BLUSHING FIGBIRDS

Text and images by Ian and Jill Brown

The colour of the bare facial skin of male Australasian Figbirds (Sphecotheres viridis) varies between a dull beige-pink, and bright red, characteristic of the breeding season. Several books note that the colour changes with the level of excitement of the bird.

This male bird, photographed at Gold Creek in early October, was sitting in a fig tree, inside the canopy, gorging on ripe figs. His facial skin was so pale that, in the dull light inside the foliage, he could have been mistaken for a Common Myna.

Suddenly, he saw the camera. Immediately, his facial skin changed to red – not the deep red often seen in breeding males, but a much deeper shade than when he was eating.

He turned again, still red-faced, showing the clear change which had occurred almost instantaneously. Perhaps the sight of the camera was enough to startle him slightly, but not to achieve the glowing red of this young male when in the company of ladies!

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