

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,
Jim Butler



CALLING FROM THE CANOPY

Today it is almost impossible to be in the bush for more than ten minutes without hearing the repetitious calling of the Olive-backed Oriole. And this calling will go on and on until well into 2017! There is usually only one bird in the vicinity and it is exceptionally hard to see because of its olive colouring and its preference for foraging in the forest canopy. The calling of the Olive-backed Oriole is complex, because along with its own call it is a wonderful mimic of the calls of other forest birds.

Globally, there are 33 species of the beautiful Orioles, all boldly coloured with splashes of yellow and red, and remarkably similar in shape and size (28cm). There are three members of the family in Australia. Two live with us, the Olive-backed Oriole and the Australasian Figbird, and are found throughout Eastern

and Northern Australia; and the third, the Yellow Oriole, is found in Northern Australia. The Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*) was first described in 1802 by the English ornithologist John Latham: *Oriolus* is latin for "golden bird"; and *sagitta* is latin for "arrow", and refers to the arrow-like marks on the breast and stomach.

The Olive-backed Oriole has plenty of red: beak, eye and gape. It is well-known they feed principally on fruit in canopy trees that produce abundant berries, as in the photo. However, motion-sensitive cameras have recently revealed new information. Nest predation is the most common source of nest failure, yet the identity of the predators is not well known. In 2014 an Olive-backed Oriole was photographed taking young from the nest of a Grey Fantail and destroying the nest in the process. And in 2014 the first ever detailed study of the breeding biology of the Olive-backed Oriole was published which is essential knowledge for its preservation.

Go bush and meet an Oriole

~ Jim



Image: Olive-backed Oriole
by Ed Frazer at Brookfield

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