

Ageing and sexing

Notes on the ageing and sexing of Cape Siskins *Pseudochloroptila totta*

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The Cape Siskin is endemic to the fynbos biome and is in general a poorly studied species. Relatively few have been ringed (195 up to July 2001) and the current descriptions in Maclean (1993) are inadequate for accurate ageing and sexing. The revised descriptions presented below are based upon observations made of siskins netted in the Cederberg Wilderness Area between April 2000 and September 2001.

There is a wide overlap in mensural data for adult male and female Cape Siskins (Table 1). Cape Siskin adults are sexually dimorphic and can be sexed on plumage with a high degree of confidence (Table 2, over the page).

Juveniles superficially resemble females but lack any yellow markings. Detailed descriptions of the features that can be used to separate juveniles and female adults are included in Table 2.

Table 1. Measurements of adult Cape Siskins.

Measurements	Male			Female		
	Range	Mean	n	Range	Mean	n
Mass (g)	10.0–15.0	12.7	15	12.0–16.0	13.0	12
Head (mm)	24.2–26.3	25.5	13	24.5–26.5	25.4	7
Bill, base of feathers (mm)	9.4–11.4	10.2	14	9.0–11.6	9.8	11
Bill, union with skull (mm)	11.5–13.7	12.3	14	9.1–13.4	12.8	11
Bill depth (mm)	6.2–6.8	6.4	12	5.2–7.4	6.4	7
Tail (mm)	48–54	51.6	14	47–57	51.5	11
Wing (mm)	68.0–72.5	70.5	27	61.5–73.0	69.0	14
Tarsus (mm)	14.4–17.5	14.7	27	13.2–16.1	14.8	13

Table 2. Separation of adult male, adult female and juvenile Cape Siskins.

Feature	Male	Female	Juvenile
Head:	Grey with grey and yellow streaks	Grey with darker grey streaks	Grey, moderately streaked with dark grey
Eye stripe:	Broad; rich yellow	Lemon-yellow with grey streaks	Buff or creamy yellow
Breast:	Golden-yellow	Grey with darker grey streaks	Greyish-brown
Belly:	Golden-yellow	Lemon-yellow	Light buff with yellow-green wash
Flanks:	Yellow with brown wash	Brown	Greyish-brown
Lesser and median coverts:	Brown with a yellow fringe	Brown with grey wash	Dark brown
Rump:	Yellow	Brownish olive	
White remige tips:	Well developed on primaries and secondaries	Spots on primaries poorly developed and may be absent on secondaries	Poorly developed or completely absent