

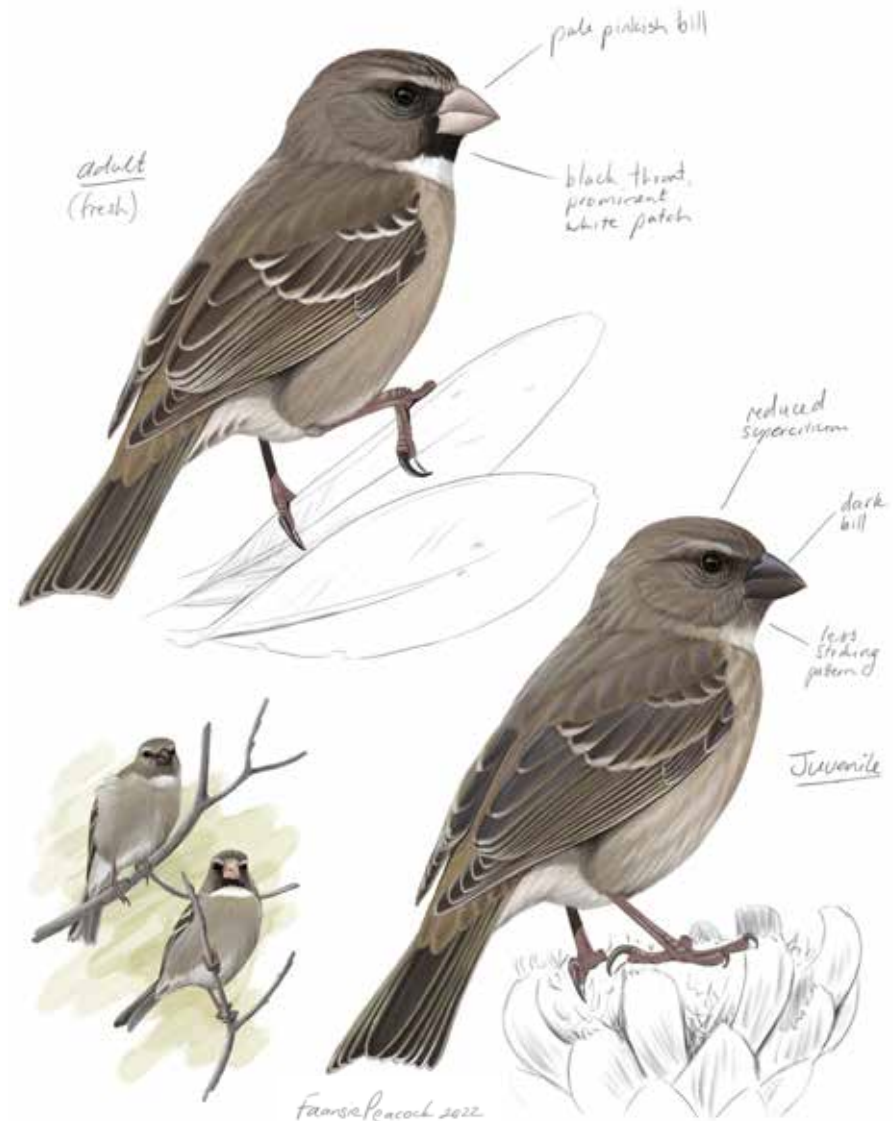
pale reflection

Juvenile plumage of the Protea Canary

The Protea Canary is the most difficult to see of the handful of birds endemic to mountain fynbos, but it is locally fairly common and has been the subject of several studies, including Toni Milewski's 1976 MSc thesis on its feeding ecology and habitat. We were thus surprised to learn that its juvenile plumage is effectively unknown. Roberts 7 says the juvenile is 'Undescribed; probably similar to adult' (Hockey et al. 2005, p. 1128). More recently, the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* states 'Juvenile resembles adult, but more heavily streaked above and below' (Del Hoyo et al. 2010, p. 537), although the basis of this claim is unclear.

Peter Ryan observed two juvenile Protea Canaries in the northern Cederberg in late December 2021. One was seen with an adult, but did not appear to be dependent on parental support. The other was alone and was detected when it gave the typical 'tswee-ooo-eee' song note. Both were in fresh plumage but had lost any vestige of a pale gape that might be expected in recently fledged birds. They were not photographed, but Faansie Peacock's illustration captures the main features.

The juvenile plumage is overall drab greyish brown, lacking any obvious streaking. Perhaps the most striking feature is the slate-black bill, which differs from the pinkish-white bill of the adult. The plain brown head is relieved only by a slightly paler supercilium, even smaller and less contrasting than that of the adult; there is no hint of the blackish face or streaked frons of the adult plumage. The juvenile does have a paler patch at the junction of the throat and breast, although this too is smaller and less well defined than the whitish throat patch of the adult. The remainder of the underparts are plain grey-brown, slightly paler than the upperparts, similar to adult birds.



The back, wing and tail appear comparable to those of the adult, with no marked streaking. The tips of the greater and median secondary coverts have paler buffy-pink tips, which form two wing bars. These appear to be less contrasting and narrower than those of adult birds in fresh plumage, but a direct comparison was not possible because adults in late December are in worn plumage and have little if any trace of pale wing bars.

Juvenile canaries typically start replacing their body feathers within a month or two of fledging, so this juvenile plumage is likely to be short-lived. However, it is unclear how long it takes for the juvenile Protea Canary's bill to change from blackish to the off-white adult bill. Birders looking for this enigmatic fynbos endemic should be aware of the plain, drab juvenile plumage.

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