yellow of the throat deepens in colour after the first year.



● Figure 1. Histogram of wing length and weights of Yellow-throated Honeyeater.

STRONG-BILLED HONEYEATER*Melithreptus validirostris***Biometrics****Male:**

Weight (14) 23.5-29 g (25.7 ± 3.4 g)
 Wing (17) 80-86 mm (83.6 ± 3.4 mm)
 Bill (19) 20-24 mm (21.4 ± 2.0 mm)

Female:

Weight (12) 17.5-25 g (21.3 ± 5.0 g)
 Wing (12) 77-85 mm (80.0 ± 4.4 mm)
 Bill (12) 17-23 mm (19.4 ± 2.8 mm)

Sexing

Males tend to be larger than females but there is considerable overlap in all measurements.

Ageing**Juvenile**

Nape: Bright lemon yellow.
Belly, axillaries and sides of throat: White, tinged pale yellow.
Bill: Bi-coloured — dark brown tip with orange basal half, orange gape.
Eye: Mid-brown.
Bare skin over eye and eye ring: Orange-yellow.

Adult

Nape: White.
Belly, axillaries and side of throat: White.
Bill: Black.
Eye: Deep red-brown.
Bare skin over eye and eye ring: Pale blue-green.

BLACK-HEADED HONEYEATER*Melithreptus affinis***Biometrics****Male:**

Weight (21) 13-18.5 g (15.2 ± 2.8 g)
 Wing (25) 74-81 mm (78.2 ± 3.8 mm)
 Bill (23) 14-16 mm (14.8 ± 1.2 mm)

Female:

Weight (6) 12-14.3 g (13.5 ± 1.8 g)
 Wing (8) 74-80 mm (75.8 ± 4.0 mm)
 Bill (7) 13-15 mm (13.5 ± 1.4 mm)

Sexing

Males tend to be slightly larger than females but there is considerable overlap in all measurements.

Ageing**Juvenile**

Crown and side of head: Pale olive-brown.
Throat: Yellowish-white.
Breast and belly: Yellowish-white.
Bill: Dark brown, with pale base and tip.

Adult

Crown and side of head: Black.
Throat: Black.
Breast and belly: Greyish-white.
Bill: Black.

YELLOW WATTLEBIRD*Anthochaera paradoxa***Biometrics****Male:**

Weight (16) 150-220 g (178.9 ± 35.4 g)
 Wing (25) 160-192 mm (179.8 ± 17.0 mm)
 Bill (24) 30-36 mm (33.1 ± 3.0 mm)

Female:

Weight (9) 111-140 g (124.0 ± 21.0 g)
 Wing (9) 157-174 mm (166.6 ± 10.0 mm)
 Bill (9) 29-31 mm (30.1 ± 1.5 mm)

Sexing

Males are conspicuously larger than females and sexing may be possible by weight (and wing and bill measurements) but further specimens are needed for a statistically significant sample.

Ageing**Juvenile**

Crown and nape: Feathers pale grey-brown.
Belly: Brownish-white.

Adult

Crown and nape: Feathers blackish-brown with white edges.
Belly: Yellow.

The juvenile crown and nape colouring persists longer than the juvenile abdomen colour. In first-year females, wattles do not develop until late autumn or early winter but in first-year males, wattles are developed by April.

References

- Disney, H. J. de S. *et. al.*, (1974), S. G. Lane (Ed.), *Bird in the Hand*, Bird Bander's Assoc. of Australia, Sydney.
 Lane, S. G. (1976), 'Results from Banding Southern Yellow Robins', *Aust. Bird Bander* 14: 63-66.

D. G. Henderson,
 P.O. Box 29, Legana, Tas., 7251.

R. H. Green,
 C/- Queen Victoria Museum,
 Launceston, Tas., 7250.