
BIRD IN THE HAND

Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscus*

by S. G. Lane, Moonee, N.S.W. Drawings by Marina Bishop

AGEING

Adult (breeding season)

Bill: Black.

Gape flange: Black.

Eye ring:* Black.

Adult (non-breeding season)

Bill: Black tip, horn to yellow at base.

Gape flange: Yellow.

Eye ring:* Yellow.

Immature

This plumage is similar to the adult plumage in the non-breeding season except that the tail feathers are more pointed (see Disney 1976) and the rump feathers are buff. Also, the coverts have buff tips. Evidence of these characters is usually present for about nine months though the edging of the coverts is often lost earlier from wear.

Rump: Buff.

Coverts: Edged buff.

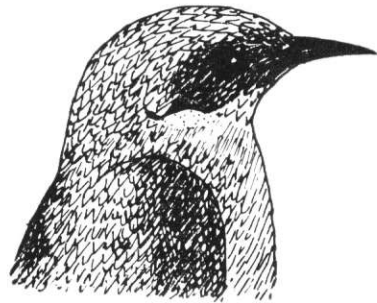
Bill: Dark brown tip, yellow at base.

Gape flange: Yellow.

Eye ring:* Yellow.

Juvenile

This plumage is similar to that of immature birds but the body plumage is soft and downy. The bill tip is brown and the yellow parts are very bright.

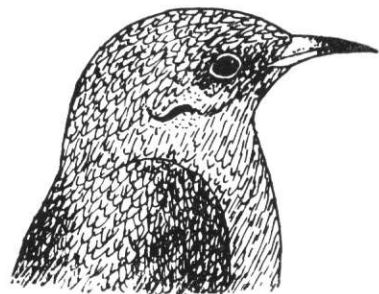


Adult (breeding season)

Bill: Black.

Gape flange: Black.

Eye ring: Black.



Adult (non-breeding season)

Bill: Black tip, horn to yellow at base.

Gape flange: Yellow.

Eye ring: Yellow.

* Scaly skin, not feathers.

SEXING

Most adult birds can be sexed by wing-span measurements (Lane 1974) but cloaca examination (see Disney 1976) during the breeding season is the most positive method. Measurements given for adults were confirmed by this method.

Adult

Males

Wing span: 251-268 mm (49 measured)

Females

Wing span: 237-252 mm (20 measured)

Immature

Some "first year" birds may be accurately sexed by wing span providing due allowance is made for the increase that occurs following the first primary moult. This increase is 5-12 mm (5 measured).

Males: Wing span > 248 mm

Females: Wing span < 235 mm

Note: These data were obtained from birds in the Sydney district, N.S.W. The plumage variations probably apply throughout the range of Fuscous Honeyeaters. However, the size is likely to vary. Near Townsville, Qld, measurements of nine adult males, confirmed by cloaca examination (in September) produced the following wing span data: Range 247-256 mm; Mean 250.8 mm; S.D. 3.2. This indicates that these more northern birds are smaller in size as might be expected.

References

- Disney, H. J. de S. (1967), 'Sexing Passerines by Cloaca Examination', *Aust. Bird Bander* 5(2): 36-37.
 Disney, H. J. de S. (1976), 'Bird in the Hand — Golden Whistler', *Aust. Bird Bander* 14(3): 73-75.
 Lane, S. G. (1974), 'Soft Part Colours in Fuscous Honeyeaters', *Aust. Bird Bander* 12(3): 55-57.

REVIEW

Bush Birds in Captivity, from the notes of the late Noel Ives, Edited by S. J. J. F. Davies, 1982, Aviculture Society of Western Australia, Perth. Pp.48, col. p.11 4. \$8.00.

The late Noel Ives was an aviculturist of the old school who pioneered the keeping of many Australian bush birds in captivity. It was with great anticipation that I read his published notes and the exercise was rewarding.

Stephen Davies, as editor, has elected to transcribe Mr Ives' notes verbatim. I found this technique refreshing because it speaks eloquently to those who might otherwise enter into difficult avicultural pursuits without a clear understanding of the problems involved.

Very few aviculturists these days will have the opportunity to collect birds from the wild for captive study or propagation. Those who do, however, will find Mr Ives' notes of considerable value. It is a relatively easy matter to maintain in captivity those birds that have been bred in confinement or have been long accustomed to it. Most aviculturists experience their first setbacks with birds that refuse to breed. These problems are sometimes difficult to overcome, despite intensive and diverse efforts. This inevitably produces a profound sense of frustration, but also provides a challenge for the future. The methods described at length in the book will prove their worth repeatedly in suggesting avenues of approach in breeding difficult birds.

The range of birds discussed is extensive, but the book's value extends beyond the birds dealt with directly, as many of the same principles apply to similar birds or their ecomorphs elsewhere.

Research on birds in captivity is a valuable tool for the ornithologist and one that is too often overlooked. Mr Ives' notes will be an important addition to the compendium of knowledge required by any researcher embarking into avicultural pursuits for the first time. They will, however, not suffice entirely, nor was this intended. A sound background in avicultural technique for maintenance of captive birds is an essential requirement. Anyone needing this information should contact the nearest zoo or avicultural society before starting a project involving keeping wild birds as captives.

There are strict laws covering the taking of any bird from the wild. Researchers are advised to check with their local fauna authorities in order to ascertain requirements and to obtain permits where necessary.

An appendix is included in the book, detailing the preparation of an artificial diet for softbills (loosely, non-seedeaters). This mixture represents a firm foundation upon which a softbill may be based, although in my view the addition of live insect food, fresh meat and fruit would be appropriate in many instances.

In summary, this book would be a useful reference for any researcher contemplating work with captive birds.

John De Jose, Mosman, N.S.W. 2088.