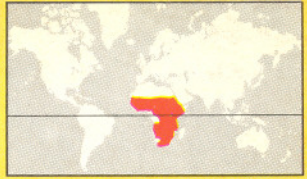


Pin-tailed Whydah



Pin-tailed Whydah

A parasite, like the cuckoo

The whydahs are a small, clearly defined group of four genera consisting of around 15 species, characterized by the magnificent courtship plumage of the males as much as by the strangeness of their reproductive habits. These passerines are parasites in that they leave the responsibility for hatching and rearing their young to other birds. Whydahs lay their eggs only in the nests of the red-eared waxbill, *Estrilda troglodytes*, or, failing that, in those of the St. Helena waxbill *E. astrild*. Waxbills would refuse to feed chicks which differed markedly from their own offspring, and thus the young whydahs resemble their adoptive brothers and sisters to an incredible degree. The male whydah is capable of mimicking the song of the host species and it is therefore impossible to

discover which bird is to be the host by listening to the whydah's song. The female will not mate until she has made sure that a suitable host pair have started nest-building, and she then chooses a mate by noting how good he is at mimicking the foster parents' call. Both in looks and behavior, the baby whydahs resemble the young waxbills with which they grow up. Male whydahs of all species take on sumptuous nuptial courtship plumage during the mating season; in particular they develop very long tail feathers (rectrices). Later, the male plumage returns to the same modest hues as that of the female, buff with black patches, and the elongated tail feathers shed. The pin-tailed whydah often lives near villages, but tends to avoid deserts or dense forests.

Total number of eggs: unknown
Female lays one at a time,
or rarely two, in each adoptive nest

Dimensions of egg: 14.5 x 11 mm ($\frac{9}{16}$ x $\frac{7}{16}$ in)
Adult length: body - 12 cm ($4\frac{3}{4}$ in)
Adult male rectrices: 17 to 25 cm ($6\frac{3}{4}$ to $9\frac{3}{4}$ in)
The young are independent at five weeks

Phylum: Vertebrata	Class: Aves	Order: Passeriformes	Family: Ploceidae	Genus and species: Vidua macroura
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