# MENSURAL DATA OF THICKBILLED WEAVERS IN LYDENBURG

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The Thickbilled Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons* has been studied in Lydenburg (25°06'S, 30°28'E), Mpumalanga, since 1990. During summer months these birds keep to reedbeds where they breed, but winter has them visiting available food sources, amongst others in my garden.

From August 1991 - September 1996, 38 Thickbilled Weavers have been caught in mistnets, erected around the birdtable in my garden. This total comprises 18 males, 13 females and 7 unsexed immature birds. These pugnacious birds visit my garden between June and September. For some reason the birds avoid it during July, as only two birds have been netted during that month. The peak ringing month is September.

Most of these weavers were netted during the morning peak time being 7h00–8h00, ending just after 11h00. Seldom is a weaver found near my garden after 14h00. Thickbilled Weavers are easily disturbed. Usually a group of five to seven birds is found near the food sources on a given day. Very rarely are more than three birds caught per day. As other birds also find their way into the mistnets, the activity there warns off the Thickbilled Weavers. For a few days they then avoid the birdtable, after which only three birds will venture back. Trapping these birds has the same effect.

Catching adult Thickbilled Weavers at breeding sites was impossible. The vegetation on the dam shores was in the way and the dams were too deep to support poles holding the mistnets.

After extraction from the net, the birds were "processed" and released. It was found that these birds' measurements differed from those given in Roberts' *Birds of Southern Africa* (1995). Besides the standard measurements, the total length of the head and culmen (referred to as 'head') and total length of the birds were collected. The total length was measured from tip of the bill to the end of the tail (Figure 1). Bill width (C:↔) and thickness (C:↕) were measured as shown in Figure 2. Wing length measurements are of natural chord.

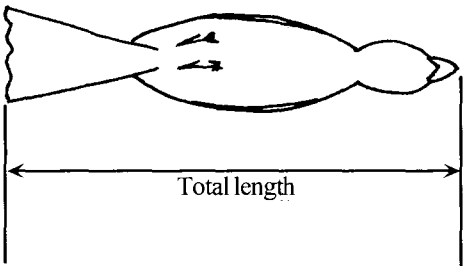
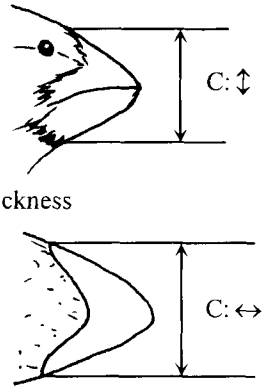



**Figure 1.** Limits of total length measurement.




**A.** Bill thickness

**B.** Bill width

**Figure 2.** Bill thickness (A) and width (B).

Tables 1-3 depict the results of collected data. Laycock (1984) classifies first-year immatures by weight, but since there is a difference in the two provinces' data (Laycock studied these weavers in Natal), this principle was not applied. Adult females are sexed according to bill coloration. Thus a difference could be made between females and immatures. Immature birds are classified as unsexed in Table 3.

It is interesting to note that the variability of bill width and length is greater in females than in males (Figures 3 & 4).

REFERENCES

LAYCOCK, H.T. 1984. Thickbilled Weaver. *Safring News* 13: 79-80.

MACLEAN, G.L. 1995. Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund. Cape Town.

**Table 1.** Mensural data for adult male Thickbilled Weaver.

| | Head | Culmen | C:↕ | C:↔ | Tarsus | Wing | Tail | Weight | Length |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Min | 38,1 | 24,2 | 18,0 | 1510 | 23,2 | 84,0 | 67,0 | 45,0 | 185,0 |
| Max | 40,8 | 27,5 | 20,7 | 16,8 | 26,8 | 100,0 | 81,0 | 57,0 | 216,0 |
| Mean | 39,1 | 26,1 | 17,8 | 15,8 | 24,4 | 95,4 | 75,4 | 49,6 | 197,6 |
| SD | 1,33 | 0,67 | 1,22 | 0,54 | 1,24 | 2,62 | 4,46 | 2,42 | 6,66 |
| n | 18 | 18 | 15 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |

**Table 2.** Mensural data for adult female Thickbilled Weaver.

| | Head | Culmen | C:↕ | C:↔ | Tarsus | Wing | Tail | Weight | Length |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Min | 34,0 | 22,7 | 14,8 | 12,8 | 21,6 | 82,0 | 62,0 | 36,5 | 167,0 |
| Max | 38,8 | 26,9 | 20,2 | 15,5 | 25,5 | 95,0 | 81,0 | 47,5 | 202,0 |
| Mean | 34,4 | 25,0 | 15,5 | 14,4 | 23,2 | 88,9 | 73,9 | 41,9 | 172,9 |
| SD | 2,49 | 1,33 | 1,50 | 0,84 | 1,19 | 4,26 | 5,76 | 3,42 | 13,28 |
| n | 13 | 13 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 |

**Table 3.** Mensural data for immature unsexed Thickbilled Weavers.

| | Head | Culmen | C:↕ | C:↔ | Tarsus | Wing | Tail | Weight | Length |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Min | 35,6 | 23,2 | 15,8 | 12,5 | 21,1 | 84,0 | 67,0 | 35,0 | 181,0 |
| Max | 38,4 | 26,4 | 20,5 | 17,7 | 24,7 | 98,0 | 86,0 | 48,0 | 195,0 |
| Mean | 37,6 | 25,0 | 18,4 | 15,2 | 23,3 | 92,0 | 72,6 | 44,4 | 184,4 |
| SD | 0,60 | 1,00 | 1,84 | 1,26 | 1,00 | 2,71 | 4,69 | 3,69 | 3,46 |
| n | 7 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |

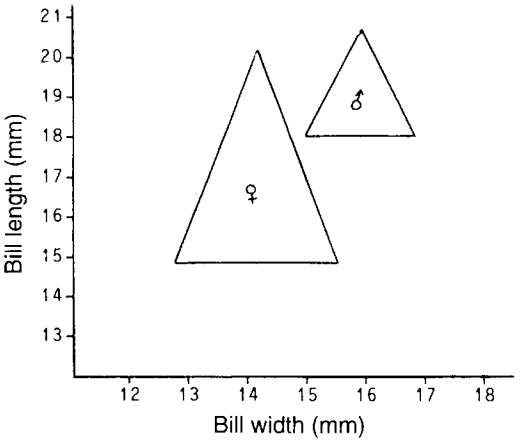



**Figure 3.** Comparison of bill size variability in adult male and female Thickbilled Weaver.

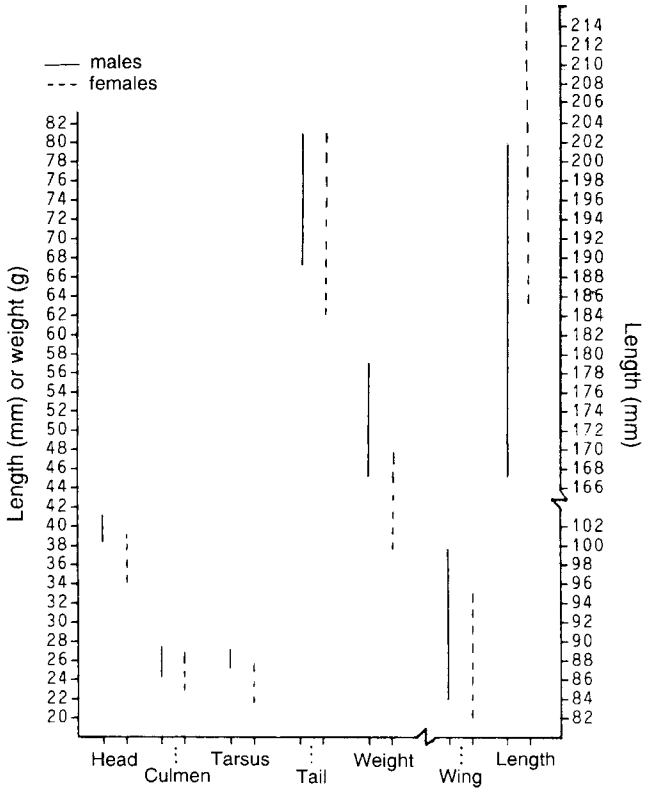



**Figure 4.** Comparison of Thickbilled Weaver mensural data: males and females.