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SHORT NOTE

Mouth-Spots in nestling Fernbirds

The relationships of the endemic Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*) are obscure, but this species is usually associated with either the Old World warblers (Sylviidae) or Australo-Papuan warblers (Acanthizidae). Plumage and morphology suggest a relationship with the grassbirds (*Megalurus*), a genus of sylviid warblers.

In a comparison of the mouth-spots of nestling Australian songbirds with those from other parts of the world, Boles & Longmore (in press) found that no Australo-Papuan warbler they examined had mouth-markings but that all Australian species of Old World warblers, including both species of *Megalurus*, had markings of the tongue.

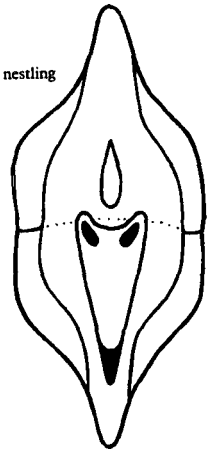
A photograph by Moon (1979) clearly shows the inside mouth of a nestling Fernbird. There are two spots at the base of the tongue and one on the tip (Fig. 1). Reed warblers (*Acrocephalus*) and cisticolas (*Cisticola*) have only the two spots at the base of the tongue. A three-spot pattern like that of the Fernbird is found in the Little Grassbird (*M. gramineus*). The Tawny Grassbird (*M. timoriensis*) also has this pattern but with the addition of black edging to the internal nares (Boles & Longmore, in press: fig. 1e).

This supports the inclusion of *Bowdleria* in the Sylviidae and a relationship between this genus and *Megalurus*.

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FIGURE 1 — Mouth-markings of nestling Fernbird and nestling Little Grassbird



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