

## A Plumage Problem in the Speckled Warbler

North, in his "Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania" (1901-1904), described the adult Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*) as having "a distinct white eyebrow the latter bordered above with a black streak". With regard to young birds he remarks that "there is a dull rufous-fawn eyebrow". Later authorities have either accepted North's ideas or ignored the "reddish eyebrow".

The species is widely distributed in small numbers in open forest country in the A.C.T. and nearby, and at Lake George, N.S.W., in particular, we have been able to net the species fairly regularly. The Speckled Warbler appears from our experience to be a sedentary species and the incidence of retrapping has been quite high.

The Lake George area has been netted over a period of about four years. After banding for some time, the banding of birds with reddish eyebrows and retrapping of the same birds still in the same plumage showed that this could not be merely the diagnostic plumage of young birds. The extreme case is that of one bird banded by Bill Belton on April 29, 1962, and retrapped by us on October 13, 1962, February 2, 1963, March 16, 1963, October 7, 1963, November 30, 1963 and October 24, 1964, and which still had a reddish eyebrow a few days short of 30 months after banding. Clearly the character is not a juvenile one which disappears with age.

Other possible explanations are that the reddish eyebrow is:

- a permanent male or female character, or
- a seasonal male or female character, or
- a seasonal character of both sexes.

Examination of the specimens in the Australian Museum, Sydney, shows that it is unlikely to be a sexual character. The details of the specimens are as follows:

**Black eyebrow**—males, five; females, seven; unsexed, one.

**Reddish eyebrow**—males, one; females, two; unsexed, three.

To ascertain whether it could be a seasonal character of both sexes we have analysed, on a monthly basis, our banding and retrapping data from our bandings at all local areas.

We have banded 89 Speckled Warblers and retrapped 24 of these on 67 occasions. This means that the species has been handled 156 times when the eyebrow colour was recorded as reddish on 63 occasions and black on 93 occasions.

Taking these on a monthly basis the result is as follows:

Month	Reddish Eyebrow	Black Eyebrow
January	1	3
February	6	13
March	3	11
April	8	14
May	10	15
June	5	7
July	1	3
August	4	4
September	6	5
October	8	9
November	7	6
December	4	3
Totals	63	93

Obviously then the character cannot be seasonal. Also our records do not show evidence that the colour of the eyebrow changes, though this possibility cannot, on these data, be excluded. The size of the reddish eyebrow does vary in different individuals.

So far we are unable to explain the matter and further work is necessary. These details are provided so that other banders may be aware of the problem and thus may be able to assist in its solution.

Thanks are due to Mr. J. de S. Disney for permission to examine the skins in the Sydney collection.

*Steve and Dennis Wilson, Narrabundah, A.C.T.*

## OBITUARY

Members will be sorry to learn of the recent deaths of three New South Wales members. Glenn Elliott of Gladesville, a competent ornithologist who became a bander in May 1963, was enthusiastic and helpful, although his private commitments prevented large-scale activities; J. H. Dufty of Illabo and Alf Levy of Pymble were associate members and the Association very much appreciated their interest and support. We extend our deepest sympathy to the relatives of the deceased.