

AGEING AND SEXING

ANTEATING CHAT *MYRMECOCICHLA FORMICIVORA*

SEX

Only male Anteating Chats have a white shoulder patch (Maclean 1985), which they use in display (Herholdt 1987). These white patches are visible even in nestling males and are always absent in females, independent of age. However, in the field the patch is not always visible so that one should take a good hard look before sexing them in the field.

Only adult breeding females have an open, featherless broodpatch which remains so for the duration of the breeding season (September to December and even to February in some years).

Males are significantly larger than females (Table 1 overleaf).

AGE

PLUMAGE

Adults are sooty brown, while juveniles are very dark brown (almost black). Chicks which were hand-reared, underwent a partial body moult three to four months after hatching. During this moult only the wing coverts, head, nape and breast were moulted, but not the tail or wing feathers. At the age of six to eight months they also underwent a partial wing moult and primaries 6-9 were renewed. Thus, first-year birds, although they appear sooty brown and might be breeding, can be distinguished from the adults on account of unmoulted primaries 1-5.

GAPE

The yellow gapes of three known-age juveniles were still noticeable at the age of three months but not at six months.

REFERENCES:

Herholdt, J. J. 1987. Some notes on the general behaviour of the Anteating Chat *Myrmecocichla formicivora*. Mirafra. 4: 63-66.

Maclean, G. L. 1985. 'Roberts Birds of Southern Africa'. Cape Town: Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund.

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TABLE 1

MORPHOMETRICS OF ANTEATING CHATS *MYRMECOCICHLA FORMICIVORA*
HANDLED IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE

MEASUREMENTS (mm)	Males				Females				t-test
	Mean	Range	S.D.	n	Mean	Range	S.D.	n	P
Wing (max. chord)	97,4	93,0-101,0	2,37	27	93,9	87,2-99,8	2,97	18	0,001
Tail	57,7	48,1- 64,3	3,85	26	55,2	48,0-60,1	3,04	19	0,01
Tarsus	34,5	32,0- 36,5	1,07	27	33,5	32,0-35,4	0,98	19	0,001
Culmen (exposed)	17,5	15,1- 20,0	1,24	27	16,1	12,0-17,9	1,36	19	0,001
Weight (g)	49,9	41,5- 60,8	4,45	26	46,0	41,5-59,0	4,23	19	0,01