

A NEW *flava*?

The status of the so-called Yellow-tailed Pytilia has been debated ever since it was first described from Djibouti in the 1980s (Welch & Welch 1988, *Sandgrouse* 10: 26–50). Although no specimens have been collected, it has been tentatively named as a distinct race of Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba flavicaudata*, or mooted as a distinct species. The discovery of similar birds near Kathu in the Northern Cape of South Africa suggests it may be merely a genetic variant, but Neville Brickell reported that the yellow birds were segregated from the normal red form (1999, *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* 6: 60).

Given this context, Marietjie Froneman's photograph of a yellow-morph male pytilia in the Kruger National Park, South Africa, is particularly interesting. This male, which consorted with typical Green-winged Pytilias, is identical to the photograph of a Kathu male as well as Martin Woodcock's illustration of a Djibouti male (*Bulletin of the African Bird Club* 5: 46–50). It suggests that the Green-winged Pytilia has a yellow morph akin to the schizochroism recorded occasionally among Crimson-breasted Shrikes and Black-collared Barbets. That's not to say that



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such variation has no evolutionary significance. Where the morph is locally common, differences may accumulate over time if the birds breed assortatively (i.e. if females favour males from their own morph as mates), ultimately allowing them to behave as separate species.

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