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Plumage aberrations in Australian birds: A reply to van Grouw (2012)

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We would like to thank van Grouw (2012) for his constructive comments on our recent review of plumage colour aberrations in birds (Guay *et al.* 2012). When we wrote the review, we had two aims: we wanted to present a list of terms useful for both ornithologists and birdwatchers to characterise aberrations observed in the field, and we also aimed at sparking interest and debate on a topic that has not received much attention in Australia. We feel that we have been very successful on both accounts.

Our first aim was to provide a list of terms that could be used by professional and amateur ornithologists to share their observations of birds displaying aberrant plumage. We agree with van Grouw (2012) that our coverage of aberrations is not complete and that some aberrations and mutations are not described. After reviewing the literature, we focussed on describing aberrations commonly used and accepted in the literature. Although van Grouw described the brown mutation in various publications (van Grouw 2006; van Grouw *et al.* 2011), we were not able to find any article (not authored by van Grouw) using this term to describe an aberration observed in the field, which is why we cautioned against presenting it in our short review. Rather than being a judgement on the validity of this mutation, this was simply a judgement on the use of the term. Furthermore, some other mutations described by van Grouw (2006) are very difficult to identify unless the bird is held in the hand, making their use in the field limited. Nonetheless, we agree that where possible all aberrations need to be identified correctly, and we encourage work describing aberrations observed in museum collections where finer observation and characterisation are possible (van Grouw 2010; Urcola 2011). We appreciate the clarifications on colour of eyes and skin in schizochroistic birds, which were only vaguely presented by van Grouw (2006).

Our second aim was to start a healthy debate and get the readership of *Australian Field Ornithology* interested in plumage aberrations. There are still many inconsistencies in the literature concerning the nomenclature of plumage aberration in birds. For example, even though multiple publications have detailed the differences between albinism and leucism over the last four decades (e.g. Buckley 1969; van Grouw 2006), some confusion still exists, with terms like partial albinism still being used (Bensch *et al.* 2000; Hosken 2011). We appreciate van Grouw's (2012) revised classifications of some of the aberrations presented in

our review. Although the Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* in Plate 4 of Guay *et al.* (2012) appears to be an albino, it is possible that it is an ino, as suggested by van Grouw. Similarly, the Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena* in Plate 7 of Guay *et al.* (2012) and the Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* described by Frith & Murphy (2012) are possibly cases of the brown mutation. These examples demonstrate the importance of photographic documentation of aberrations. Therefore, given the constant evolution of our knowledge of plumage aberration in birds, we strongly suggest that future reports of aberrant plumages in birds should be accompanied by high-quality colour photographs (as in e.g. Guay & Potvin 2010; Guay 2011; van Grouw *et al.* 2011; Frith & Murphy 2012) to allow re-evaluation of the aberrations as our knowledge and understanding of the topic increase.

Overall, we are very grateful to van Grouw (2012) for providing clarifications on some specific aberrations described in our review and contributing to a healthy debate on the topic in Australian birds.

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