

# AGEING & SEXING

## BERTRAM'S WEAVER *PLOCEUS BERTRANDI* IN LIMBE

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Bertram's Weaver *Ploceus bertrandi*, is a fairly common resident between 900 and 1 800 metres in southern Malawi, which is the southern end of its range.

This study is based on 33 captures (14 male and 15 female, 4 unsexed) from September 1987 to December 1993, in my garden at 1 224 metres on the northeastern edge of Blantyre. It is sporadically present all year around, though more commonly from June to December. I have capture records from all months except January, February, April, May and August. It is found either in family parties or singly. Retraps of adults after 25, 36 and 52 months, indicate that they are locally resident, but I have no retraps as adults of birds previously trapped as juveniles which suggests that they disperse and establish separate breeding territories, as one would expect.

The adult male of *P. bertrandi* is unmistakable. The face (that is, the bristly feathers just over the nostrils, the lores, supercilium, ear coverts, chin and a semi-circular area behind the ear coverts) is black. An orange patch extends from the bill backwards across the crown of the head. Across the nape, it is bordered by a thin line of yellow, followed by an irregular shield-shaped black patch. The sides of the neck are yellow, and joined by a narrow yellow band between the black patch and the mantle. The mantle, back and rump, upper-tail coverts and both surfaces of the tail are olive green. The underparts, including the under-tail coverts are yellow with an orange wash on the throat and breast. The flight feathers and upper wing coverts are blackish, edged on the leading edge and tips with green. The rim of the eye is black, the iris yellow. The legs, feet and claws are dark pinkish horn and the bill black.

**Table 1.** Measurements of Bertram's Weaver *Ploceus bertrandi*.

	Adult (M)	Sub-adult (M)	Adult (F)	Sub-adult (F)
Wing	81-87	81-85	76-82	76-84
Bill	20,0-20,5	18-20	20,0-21,5	19,5-21,0
Tarsus	25-27	25-26	23-26	23-26
Mass	37,6-42,0	35,9-42,0	32,6-40,6	35,8-41,0
Tail	61-65	57-62	57-60	53-60

The adult female is slightly smaller than the male and lacks the male's orange head patch, that area being black, but is in other respects identical to it.

The young juvenile has an olive head and dusky wings with yellow edges. The rest of the plumage resembles the adult's. The rim of the eye is medium horn and the iris grey. The upper bill is medium horn, the lower pinkish horn. The legs are darkish flesh. The gape is swollen and pinkish flesh. Sexes are alike as juveniles. At the post-fledging moult, the heads of both sexes assume a pale and mottled version of the adult plumage. The gape darkens but remains slightly swollen. The iris becomes pale straw and the bill dark horn over light horn.

It should be noted that in Mackworth-Praed & Grant, *Birds of the southern third of Africa*, the captions for Bertram's Weaver and Brown-capped Weaver have been exchanged.

I have captured one female in breeding condition in October and very young juveniles in November and December. Other breeding records from Malawi are from August and January as well as October and November.

The records I have of birds in post-fledged moult are from March and July. Those of birds moulting into adult dress are from October and November. My only record of an adult in moult is from 4 September – of an individual with new wing and body plumage and a tail in full moult. As I have no adult records from July and August, this would suggest that adult moult takes place in those months. Further investigation of the moult is needed.

#### REFERENCE

MACWORTH-PRAED, C.W. & GRANT, C.H.B. 1963. *Birds of the southern third of Africa*. Vol 2. London: Longmans, Green & Co.

## NOTICE

### **QUELEA QUELEA, AGAIN ...**

For agriculture, the Redbilled Quelea *Quelea quelea* is the most destructive bird pest world-wide, yet comparatively little is known about its ecology and general biology, even here in South Africa where its numbers have been estimated to be as much as 200 million at times. Large numbers of quelea were ringed in the 1950s and 1960s to try and work out movements, but a lack of information on age and origins in particular, made the ringing results very difficult to interpret. Once again, research interest in queleas is picking up, and it is hoped that once again, queleas will become the target of ringing programmes if

funding proposals are successful. This time, ringing programmes will be geared at answering more specific questions, and ringers will hopefully be able to use ageing and sexing guides, and score moult so as to provide much more information about the queleas. So ringers are once again asked to take more interest in the lowly quelea, and are alerted to the possibility of major future ringing programmes. Watch *Safring News* to keep yourself informed of future developments.

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