



THE
Australian
BIRD
GUIDE



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Illustrating
birds for
the
Australian
Bird Guide

Peter
Marsack

Why do people want field guides?

- There were already 4 current Field guides to Australian birds (Slater, Pizzey and Knight, Simpson and Day and Morecombe) and all have sold in at least tens of thousands. So the demand is there, but why? I think it's about:
 - Enjoyment – a way to connect
 - “Collecting” – getting to see everything
 - Knowledge – identification is part of understanding.

The sum of all knowledge

- As birders get more knowledgeable, they demand more information
- Not easy with a compact field guide
- THE HANDBOOK approach: *the steaming pile of data.*

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB)

- Seven volumes in nine parts, first published 1990, last 2006
- Pioneering: attempt to define and summarise existing knowledge
- birds often not well known and described, fewer photos available
- Drawings often based on measurements from specimens, colour standards.

The full HANZAB (7 volumes, 9 parts)

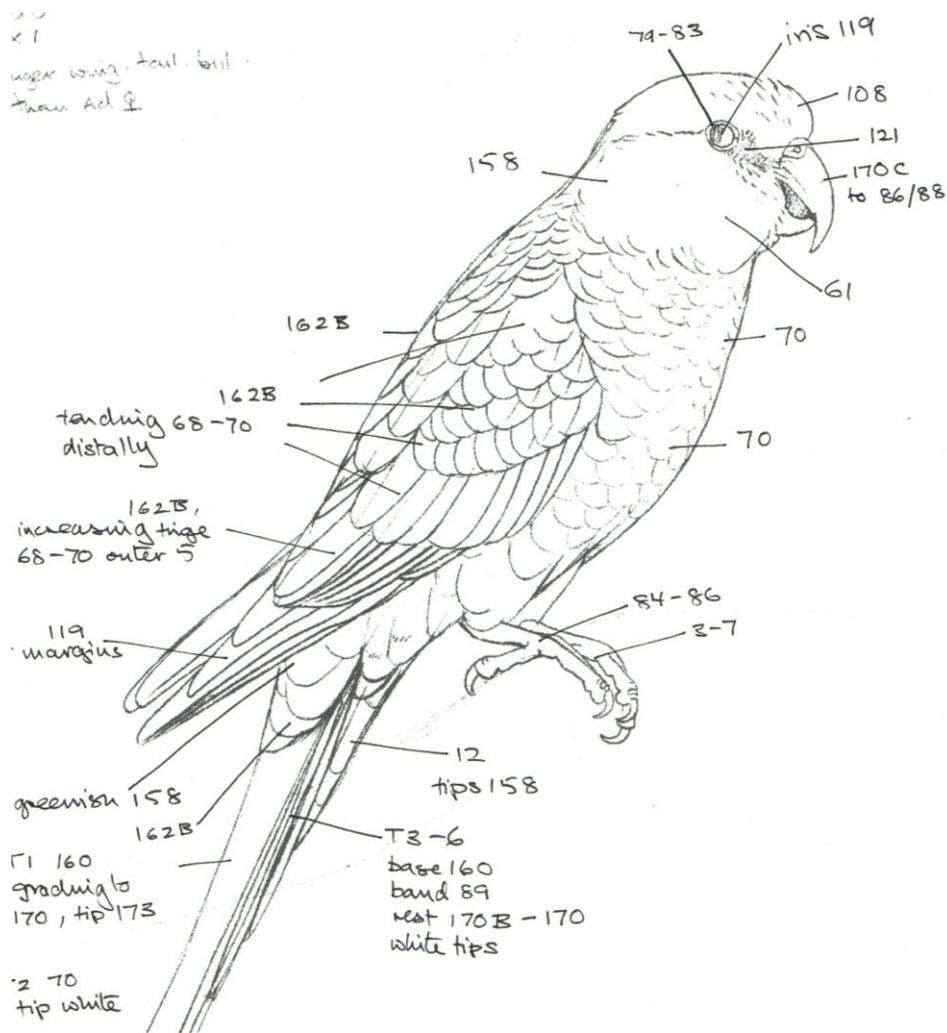


HANZAB text with colour notes

Adult male (Second and subsequent basic). **Head and neck** Forehead and crown, dark red (108), forming vivid crimson cap running from gape or base of lower mandible, through centre of eye; feathers have grey (84) bases and narrow light green (c162C) subterminal bars, both of which are generally concealed. Rest of face mostly apple-green (c61) grading to more yellow-green (158) on rear ear-coverts; hindneck, green (c162B); all feathers have concealed grey (84–83) bases. Lores, dark grey-brown (121), feathers with narrow light green (c61) tips (like cheeks) or red (108) tips (like cap); cut-off between cap and cheeks thus appears blurred. In some individuals, especially when very fresh (Mar.–Apr.), feathers of crown and rear ear-coverts have very narrow and inconspicuous black (82–89) fringes. **Upperparts** Mantle, scapulars and back, green, feathers with concealed grey (84) bases and a blue-green (ne) tinge near base that can be slightly exposed with wear and ruffling. When very fresh, these feathers can be finely and inconspicuously fringed black (82–89). Rump and most uppertail-coverts, greenish yellow (yellowish 158). Longest uppertail-coverts, green (162B). **Underparts** Foreneck, breast, belly and flanks, rich purplish-blue (c70), sharply demarcated from cheeks. Feathers have duller leaden-grey (c87) bases (and in some individuals, subterminal bars) that are most exposed in belly (which thus tends to look duller than breast); some birds, especially very fresh ones, also have very narrow black (82–89) tips to feathers. Thighs, vent and undertail-coverts, mostly red (12), sometimes faintly scalloped by narrow yellow-green (c158) tips to feathers; in all birds, yellow-green (158) of rump wraps round rear-flanks to meet top of thighs. **Uppertail** When spread, looks green grading to blue at sides, white at lateral tip and blackish at central tip. All feathers have black (89) shafts. Outer feathers (t3–t6), mauve-blue (170B) grading to blue (170) on outer edges and near base, and grading to blue-white at tips; white tips narrow on t3, broadening (up to 35 mm wide) on t6. At extreme bases of t3–t6, green (160) bases to outer webs are separated from blue areas by a broad black (c89) band. Central feathers (t1), green (c160), with blue tinge in distal half grading to through dark blue (170) to blue-black (173) at tips, especially of outer webs. T2, mostly dark blue (70) on outer web (grading to white at extreme tip); inner web grey-black (82) grading to green (160) at base, and with clean white tip of c. 30 mm; usually have a small bluish area (c70) area between black area and white tips. **Undertail** When closed, looks pale blue with diffuse white tips to feathers. Feathers patterned like uppertail, but lack all green tinges. Accordingly: t3–t6, light blue (c170C–c66) with white tips grading from 1 mm on t6 to c. 25 mm on t3; t2 mostly grey-black (82) with white tip of c. 30 mm, and diffuse subterminal zone of pale blue (c170C–c66) broadest on outer webs; t1, wholly grey-black (82). **Upperwing** Most lesser



32 Colours for one bird (Red-capped Parrot)



Specimen skins

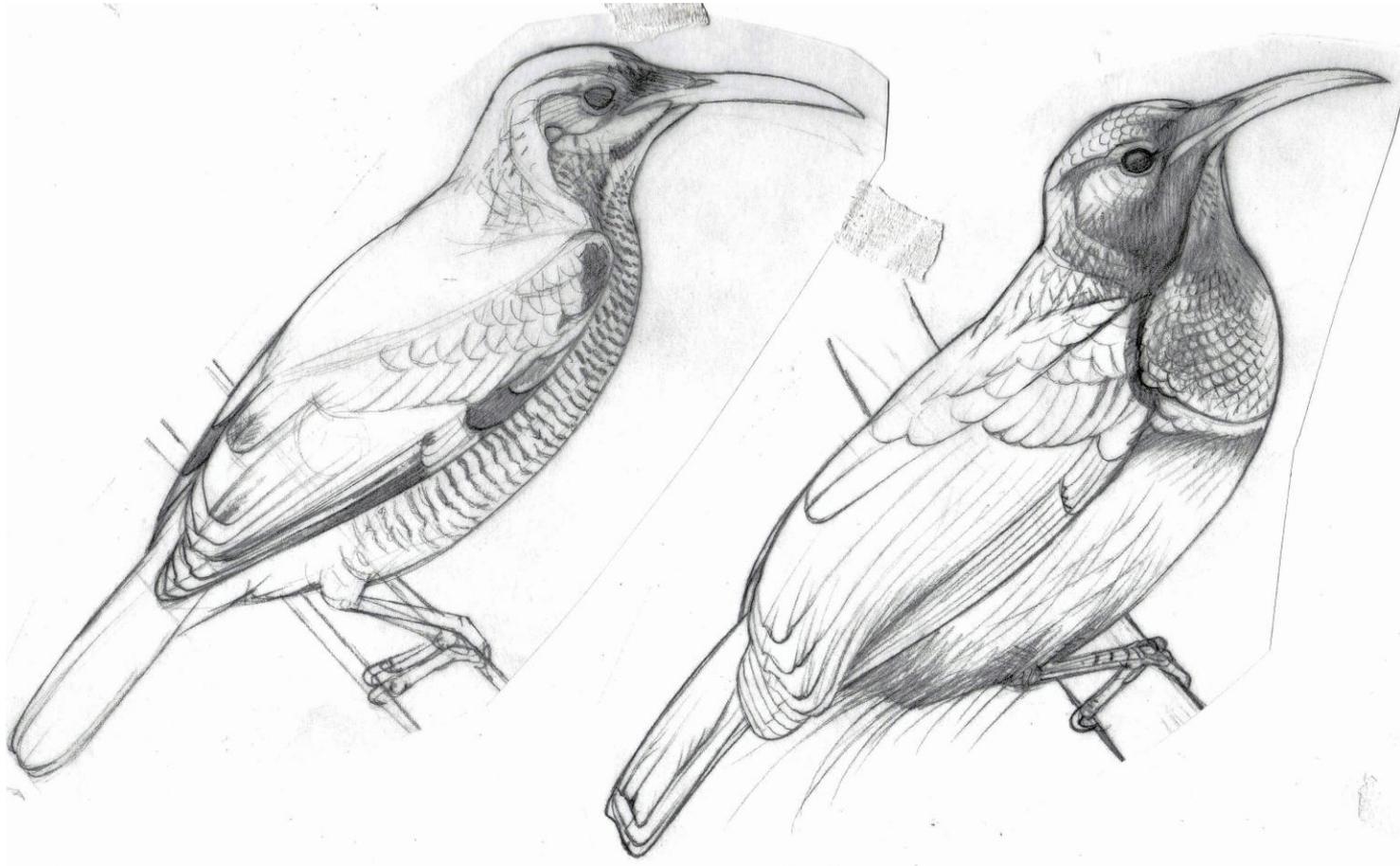
- Mainly from Australian-based collections, especially the National Wildlife collection (over 60,000 specimens)
- Skins provide good information on colour and pattern, less so for structure and shape
- During preparation, all soft tissue and most bones are removed
- Resulting shape of body and especially head are not realistic (most of skull removed).

Specimen skins

- The following photo shows a tray of specimens of Lewin's Honeyeaters from the CSIRO's Australian National Wildlife Collection in Canberra.
- The writers of the Handbook of Australian New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (7 volumes, finished in 2005) studied most of the skins available in Australia and some overseas collections to come up with plumage descriptions, colour standards and measurements for well over 700 species, so this is resource birders and artists can still use to confirm details.



HANZAB drawings from measurements



Handbook into Field Guide?



Aims of bird identification guides

- Identification
 - Provide the right detail
 - Allow comparison
- Explanation
 - Build knowledge and understanding (and enjoyment)

Photo: next slide

- (North east India, looking for an extremely rare bird, the Bugun Liocichla, fewer than 20 individuals)
- Increasingly birders use cameras in the field; sometimes they only see the bird via the camera.
- Photography is now part of birding, and it makes a big contribution.
- For me a camera can easily get in the way of looking – I immediately start to think about taking a photo, often before I really look. Observing with an eye for what interests you is very different – not just the bird, but the setting, the light, movement – all the things that make up an experience you want to hold onto.

Why not photos?



Photos: good and bad

pros

- Instant
- Detailed
- Stop action
- Objective (maybe)
- Substitute for study

cons

- Unique, specific
- Misleading
- Subjective (maybe)
- Substitute for study

Good I.D. photos are rare!

(female Speckled Warbler taken by an expert photographer)



© Simon Bennett

More limitations of photos

- It is often difficult to find exactly the right photo to sum up a bird: is the posture right to allow comparison of size and shape, is the lighting right for showing colour?
- Even if you get the perfect picture of, say, an adult male Superb Fairy-wren in breeding plumage (top R in the next slide), you should also have comparable pictures of non-breeding male, adult female and juvenile.
- Then you need the same series for Splendid Fairy-wren, only they also show regional variation, and then there are other Fairy-wrens to worry about. Getting a full set of comparable photos across a species, let alone a whole group, just isn't possible.



What illustration can do

Show just what the user needs in order to:

- avoid confusion
- unpick and understand complexity
- identify (and appreciate!)

...and nothing that you don't want

The natural world is complex – where to begin?
(Breeding male Superb Fairy-wren on a lichen-encrusted log on a sunny day – this is about an experience of nature as a whole: the bird, the foliage, the light)

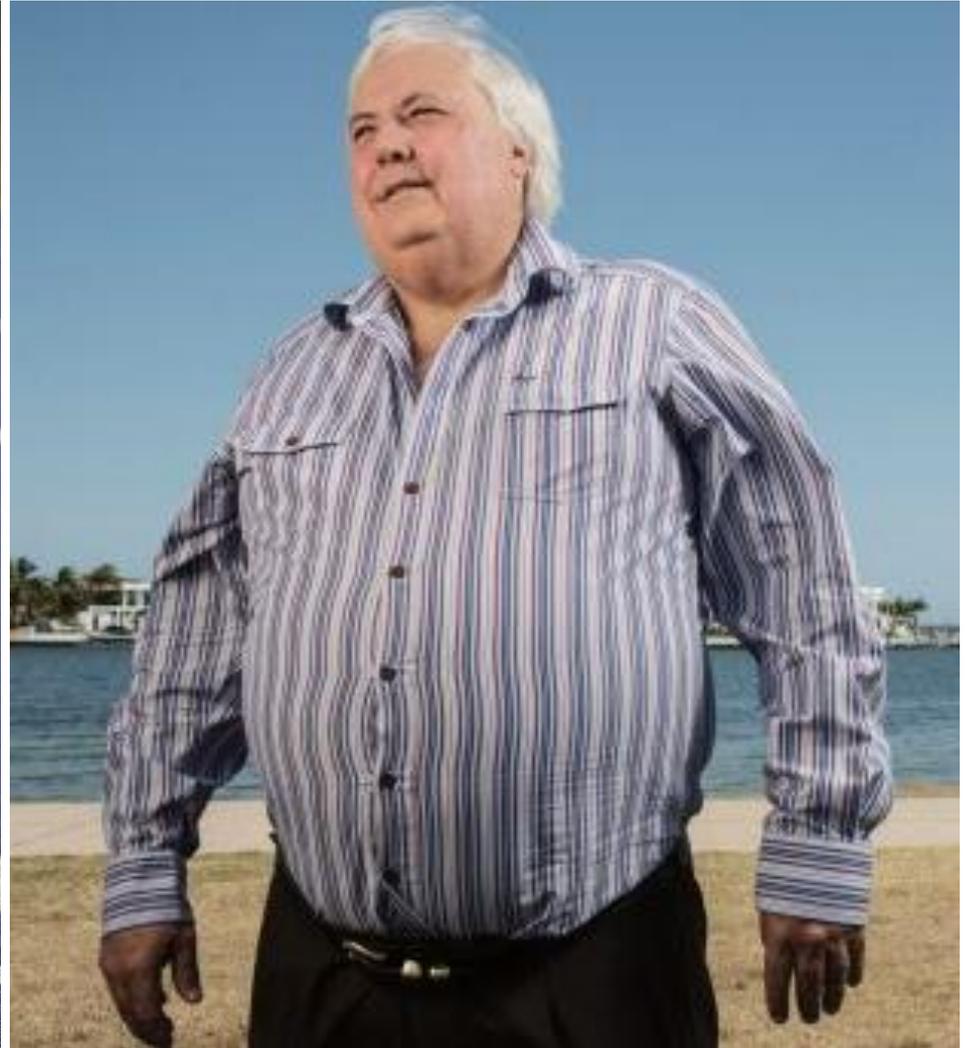


Imagine you are illustrating a field guide to life on Earth for aliens.....

.....and your challenge is to illustrate the adult male human in breeding condition.

Which photo below would you choose? People are varied, and just one species! The field guide artist has to look at the variety and decide what is typical, what to include, what to leave out (Usain Bolt, Clive Palmer)

Identification: Human, adult male



The new way: Australian Bird Guide

- Modeled on revolutionary guides for Europe and US
- Approach based much more on field observation and information – ageing, sexing, regional variation etc
- MANY more reference photos available
- Measurements and descriptions from HANZAB still valuable
- The ABG has over 4500 painted images; to prepare these, Jeff Davies pulled together over half a million reference photos for the artists to use.

Australian Bird Guide artwork

- Proposed 5-year project for two artists...
- Turned into 9-year project for three artists
- With three artists there are three distinct styles, though we tried to keep to a consistent 'look': accurate, as detailed as necessary, and lifelike – some identifications depend heavily on a bird's character and behaviour. All birds facing out of the spine on the RH page, soft light from top L...
- All three artists had been involved in other publications focusing on bird identification, and all had worked on HANZAB.

ABG artist: Jeff Davies

(focused on seabirds and larger parrots)

Cockatoos (Family Cacatuidae)

Large parrots with powerful bills in which both mandibles are articulated to give great crushing power, zygodactylous feet (2 toes point forwards, 2 backwards) providing a powerful grip, erectile crests and large bare ceres. Cockatoos (and parrots) evolved and diversified in Aus (actually eastern Gondwanaland before its break-up to form the current southern continents). Plumage rather plain with simple colour patterns, predominantly white, black or grey with combinations of red/pink and yellow in 1 or more of crest, tail, cheeks or underparts. Orbital skin often enlarged and coloured, and some sexual dimorphism in plumage and size. The Cockatiel is atypically small and gracile. Mostly gregarious, noisy and conspicuous, some spp are declining but others have greatly expanded in population and range into agricultural and urban areas. Bred in tree hollows that are only provided by mature trees (often >150 yr old).

Palm Cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus*

Wing 330–366 mm Bill ♂ 82–95 ♀ 66–76 mm

Wt ♂ 900–1040 ♀ 710–765 g
Unmistakable: large, bulk, all-black plumage; long, back-swept, shaggy, erectile crest covers forehead and crown; bright red bare facial skin; huge down-curved, pointed upper mandible. Plumage can have blue-grey cast due to powder down. Sexes similar but ♀ smaller with noticeably shorter bill. **Juv** feathers of abdomen, flanks and underwing-coverts finely edged pale yellow; bare facial skin pinkish, orbital skin whitish; bill smaller with whitish ridge. Distinctive **flight** silhouette: very broad wings, broad but short tail, huge bill causes head to appear large and somewhat pointed. Flight laboured with slow, deep wing beats and frequent glides. Can be shy and difficult to approach. **Voice:** Loud, disyllabic, whistled contact call given in flight and upon landing, the 1st note rather deep, the 2nd shrill and drawn out with an upward inflection. Alarm call a short, sharp screech. **Notes:** Essentially a New Guinea species that occurs on a Cape York Pen s to Princess Charlotte Bay on e coast, and to Archer R on w coast. Sedentary within a large home range, active and conspicuous in pairs or small groups. Inhabits mostly ecotones: rainforest edges, gallery forest, eucalypt woodland and palm swamps. Eats fruits, nuts, palm tissue. Comes to the ground to feed on fallen *Pandanus* fruit but mostly feeds in canopy. Frequently socialises on emergent dead branches. Loafs in rainforest canopy in heat of the day. Male territorial display can include banging a hard object, such as a short stick, held in the foot against a hollow spout to produce a loud drumming sound.

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Calyptorhynchus banksii

Wing 400–470 mm Bill 47–55 mm Wt 615–920 g

Ssp *graptogyne* (sw VIC, se SA) Wing 390–450 mm

Bill 43–45 mm Wt 590–640 g

Large, mostly black cockatoo with bright red or yellow-orange panels in tail and prominent, rounded, helmet-like

crest that, when raised, protrudes well forward of bill. In n and w Aus, the only black cockatoo with red/orange tail panels. Bigger and bulkier than Glossy Black-Cockatoo with different calls and flight pattern. Six described ssp differ in size, shape of bill, purity of coloured tail panels and degree of yellow spotting in ♀. **Ad ♂** glossy black except for 2 bright red tail panels; bill mid-grey. **♀** dusky black; head and shoulders spotted pale yellow; underparts irregularly barred yellow/orange; tail panels yellow/orange faintly barred black. Bill dull white. **Juv** similar to **Ad ♀** but less barring on underparts, and whitish bare skin around eye. **Flies** on broad, deeply fingered wings with deep, slow wing beats and much tilting of the body and jinking from side to side. **Voice:** Strident, rolling, far-carrying *krur-rurr-kee* given in flight. Alarm call is an abrupt *krurr-rak*. **Notes:** Gregarious in noisy flocks, sometimes numbering many 100s. Across its very broad range, inhabits a wide variety of habitats including monsoon forest, tall moist eucalypt forest, semi-arid woodland, savanna and heathy woodland. Often in trees along watercourses. Staple diet is seeds of large-fruited eucalypts; also *Hakea*, *Casuarina*, *Banksia*. Some ssp routinely feed on ground on variety of seeds and fruits; others exclusively arboreal, eating eucalypt seed. See ssp *graptogyne* EN, sw ssp *naso* VU.

Glossy Black-Cockatoo

Calyptorhynchus lathami

Wing 317–360 mm Bill 42–48 mm Wt 430–500 g

Smallest black-cockatoo, specialised for feeding on seeds of *Casuarina* and *Allocasuarina*. Plumage mostly dull black (despite common name) fringed with brown on head, neck and underparts; bill massive, broad and bulbous; crest short. **Ad ♂** has 2 bright red panels in tail. **Ad ♀** irregular yellow markings on head and neck highly variable, from a few feathers to extensive patches. Tail panels orange-red, variably barred black; barring reduces with age and panels become redder, so older ♀ more closely resemble ♂. **Juv** most like **Ad ♂** but spotted pale yellow on sides of head, lower breast, belly and flanks; undertail-coverts barred or spotted pale yellow; bill and bare skin around eye pale grey. **Flight** distinctive: buoyant with slow but shallow wing beats; short tail gives a somewhat compact silhouette. **Voice:** Contact call a rather soft, plaintive wavering *tarr-red*; quite different to that of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Harsh alarm screech. **Notes:** Inhabits eucalypt forest and woodland with stands of *Casuarina* or *Allocasuarina* in coastal, riparian or hilly country. Entirely arboreal, usually in pairs, trios or small parties, quiet and unobtrusive, can be approached closely when intently feeding. Kangaroo I ssp *halmaturinus* EN.

Palm Cockatoo



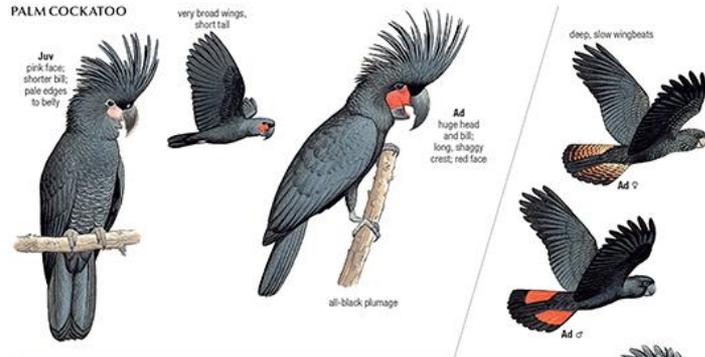
Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo



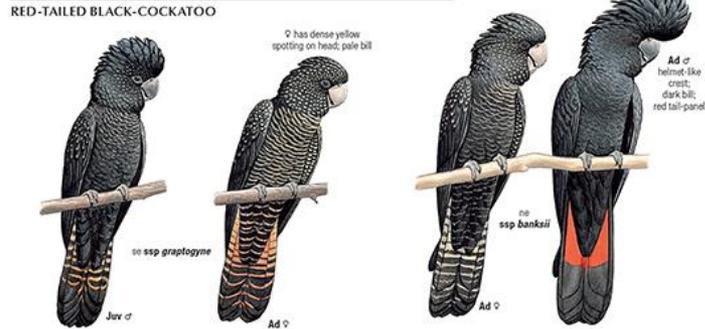
Glossy Black-Cockatoo



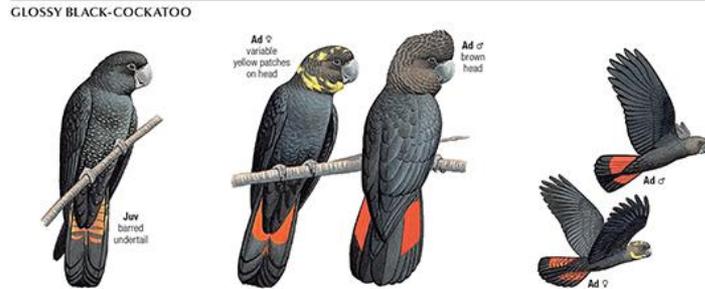
PALM COCKATOO



RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO



GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO



ABG artist: Kim Franklin

(painted the raptors , smaller parrots, waterbirds, some passerines, especially vagrants)

Little Eagle *Hieraetus morphnoides*
 Wing ♂332-396 ♀367-413 mm Bill ♂22-27 ♀22-30 mm
 Wt ♂ 0.6-0.8 ♀0.9-1.2 kg

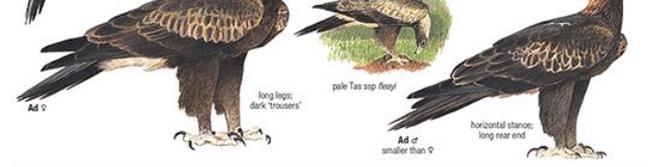
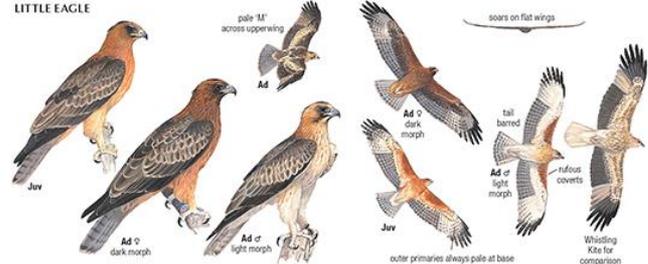
Small eagle, similar in size to kites but with more compact and powerful build; polymorphic, so familiarity with structure helps ID. When perched, note pale 'trousers', erectile feathers on nape that can be raised to form small shaggy crest; folded wings do not reach tail tip. In flight looks stable and controlled, even in strong winds; has short, broad head. Soars on flat wings with 5 splayed 'fingers' curled up at tips; wings look rectangular with straight trailing edge (cf curved in Whistling and Brahminy Kites). Tail length about equal to width of wing base; tail square when closed, gently rounded when fanned. Beware Whistling Kite, which appears long-limbed and loose, not compact, has longer, rounded, pale and unbarred tail, outer primaries entirely black. Plumage varies but all have dark brown upperparts with pale, broken M shape across spread upperwing; undertail always pale grey barred with darker grey. Light and dark morphs occur throughout range but pale morph usually outnumbered dark, except in se Qld. Light morph has pale ground colour to head and underparts, and diagnostic white-centred underwing contrasting with rufous leading edge, blackish secondaries and primary tips. Dark morph has rufous ground colour to head and underparts; underwing dark rufous and dusky except for whitish, lightly barred, inner primaries and bases of outer primaries. Ad black patches on crown, distinct black streaking on neck and breast, especially heavy in dark morph. ♀ larger. Juv more rufous-toned, particularly on head and breast, with much fainter dark streaking on underparts. Rufous tips to wing-coverts form a thin line along the spread upperwing. Voice: Vocal for a raptor: an excited, loud, 2- or 3-syllable whistle fee-fee or fee-fee-fee, often given in flight. Loud begging squeals and chattering by ♀. Notes: Mostly solitary in open, wooded habitats over most of Aus. A fast and agile hunter eating mostly birds and rabbits captured in a stoop or by dropping feet-first after hanging into the wind. Often soars high in tight circles with occasional swift dives on closed wings; in powered flight has deep, rather loose wing beats broken with glides. Has a distinctive, undulating, pair-bonding display flight, accompanied by the loud whistling call, sometimes flying tight, vertical figures-of-eight.

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*
 Wing 550-680 mm Bill 53-64 mm Wt 2.5-4.5 kg
 Largest Aus eagle with dark plumage, prominently 'fingered' outer primaries and long diamond-shaped tail. In flight soars on dihedral wings, circling, rising effortlessly in thermals. Glides on flattish wings with upturned outer primaries. On take-off, heavy flight with deep powerful wing beats. Perches with upright or horizontal carriage; note long rear-end owing to wedge shaped tail; deep powerful bill, fully 'trousered' legs and massive talons. Plumage darkens with age. Older Ad mostly blackish with rufous streaks on nape and pale-edged median-coverts forming slightly paler panel in closed wing. In flight from below: dark unbarred flight feathers;



pale bases to primaries and adjacent secondaries form greyish crescent in outer 'hand', continuing as narrow line across inner wing, but variable depending on age and moult of adjacent coverts. Younger Ad paler rufous brown on nape, extending to mantle; paler covert-panel and indistinct 'U' across uppertail formed by buff tips to longest uppertail-coverts. Juv with rufous or golden brown crown, nape and mantle extending diffusely onto back. Breast feathers dark with broad pale rufous fringes. Prominent, uniformly pale median-covert panel and pale edges to lesser-coverts. Except for outer 'hand', flight feathers of Juv show 5-6 dark bars along spread wing. With wear, paler dorsal feathers bleach to golden-yellow. Sep fleet Juv much paler; golden-brown plumage of mainland Juv replaced by paler buff. In flight, even at distance, ID from all other large dark raptors (including extralimital spp) by long wedge-shaped tail and dihedral position of wings when soaring. Juv White-bellied Sea-Eagle paler than similar aged 'Wedgie'; look for pale inner primaries reaching to trailing edge of wing. Also broader wings bulge across inner wing, shorter less acutely wedge-shaped tail. Voice: Mostly silent but utters dysyllabic and wavering trill-like whistles and yelps in social/territorial contexts. Notes: Perches atop dead trees, telegraph poles, etc., especially in morning sun, sometimes on ground in open country. Hunts small/medium vertebrates, especially rabbits and small macropods, with gliding flight to attack with outstretched talons; will take larger birds (eg cockatoos) in flight. Also carrion; frequently consumes road kill when sometimes struck by vehicles. Huge stick nest, often in use for decades, usually in elevated position (eg tree on ridge line) providing panoramic view. Breeding pairs resident. Juv and Imms may disperse widely.

Gurney's Eagle *Aquila gurneyi* Vag
 Wing 510-560 mm Bill no data Wt ~3 kg
 Rare visitor to n Torres Strait. Large blackish eagle with very broad wings and long rounded tail. Soars on flat to slightly upseep wings, with upturned primary tips; tail at least partly fanned. Differs from familiar Wedge-tailed Eagle by: smaller size; shorter, broader wings, bulging across trailing edge, especially secondaries; long straight-edged tail with rounded end (outer rectrices much longer than those of 'Wedgie'); shorter neck and smaller bill, imparting smaller headed appearance. Ad blackish except for indistinct dark brown carpal-bar. Presence of symmetrical paler panels in flight feathers indicates combination of old and new feathers. Juv not recorded in Aus. Much paler than Ad with tawny-russet head and upperparts, paler buff-brown covert-bar and rump. Voice: Mostly silent; slightly nasal, down-slurred piping may draw attention to flying birds. Notes: Widespread inhabitant of New Guinea w to Moluccas; frequently occurs on islands. Hunts for small/medium vertebrates in lowland rainforest and coastal forest. Reported singly or in pairs on 5+ occasions from Boigu and Saibai Is, n Torres Strait; not resident here; makes the short sea crossing from PNG presumably as part of territorial wanderings. Unconfirmed reports from Cape York and Top End.



ABG artist: Peter Marsack

(painted most of the passerines, nearly all of the little brown jobs, including many he'd painted for HANZAB)

The Australian Bird Guide

Species accounts

Striated Fieldwren *Calamanthus fuliginosus*

Wing 53–63 mm Bill 14–18 mm Wt 15–26 g
Common in low dense vegetation of se Aus. Olive above, yet loush below and boldly streaked blackish throughout; distinctive 'fieldwren' posture with long tail usually held strongly cocked, often flicked to vertical or swept side to side. Flight low and fluttering, tail often spread to reveal pale tip. Unlike Rufous Fieldwren, has sturdy bill and coarse black streaking on uppertail-coverts. Little Grassbird is slimmer with different calls and longer tail that is seldom cocked. Finer bill and sharper dark eye-stripe of Little Grassbird can be a helpful distinction when skulking birds largely concealed by vegetation. Ad supercilium and chin white in ♂, buffy in ♀. Juv like respective sexes of Ad, but underparts and rump paler, with finer dark streaking. Voice: More often heard than seen, with loud, melodious and prolonged song given mainly by ♂: a repeated series of canary-like warbling notes and trills, often including 2 sharp notes followed by a pause and a trill, sometimes transcribed as *wee-tee-tee-taw*. Song given year-round, but most often in spring. Sometimes utters nasal single note *tang* similar to White-fronted Chat. Notes: Found in low dense heath, saltmarsh, sedges and tussock grasslands, often in treeless areas or near wetlands. Seen singly, in pairs or small family groups. ♂ often sings on top of shrubs or other exposed perches. Otherwise unobtrusive, foraging on the ground with hopping gait and strongly cocked tail, or skulking in vegetation, often moving to near top of shrub to keep an eye on intruding birdwatchers. Ssp differ subtly in size, ground colour and coarseness of dark streaking.

Rufous Fieldwren *Calamanthus campestris*

Wing 50–60 mm Bill 13–16 mm Wt 11–16 g
Inland and w fieldwren of low shrublands. Varies geographically and (despite name) some ssp have little rufous; however, all differ from slightly larger Striated Fieldwren by finer bill; unstreaked rufous uppertail-coverts and shorter hindclaw. Striated only occurs nearby in se SA, where Rufous Fieldwren has paler, greyer upperparts, rufous-toned ear-coverts and whiter underparts. Elsewhere, combination of streaky plumage and persistently cocked tail usually diagnostic, but might cause confusion with grasswrens (especially Thick-billed, which can co-occur); however, grasswrens have white streaking on upperparts. Eight ssp; generally paler, more rufous-toned and more finely streaked in arid regions; darker, greyer and more coarsely streaked in more humid regions. Ssp *montanellus* of s WA lacks rufous tones, is heavily streaked and has yellow-tinged upperparts; it is sometimes treated as a full species 'Western Fieldwren'. Sexes alike in most ssp but supercilium is faintly yellow-tinged in some Ad ♀ *montanellus*. Difficult to age, Juv has slightly more finely streaked underbody than Ad. Voice: Like Striated Fieldwren, often utters loud melodious song of repeated canary-like warbles and trills, eg *chick-uh-oo-ree-ree-uh-oo-ree*. Notes: Occurs in low, sparse to dense shrublands, from temperate to arid regions. Characteristic of chenopod shrublands and samphire, also in mallee heathlands and has been recorded in *Triodia* grasslands and

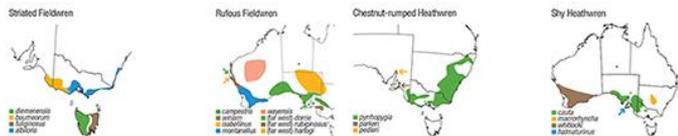
dwarf mangroves. Usually seen singly or in pairs. Unobtrusive except when singing from top of shrubs; often crouches in dense cover until almost trodden upon or dashes to another bush, sometimes with tail held horizontally.

Chestnut-rumped Heathwren *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*

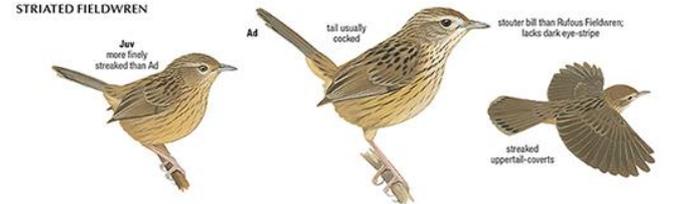
Wing 51–58 mm Bill 13–16 mm Wt 15–20 g
A furtive heath-dweller. Strongly cocked tail, unstreaked brown upperparts, pale supercilium and striking rufous uppertail-coverts rule out other spp except Shy Heathwren. Ad ♂ narrow off-white supercilium; underparts obviously streaked, with off-white breast and belly; undertail-coverts rufous-brown. Ad ♀ supercilium and underparts buff rather than white, with weaker ventral streaking. Juv supercilium weak, buffish; underparts mainly light brown and unstreaked. Voice: An accomplished songster. Song (mainly heard in early breeding season) begins softly but builds into a sustained and surprisingly loud, melodious string of varied trills and warbles, often blended with skilled mimicry of many local bird species. Also a single note *zeet* in contact, and a sharper *tzeet* or *zueet* *zueet* in alarm. Notes: Uncommon resident of low, dense undergrowth, mainly heath or healthy understorey of sclerophyll forests, including regrowth. Seen singly, in pairs or small (family) groups. ♂ sometimes sings from the top of bushes or low tree branches just above shrub level. Otherwise secretive, foraging with brisk hops on the ground or in low shrubs; runs or flies low into thick cover if disturbed. Three ssp differ subtly in size, darkness, and width of ventral streaking; ssp *pedleri* (Flinders Ra) is VU, and spp. *parkeri* (Mt Lofty Ra) is EN.

Shy Heathwren *Hylacola cauta*

Wing 52–58 mm Bill 13–17 mm Wt 13–16 g
Mallee-heath counterpart of Chestnut-rumped Heathwren; they overlap slightly in range (eg in mallee patches in box-ironbark woodlands near Bendigo). Shy Heathwren is more boldly patterned, with broader white supercilium and lower eye-ring; whiter underparts with heavier streaks; white (not greyish-brown) tail-tip; darker rufous undertail-coverts spotted white; brighter rufous rump; diagnostically, it has larger, cleaner white spot on outer primaries. Ad ♂ bold white supercilium, whitish breast and belly with bold blackish drop-shaped streaks. Ad ♀ duller, with weaker, buff-tinged supercilium; buffier underparts with narrower, straighter dark streaking. Juv clean white wing-spot and tail-tip like Ad; slightly bolder face patterning, cleaner white belly than Juv Chestnut-rumped. Voice: Song is a clear and sustained canary-like trilling, eg *chee-chee chick-a-dee*, sometimes interspersed by mimicry; song is less loud with less mimicry than Chestnut-rumped. Also a loud sharp single note in alarm *tehak*. Notes: Moderately common resident in low dense shrubby or heath understorey of mallee woodlands. Seen in pairs, singly or in small family groups; occasionally joins mixed feeding flocks. Secretive, but less shy than Chestnut-rumped. Ssp differ subtly in size, upperparts colour and density of ventral streaks.



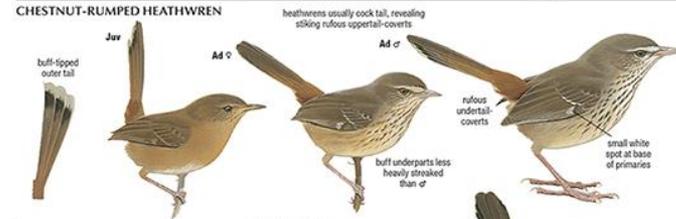
STRIATED FIELDWREN



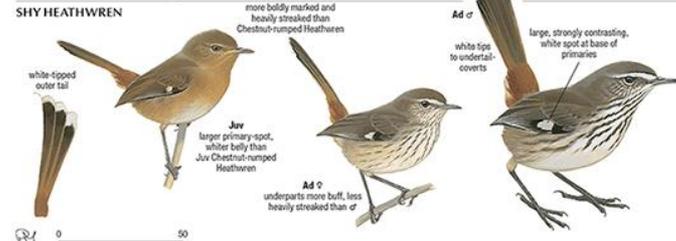
RUFOUS FIELDWREN



CHESTNUT-RUMPED HEATHWREN



SHY HEATHWREN



Bird illustration: the basics

- Birds have properties of
 - Size
 - Shape
 - Colour
 - Character

So how hard can it be to describe a bird? VERY.

The job is simple to describe, harder to achieve!

Sample field guide text...words just don't work by themselves

- Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* Vag
- Wing 60-70 mm Bill 14-16 mm Wt 11-19 g
- Elongate, *rusty-rumped* warbler with prominent *dark dorsal streaking* and longish, broad based, graduated tail and long deep-based undertail coverts. Averages slightly smaller than Middendorff's GW but with similar horizontal carriage and skulking, terrestrial, behaviour; differs by darker more richly rufous upperparts and presence of prominent dorsal streaking. Equally or even more cryptic. Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata* (not yet record in Aus) is smaller, shorter tailed, more 'dumpy', more olive-brown and shows prominent streaking on breast, flanks and undertail coverts, lacks pale tips to rectrices. Behaviour very similar to Middendorff's GW (which see). **Ad** *certhiola/minor* (ssp that winter s of Thailand) with thin blackish streaks on crown, bordered by narrow pale cream supercilium becoming diffuse behind eye. Rufous-brown feathers of mantle, upper back, and wing coverts all with *broad black centres*. Lower back often unmarked, extent of streaking on rich rufous-brown rump variable but *uppertail coverts always with broad dark streaks*. Obvious pale (usually white) tips to all but central rectrices. Unmarked buff and rusty-buff-brown below. **Juv** similar to Ad but slightly darker with less conspicuous supercilium and more diffuse edges to dark streaking of dorsum; underparts with *yellowish wash* not seen in ads and short dark streaks on lower throat.

...and illustrations of the same bird...

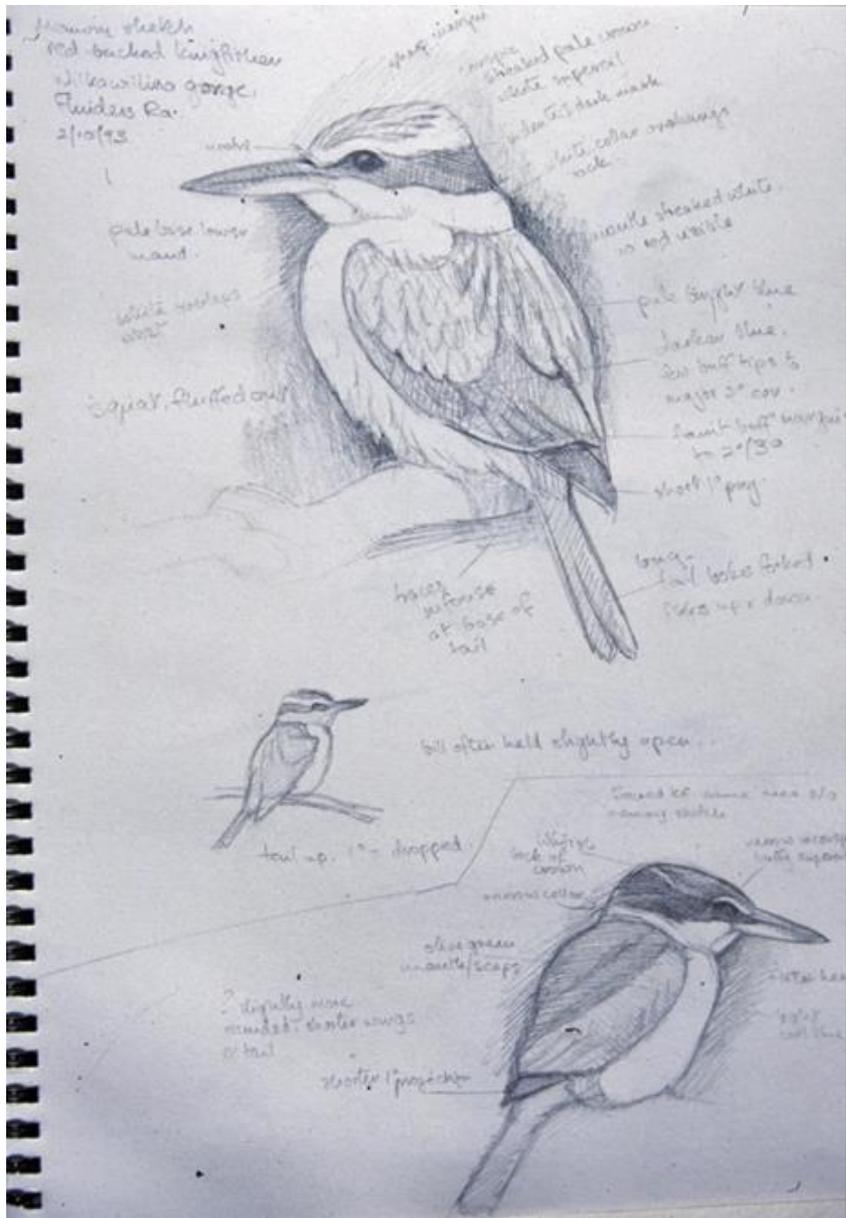


The illustrator's job

- Work with references
- Decide on the essentials
- Render the artwork
 - guided by...*
- Texts and measurements
- Observation and field sketching
- Specimens
- Photographs

The illustrator's job

- Even with all the available photos and specimens, it's still very helpful to see your subject in the wild.
- Even better if it sits long enough to study, draw and make notes...
- Here are drawings I made of a Red-backed kingfisher, which I could use almost directly as the basis for an identification painting (no. 6 on plate).



The illustrator's job

- Here is a page from a current European field guide with artwork and text by Lars Jonsson: wonderful drawing and rendering and still conveying character and life. This is the sort of work other artists aspire to.
- However, there is only one Lars Jonsson, so back to the basics: what are you trying to show, and how can you get the information?



Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East

Phylloscopus warblers

Lars Jonsson 1992

Birds in the hand

- If you can't get a good look at birds in the field, you can hang around with bird banders and take a close look at birds caught for banding (ringing). I was lucky to be able to visit two cooperative banding sites near Canberra (Charcoal Tank – Mark Clayton and Weddin Mountain – Richard Allen).
- Seeing birds in the hand is very helpful for getting a feel for the character of the living bird, details of things like soft part colours, and the way plumage changes with age.

Eastern Yellow Robin

Showing where the wing stripe sits on the spread wing; you can see that this particular bird has some retained juvenile feathers in the inner wing.



Juvenile Willie Wagtail

We found that juvenile plumages are one of the things that seem to trip up beginning birders; often they look quite unlike the adults. Many juvenile passerines have buffy tips to the covert feathers, like this Willie Wagtail.





Crested Shrike-tit

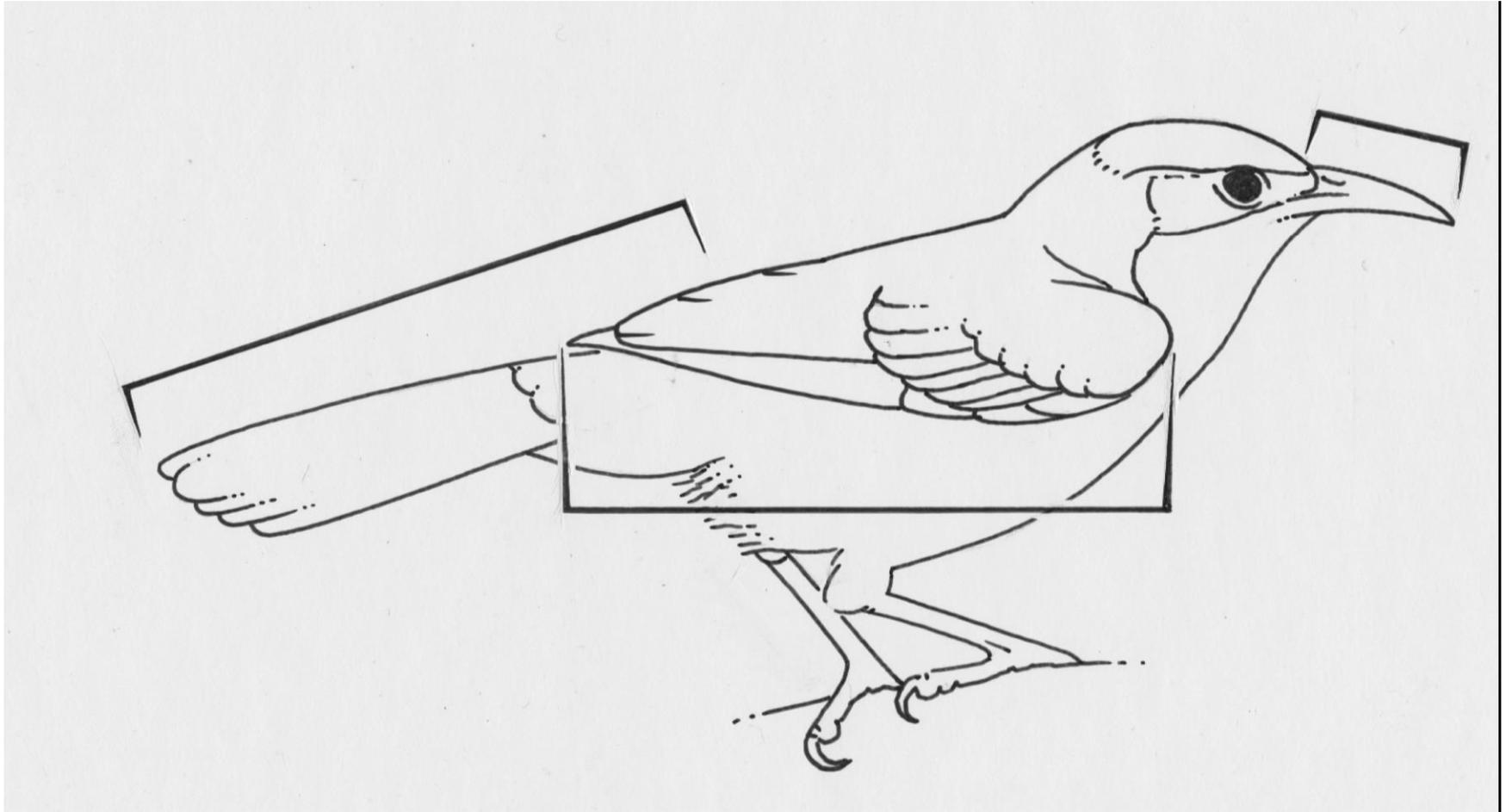
And sometimes it's just fun to get a close look at a spectacular bird - this is an adult female Crested Shrike-Tit. And this is an unusual view because it would normally be tearing bits off the bander's finger.

This is one time I'd recommend taking photos – you don't want to stress the birds by holding them any longer than necessary.

Key dimensions

- You might think the size of a bird wasn't an issue. The ABG team decided to use different measurements from the other Australian guides: wing and bill length.
- The feeling was that an overall length could be misleading – this was controversial and some birders didn't like it because it made size comparisons difficult between different guides (other guides tend to give overall length).

Key dimensions



Key dimensions

- One of the text authors, Danny Rogers, put this next slide together to explain the thinking – three very different birds all with the same overall length (King Quail, Mallee Emu-wren, Gouldian Finch).
- The size of the bird determines how much detail you can show at the printed stage; we always painted as much detail as possible because there will be a digital version of the Bird Guide some day, and that will allow you to pull up the images to the full painted size.
- That's one aspect of size, now let's look at drawing up an image for identification.

Length 13.5 cm?

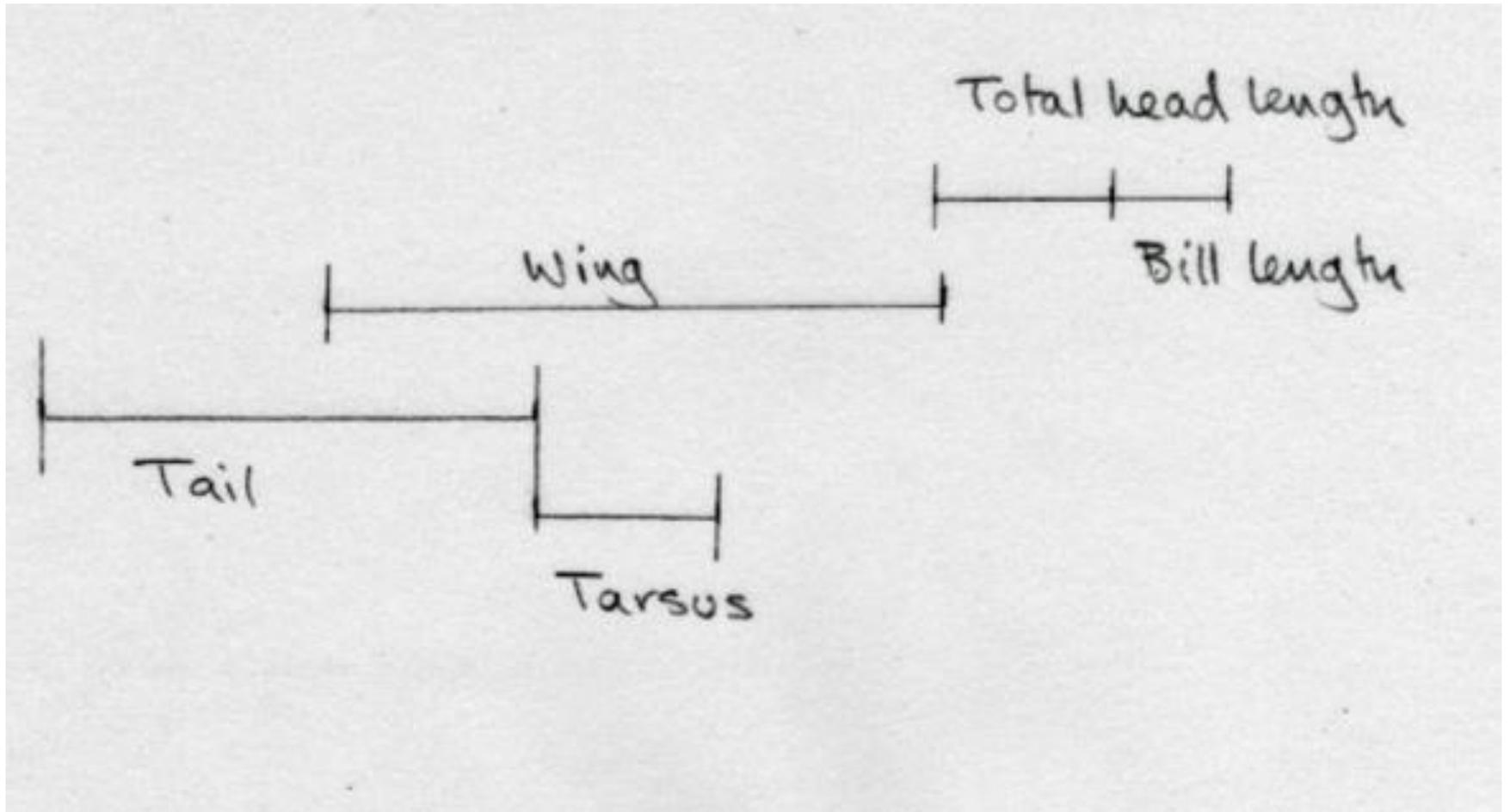


We present wing and bill measurements, weight and a scale on the illustrations to give a better impression of size

Key dimensions

- The next slide shows the key measurements I'd like to have when I set out to draw a bird from scratch, using published information on size and shape. These make up the framework to show the bird side-on, to allow its size and shape to be compared to other species.
- This is sometimes the best place to start if other references are limited.

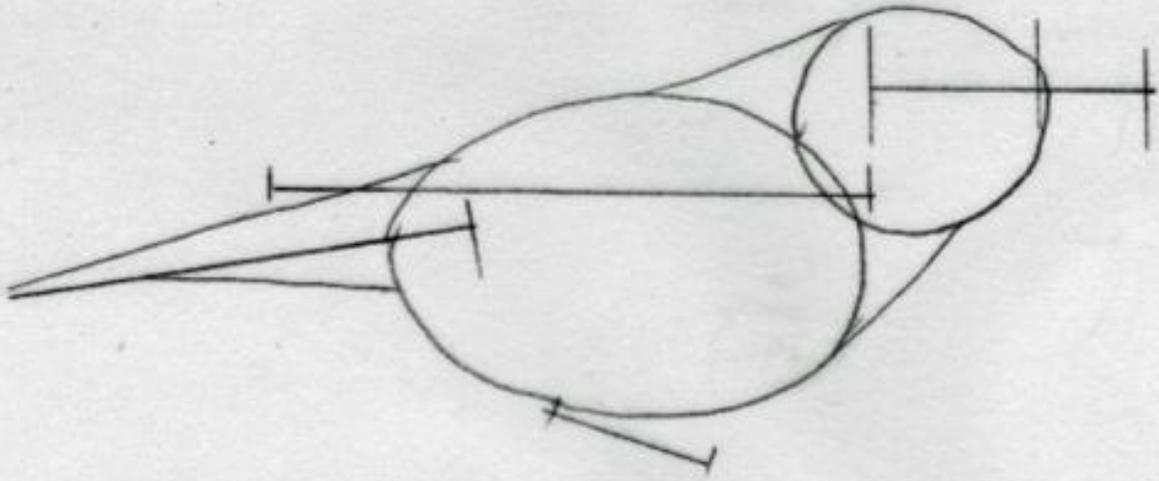
Building a bird from key measurements



Key dimensions

- The next slide shows one of the few Australian photos available for Pallas' Grasshopper warbler, recorded very occasionally on Ashmore Reef.
- Still has useful information, but need to look for other material...
- So sometimes the artist has to construct a bird the old-fashioned way, from a few key measurements.

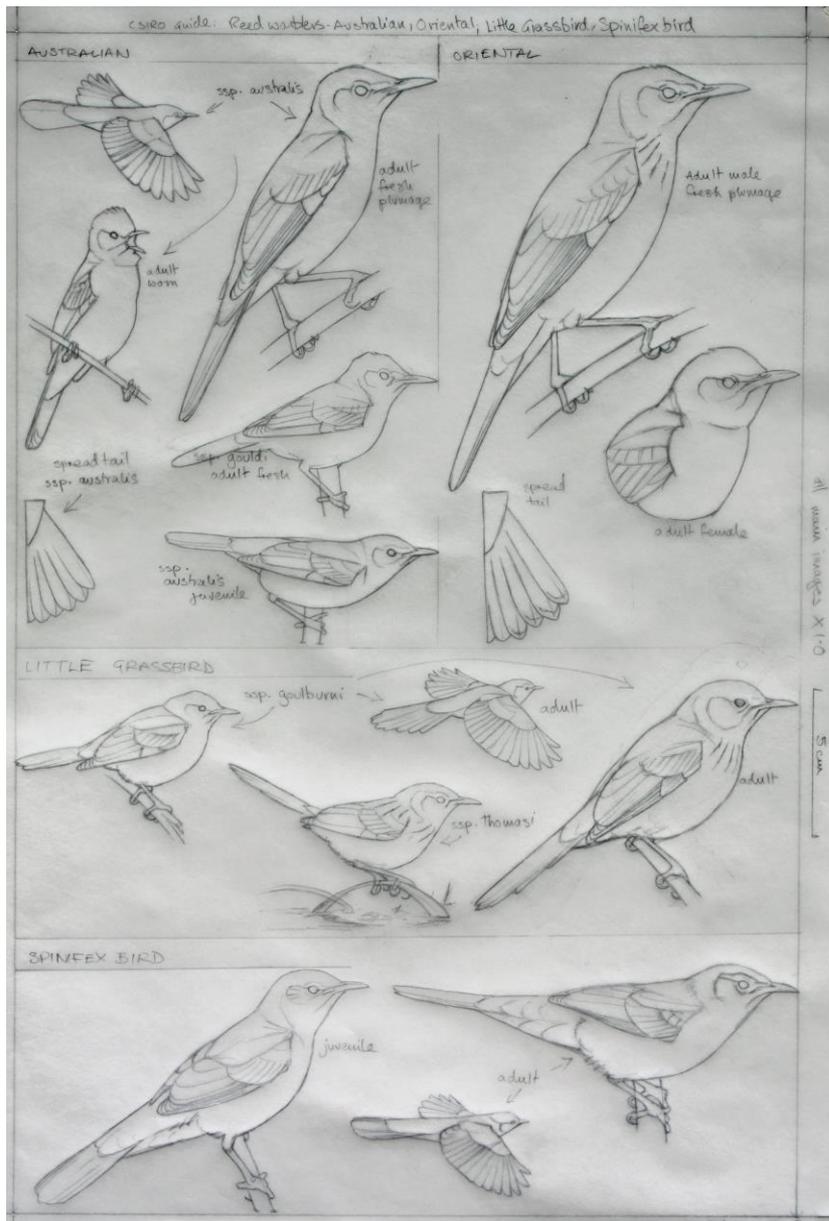






Layout

- Once you have your finished batch of drawings of a species, the next step is to arrange them together on the plate layout. The aim is to come up with a design that lets you compare images, is not confusing and is still pleasing to look at.
- At this draft stage (on L below), it's simplest to have each drawing separate so it's easy to change the composition and to correct if you need to. It's a very handmade process: pencil, tracing paper and tape. Then you get comments from the text authors to make sure you are showing what needs to be shown and have the structures right.
- Once you have made any corrections, you copy the whole layout down onto a cover sheet which will be traced down onto watercolour paper to guide the painting (see R below).



Blocking in

- The next stage is to start blocking in the images in watercolour (gouache), to get the colours and tones right before you start detailing. At this point the individual paintings look dreadful. But if there are major problems in the drawing they will show up now and are easier to correct early.
- The slide below is a plate showing two species of Reed warbler (Australian and Oriental), plus Little Grassbird and Spinifexbird.
- The next layer will add detail to the underpainting and bring the whole plate to life.

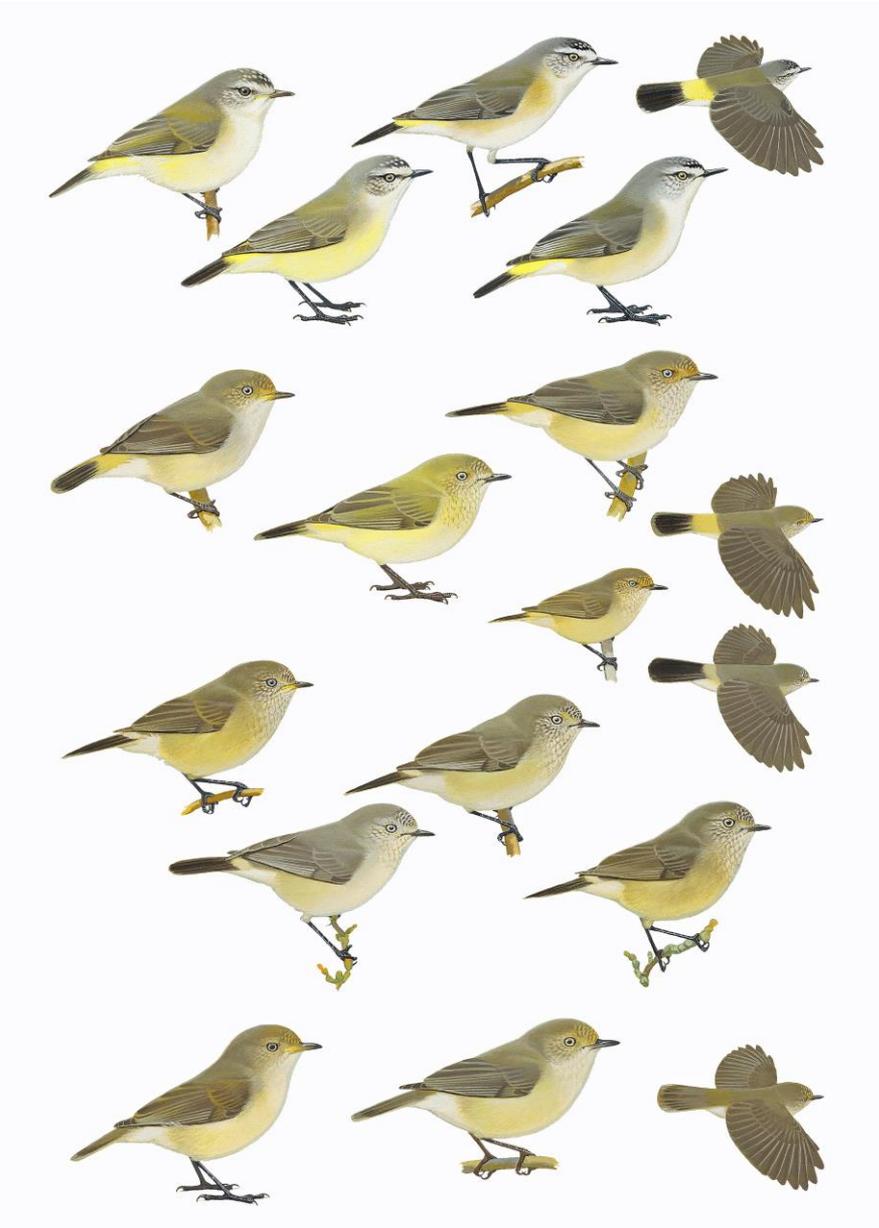


Detail of finished plate (Australian and Oriental Reed warblers: size most obvious difference)



Examples showing the variety of Australian passerines

- Birds of Paradise – 4 Aus spp:
 - Paradise
 - Victoria's
 - Magnificent Riflebirds
 - Trumpet Manucode
- Thornbills:
 - Yellow-rumped
 - Buff-rumped
 - Slender-billed
 - Western



Rare birds

- One of the aims of the Australian Bird Guide was to cover all the species ever recorded in Australia, which meant illustrating some birds that had only occurred very rarely and in remote locations.
- This was a challenge: here is part of a plate of vagrant warblers included in the Guide. All very rare in Australia, all small and a bit drab, often very similar to each other, often very worn and tatty by the time they get here.

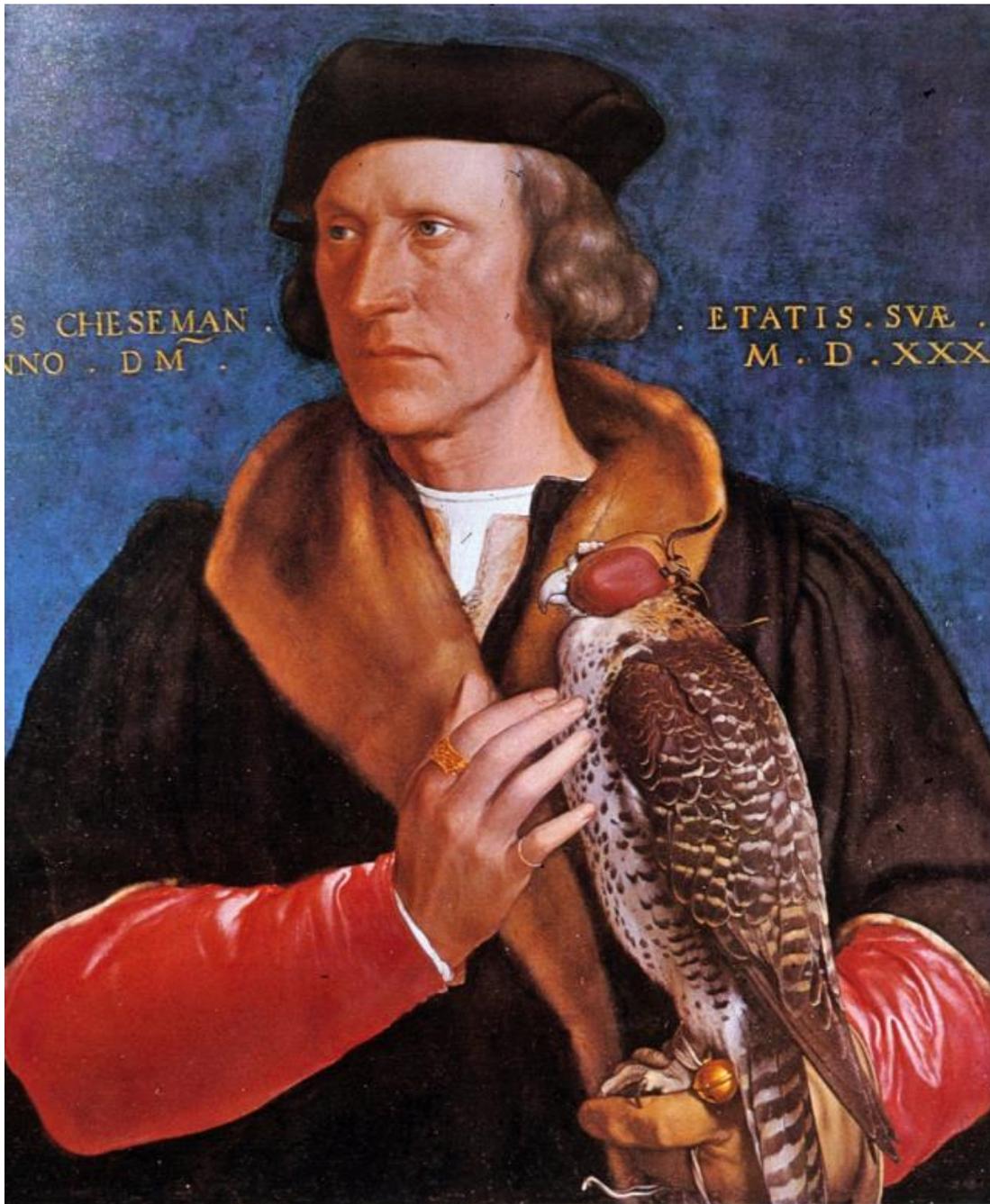


Below is a large watercolour of Pink-eared duck at dawn – this is more about the whole experience, the place and the light...
...less about detail and accuracy.



The focus on accuracy and detail isn't new....

- Here is the Portrait of Sir Robert Cheseman by Hans Holbein the younger, an oil painted in 1533. Holbein was known as an extraordinary portraitist, with a talent for accuracy and rendering of detail and texture.
- Like all the other detail and texture in this painting, the bird is beautifully rendered – even though it's wearing a falconry hood, you can tell the species, the sex (from its size) and know that it's more than a year old, because of moult contrast in the colour of the new wing coverts and wear on the primaries.
- It wouldn't really work for a field guide, too much shadow and reflected light, but there is nothing better in modern guides!



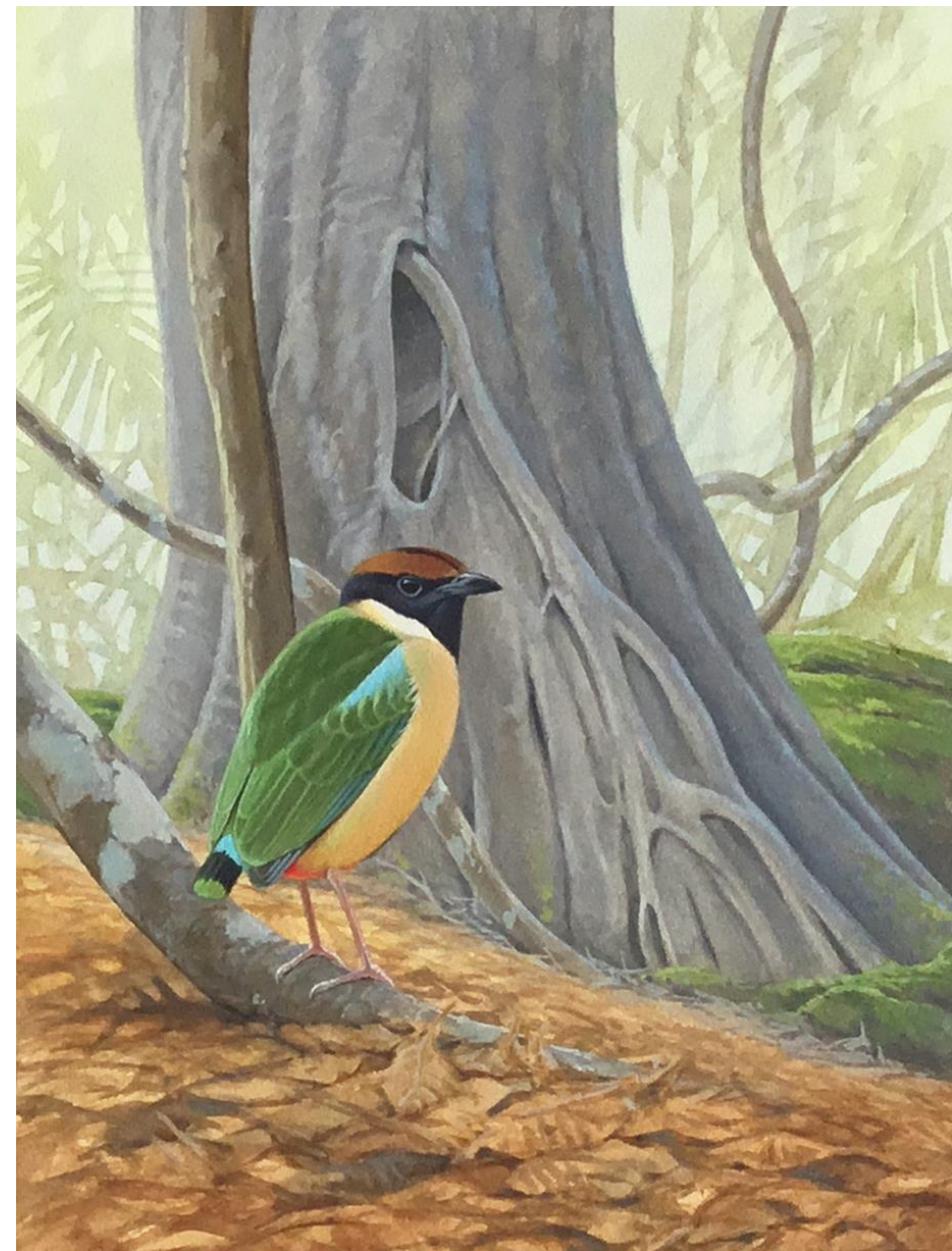
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Final observations

- All the illustrators I work with are still fascinated by birds, still always looking, trying to find ways to take something complex and make it simple enough to tell the story.
- Here are some small painting showing birds in habitat, trying to catch the moment of a sighting, working to the limits of my skills as observer and a painter. There will always be more to paint.
- Noisy Pitta and rainforest fig, Spotted Pardalote on Argyle Apple (*Eucalyptus cinerea*).



Final observations

- And here is a bird of Asian tropical rainforests – Black and Yellow Broadbill, a painting showing the bird in its habitat. This is still illustration to me, as accurate as I could make it; the Broadbills look like flying stuffed toys, so bizarre you have to see them to believe it.
- One of the joys of this kind of work is knowing we will never run out of things to look at. And it's good to remember: if you can see a bird, it's probably already watching you!
- I'll leave you with this close up of a reflection in the eye of a Green Broadbill.



