AGEING & SEXING

IRIS COLOUR, SEX AND GONADAL DEVELOPMENT OF CAPE WEAVERS

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In a recent 'Ageing and Sexing Guide', Terry Oatley (1986) reprinted data on the Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* extracted from an earlier article by Elliott (1973). In these guides, female Cape Weavers are stated to have 'deep, warm-brown' irises. This is not always true.

In September 1986, I collected a small number of Cape Weavers at Ruigtevlei and Rondevlei, near Knysna in the southern Cape province of South Africa, for purposes of dissection. The collection was part of a ringing project conducted by Bob Dowsett and myself to augment Clive Elliott's data on this species, and will be published in full shortly. My motivation for this note is to correct the notion, similarly promulgated in Maclean (1985), that pale-eyed Cape Weavers are necessarily males.

In my small sample of 12 weavers dissected in September (early in the local breeding season), one cream-eyed bird was a pre-breeding female (Table 1 overleaf). The oocytes of this bird were small but distinct and well-developed, and were also inspected by Bob Dowsett and Francoise Dowsett-Lemaire. However, at least eight of the ten cream-eyed birds in this sample were males, and a ninth bird with minute, indistinct gonads was almost certainly male, judging from its size (bottom of Table 2 on page 47). Although we need to dissect many more dull-plumaged birds to establish how likely it is that a given cream-eyed bird is an immature male, it cannot be sexed with certainty on iris colour alone.

Similarly, Markus (1964, 1968) pointed out that among Masked Weavers *Ploceus velatus*, reproductively active females as well as males can have red irises, and he eschewed assumptions of reproductive capability made on the basis of external characters or behaviours. In my sample, three dull-plumaged birds tentatively identified as females on the grounds of abdominal protuberance shape proved to be males. I therefore agree with Markus (1965) that weaver ringers should proceed cautiously with gender assignments on the basis of external traits!

TABLE 1

BARE PART COLOURS AND GONADAL DEVELOPMENT OF 12 CAPE WEAVERS *PLOCEUS CAPENSIS* DISSECTED IN THE SOUTHERN CAPE, 1986

STATUS		DATE 1986	BARE PARTS			PLUMAGE	GONADS
AGE	SEX		IRIS	BILL	LEG		
A	M	17-9	CrSal	Blk	PiBr	Bright	Testes: L 12,0x6,2mm R 9,9X8,0mm
A	M	17-9	SalCr	Blk	PiBr	Bright	L 10,5x6,6mm R 9,5x7,2mm
A	F	17-9	Cr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Oocytes 2,8mm diam. well differentiated.
A	F	30-9	LiqBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Oocytes 2,6mm diam. well differentiated. Ovary large, 1 flat orange follicle. Brood patch present.
I	M	17-9	Cr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 1,8x1,4mm R 1,0x0,6mm
I	M	17-9	BrCr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 2,6x1,8mm R 2,0x1,5mm
I	M	17-9	CrBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 2,6x1,8mm R 1,5x1,0mm
I	M	18-9	CrBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 2,2x1,6mm R 1,8x1,4mm
I	M	25-9	CrBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 2,2x1,5mm R 2,0x1,2mm
I	M	25-9	CrBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Testes: L 2,2x1,4mm R 2,0x1,4mm
I	F	18-9	LiqBr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Oocytes 0,1mm;cheesy
I	M?	17-9	BrCr	Hor	PiBr	Dull	Gonads indistinct.

Cr = cream, Sal = Salmon, Liq = Liquid, Br = Brown, Blk = Black, Hor = Horn, Pi = Pinkish

TABLE 2

MORPHOMETRICS OF 12 CAPE WEAVERS *PLOCEUS CAPENSIS* DISSECTED IN THE SOUTHERN CAPE, 1986

STATUS		DATE 1986	MORPHOMETRICS (mm)						
AGE	SEX		WT(g)	WING	TAIL	TARS	CULMEN		
							L	W	D
A	M	17-9	48,1	94,0	62,0	26,0	23,5	8,0	10,5
A	M	17-9	49,1	94,0	62,0	26,0	23,5	8,0	10,0
A	F	17-9	41,5	87,5	54,0	24,0	20,5	7,5	9,5
A	F	30-9	44,4	86,0	56,5	22,5	21,0	8,0	10,5
I	M	17-9	45,8	91,5	58,0	26,0	21,5	8,0	10,5
I	M	17-9	48,5	92,5	59,0	25,0	23,0	8,0	10,0
I	M	17-9	46,0	94,0	61,0	26,0	22,5	8,0	11,0
I	M	18-9	45,8	91,0	60,0	26,5	21,5	7,5	10,0
I	M	25-9	44,9	91,0	58,5	26,5	22,5	8,5	10,5
I	M	25-9	46,8	93,0	58,0	26,5	22,5	8,0	10,0
I	F	18-9	37,7	88,0	58,0	25,0	21,0	7,5	9,5
I	M?	17-9	47,1	93,0	60,0	25,5	22,0	7,5	10,5

A = Adult M = Male F = Female I = Immature

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