

BIRD IN THE HAND

by H. J. de S. Disney, Australian Museum; drawings by G. Daniels

Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*

Sexing and Ageing

No clear characters have so far been found for separating the male and female juveniles in all races, or second-year males from second-year or adult females. Mayr (1954) described the Australian races in which he differentiated the various males and females. The latter are not readily separated from second-year males, particularly in New South Wales. To date, insufficient samples are available to determine this.

Galbraith (1967) gave a brief description of the plumages of different age classes. Further details and some notes on the Australian races follow.

JUVENILE

Body: Deep rufous, including head.

Wing: Brown edged rufous.

Tail: Individual feathers pointed.

Tasmanian race: Dark brownish-grey.

Eastern Australian race: Edges olive, becoming

greener northward, at least from about Grafton, N.S.W., through Queensland.

Rump: Rufous.

Bill: Pale brown.

Iris: Dark brown.

FIRST YEAR

This plumage is achieved by a rapid moult of the juvenile body feathers and secondary coverts, but not of the remainder of the wing or tail feathers.

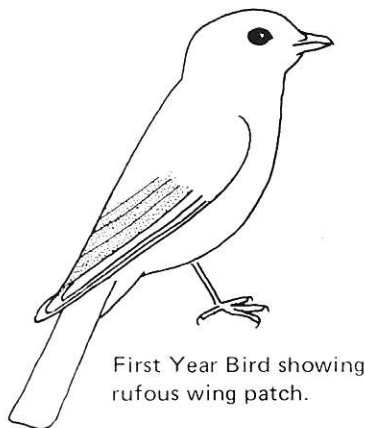
Body: Similar to that of the adult female.

Wing

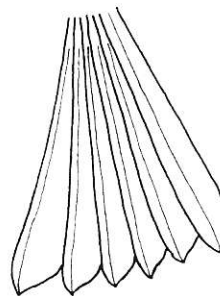
Primaries: Still unmoulted juvenile feathers but rufous edges becoming whitish with wear.

Primary coverts: Still juvenile, usually with slight rufous edges.

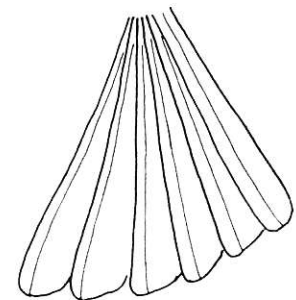
Secondaries: Unmoulted juvenile feathers which stand out as a distinct rufous patch on the wings. In some Tasmanian birds, the rufous may be



TAIL FEATHERS



JUVENILE



ADULT

slight, and with wear leaves olive edges similar to second-year birds.

Secondary coverts: Moulded and replaced by feathers similar to those of the adult female.

Tail: Still juvenile with pointed ends to the feathers.

Rump: Grey in the Tasmanian race, becoming olive and greener northwards.

Bill: Brown.

Iris: Dark brown.

NOTE: *The male is capable of breeding in this plumage.*

SECOND YEAR

Male and female moult into plumage similar to that of the adult female.

Body: Similar to that of the adult female.

Wing

Primaries: New feathers blackish-grey with pale to olive edges.

Primary coverts: Similar to primaries and without rufous edges.

Secondaries: New feathers with greenish-olive edges.

Secondary coverts: Similar to those of the adult female.

Tail: Ends of the feathers rounded or squarish (not pointed).

Bill: Dark brown becoming black by the next breeding season.

Iris: Red-brown.

NOTE: *Both sexes may breed in this plumage.*

THIRD YEAR

Female

Body, wing and tail: As for the adult female.

Bill: Brown or black.

Iris: Red-brown.

Male

It is not known when the males attain full plumage. However, there is no evidence to show that they moult directly from first-year plumage into that of the adult (see also Galbraith 1967).

TAIL PATTERNS



TAS.
BIRDS



VIC.
BIRDS



QLD.
BIRDS



W.A.
BIRDS

Galbraith (p. 293) quoted S. J. Wilson who, from banding data, suggested that the male third-year plumage was similar to that of the second year, and the full adult plumage was not attained until the fourth year.

Body

Crown: Grey-brown sometimes with dark blackish, adult-type feathers.

Breast: Similar to that of the female. Sometimes a few black breast feathers appear, mixed with buff feathers, sufficient to show a definite band.

Belly: Buffish-grey, sometimes with some yellow feathers.

Back: Similar to that of the female, but may have one, two, or more adult-type greenish-yellow feathers.

Wing: Similar to those of second-year birds.

Tail: Similar to that of second-year birds. However, with sufficient breeding stimulus some feathers may be partly black as in the adult.

Bill: Black.

Iris: Red-brown.

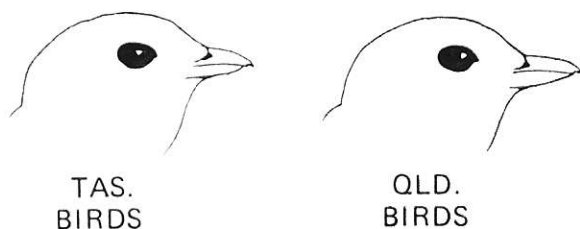
FOURTH YEAR

Adult Female

Body

Crown: Olive-brown to olive-grey, becoming greyer northwards.

BILL DIFFERENCES



Back: Olive-brown to olive-grey, becoming greener northwards.

Throat: Mottled grey.

Breast: Grey to buffy-grey.

Belly: Greyish to light cinnamon, becoming whiter with wear.

Undertail coverts: White in the Tasmanian race becoming pale yellow to yellow northwards.

Wing

Primaries: Blackish-grey to brown, becoming grey northwards. Olive edges to feathers become whitish with wear.

Primary coverts: Blackish-grey to brown, with paler edges.

Secondaries: Blackish-grey to brown with edges olive to olive-green, becoming greener northwards.

Secondary coverts: Inner webs dark blackish. Outer webs olive to green with buff tips, becoming whitish with wear.

Tail: Grey in the Tasmanian race, becoming greener northwards.

Rump: Olive-brown, becoming greener northwards.

Bill: Black.

Iris: Red-brown.

NOTE: *The presence of some yellow feathers on the lower breast and belly is not a definite indication that the bird is a male as females occasionally have some yellow feathers in these places.*

Adult Male*Body*

Head: Black.

Throat and chin: White.

Nape: Bright golden-olive.

Back: Olive.

Upper breast: Black band.

Lower breast and belly: Bright yellow.

Wing: Blackish-brown with pale grey or olive edges to the webs.

Tail

Tasmanian race: All grey.

Eastern races: Basal part grey with greenish-olive edges to webs. One-half to two-thirds black in the south, becoming almost entirely black in the north.

South-western race: Basal two-thirds grey, remainder black.

Bill: Black.

Tasmanian race: Short and stubby.

Eastern races: Slightly longer than Tasmanian form, increasing northwards.

South-western race: Similar to eastern races.

General Note

It is possible that the southern forms in Tasmania and Victoria may migrate north in the winter. There is an indication from skins that Tasmanian birds may winter in N.S.W. Banders are urged to take particular note of tail and rump colours and to measure bill, wingspan and tail. By recording these data, it may be possible to determine the degree of winter movement and eventually sex differences in immature birds.

References

- Galbraith, I. C. J. (1967). 'The Black-tailed and Robust Whistlers *Pachycephala melanura* as a species distinct from the Golden Whistler *P. pectoralis*', *Emu* 66: 289-294.
- Mayr, E. (1954). 'Notes on the Australian Whistlers (Aves, *Pachycephala*)', *Amer. Mus. Novit.* 1653: 1-22.