

Facial Colour as a Sex Difference in the Black-capped (Varied) Sittella

According to most recent texts e.g. Macdonald (1973), Slater (1974), Reader's Digest (1976), the sexes of the Black-capped (Varied) Sittella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera pileata* can be differentiated by the colour of the face: white in males and black in females. Recent evidence indicates that this character is not reliable in the determination of sexes.

Both members of a pair of Black-capped Sittellas taken from a flock 8 km west of Ivanhoe NSW on 30 July 1978 had black faces. When the gonads of both specimens were examined it was found that one was a male (AM 0.47031) and one a female (AM 0.47030).

This finding prompted an inspection of other sexed adult specimens of The Australian Museum collection. Other than those cited above, only two of these were collected after 1900. The possibility was considered that the sex of the specimens may have been determined, not from internal examination, but by the assumed character of facial colouration. The data, however, did not support this assumption. Of ten other sexed specimens, three males have black faces and three have white. Four females have white faces. Two other specimens, from the Northern Territory, are directly opposite the accepted pattern but it is likely due to an exchange of labels as similar clerical errors have been discovered previously in this series of skins.

As indicated in Table 1, these differences appear, independent of geographical variation. The crowns of the immatures differ from those of adults of either facial colour by being streaked, not solid black. Thus it appears that it is not a difference between immatures and adults. It may be, however, that the Black-capped Sittella is like some other passerines, in which the males do not acquire full adult plumage until several years of age. Noske (1980) has presented evidence that sexual dimorphism is present in the Orange-winged Sittella *D. c. chrysoptera* as early as the fledglings.

TABLE 1

Facial colour of sexed specimens of Black-capped Sittella by state.

	MALES		FEMALES	
	Black	White	Black	White
New South Wales	1		1	
South Australia	2	1	2	
Western Australia		2	1	
Northern Territory*	1*			1*

*These are most likely due to incorrect labelling.

Positive identification of the sexes of the Black-capped Sittella on the basis of facial colour alone is not possible and care should be taken.

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References

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Walter E. Boles,
The Australian Museum, College Street,
Sydney, N.S.W., 2000.