

# AGEING & SEXING

## FOREST CANARY *SERINUS SCOTOPS*

The Forest Canary is infrequently ringed, and its habits are relatively poorly known. During the period 1984-1986, we mistnetted 137 Forest Canaries in the southern Cape Province (Wilderness/Knysna districts), while working on other species.

### AGE and MOULT

Immatures up to about 5 months of age have a bright and prominent gape, pointed rectrices, and loose, soft body plumage. From 6 - 12 months of age, they have unmoulted primaries and secondaries, primary coverts, and rectrices. Immatures are in partial moult in March - May (probably starting in January), involving all contour plumage except for greater coverts. Skull ossification was not examined, but judging from other passerines, it is unlikely to be useful much longer than morphological characters. Adults have a complete moult after breeding (egg-laying occurs in October/November in the southern Cape), between about November and March.

### SEX

#### Cloacal protuberance and brood patch

The sex of adults may be determined with confidence on cloacal protuberance shape from about September to January. Breeding females may have a well vascularized brood patch in October - December. Breeding males may have a bare belly at this stage, but not vascularized.

#### Plumage

Adult males have a well-contrasted black chin patch. Adult females have a greyish throat, lightly streaked with darker grey. Juveniles of both sexes are similar. We do not know exactly at what age immatures can be separated, but males appear to gain the blackish chin with the post-juvenile moult.

MEASUREMENTS

As immatures moult their primaries in their first year, the shortest-winged individuals of both sexes are probably first-year birds. There is no apparent sexual dimorphism in Forest Canaries: in a subsample of 46 males and 47 females (most sexed by RJD on the above criteria), there were no significant differences in mass, wing length, tail length, tarsus length or culmen length (Table 1). These measurements are thus unhelpful to the ringer, and we recommend reliance on plumage, moult and cloacal criteria instead.

TABLE 1  
MENSURAL DATA FOR MALE AND FEMALE *SERINUS SCOTOPS*<sup>1</sup>

	MALE	N	FEMALE	N	T-TEST
Wing length (mm) (flattened chord)	65,5 ± 2,0 (61 - 69)	40	65,2 ± 2,0 (58 - 68)	44	NS
Tail length (mm)	51,4 ± 2,3 (47 - 55)	17	50,7 ± 2,4 (45 - 55)	18	NS
Tarsus length (mm)	16,2 ± 0,6 (15 - 17,5)	18	16,1 ± 0,6 (15 - 17)	18	NS
Culmen length (mm)	10,3 ± 0,6 (9,5 - 11,8)	18	10,1 ± 0,7 (9,0 - 11,5)	18	NS
Weight (g)	15,2 ± 0,8 (13,8 - 17,4)	42	15,2 ± 0,9 (12,7 - 17,9)	44	NS

<sup>1</sup> The shortest-winged female in the subsample was judged to be immature; all other birds represented in the table (98,9%) were adults.

Phoebe Barnard, Department of Zoology, University of Namibia,  
P/Bag 13301, Windhoek, NAMIBIA

R.J. Dowsett, Rue de Bois de Breux 194, Jupille, Liege,  
BELGIUM

## PINTAILED WHYDAH *VIDUA MACROURA*

The Pintailed Whydah (PTW) is a well-known garden bird, and males in breeding plumage are unmistakable for any other species. However, females and nonbreeding males are another matter altogether. Even after six years' work on the whydahs, I sometimes have to look twice to pick out sparrowy-plumaged PTWs in a flock of Redbilled Queleas (*Quelea quelea*), Shafttailed Whydahs (*Vidua regia*) or Paradise Whydahs (*V. paradisaea*). This note summarizes some of the main distinguishing features, which are often subtle. My data were collected from 84 PTWs ringed in the southern Cape Province (Wilderness/Knysna districts) and central Transvaal Province (Naboomspruit/Nylstroom districts) in 1984-1986.

### MOULT and BILL COLOUR

In their first three to four months of life, immature Pintailed Whydahs are uniformly light brown above and buffy below. They then have a post-juvenile moult; nine (64% of 14 immatures ringed in the Transvaal in mid-March 1986 were in active moult while the remainder had not yet started. At this stage, russet-brown feathers appear on the crown, nape, back, flanks, ear coverts, tertials and upper wing-coverts. The tubercles are regressed but still plainly visible in most birds, and the bill is orangey-red at the base and below, with a blackish maxilla. I have no data on exactly when the bill becomes bright red in males, nor when breeding dress is acquired, but this presumably happens after the first year (see Payne 1971).

There is evidence of seasonal variation in bill colour in PTWs, as Payne (1971) found in Paradise Whydahs. For example, a sparrowy-plumaged PTW with a reddish bill with dark streaks was colour-ringed in the Cape on 30 August 1985; three months later, in mid-breeding season, this bird was sighted 13 km west with a uniformly blackish bill. Normally, the bills of nonbreeding males are bright red while those of females are blackish or brownish red (Maclean 1985). Indeed, the bills of laying females dissected in my study were blackish red. However, a Cape pre-breeding female dissected in August 1986 had a bright red bill with fine blackish streaks. The bills of breeding males also seem to become progressively "magenta" or deep pink, on a scale of orange - red - pink, as their nuptial moult progresses. (This pattern is also found in their host, the Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*: Barnard 1988). Bill colour should thus be used fairly cautiously as a clue to the sex of sparrowy-plumaged birds.