



Fig. 4: Olive-backed sunbird (*Nectarinia jugularis*) (drawing by Donna McKinnon).

heijen (1963: 697) as the "finest songster of Flores," the bird is also an accomplished mimic. In fact, in these several respects, the Bare-throated whistler, a species the Nage call *kete dhéngi* (Forth 2004; see Fig. 3), might appear to be an even better choice than the friarbird as the pigeon's antagonist. Explaining the bird's sole appearance in a variant of the myth from Flores, however, is the fact that the species is endemic to that island and to Sumbawa, and thus absent from both Sumba and Timor. Even on Flores, moreover, it does not play a prominent part in the dawn chorus, and in fact occurs only at higher elevations and thus, unlike the ubiquitous friarbird, often at some distance from human habitations. The bird's sole appearance in the Manggarai story, on the other hand, is consistent with *Pachycephala nudigula* being significantly more common and vocal in this more densely forested western region than in other, more easterly parts of Flores (Verhoeve and Holmes 1999: 41).

In regard to the bird's favouring a very lengthy night, the selection of the owl as the pigeon's ally in the Manggarai story of course requires no comment. Nor, for the same reason, does the replacement of the pigeon by the moon in another Manggarai variant. The occurrence of the crow in place of the Imperial pigeon in the Belu story might be explained by its dark feathers. But as noted, in another Timorese myth the crow takes the place of the friarbird as the advocate of a short day and night, thus again suggesting the subordination of the visual to the vocal. In addition, the Manggarai owl is described as prefacing an appeal for an enduring

night with the cry *po, po, po*, thereby associating the bird's mythical function with its characteristic nocturnal vocalization (one Nage consider a principal manifestation of witches [Forth 2004: 68–74], who also favour the night) as much as with the bird's simple occurrence after dark.

Another bird requiring attention is the sunbird (*tiwe*, including the Olive-backed sunbird, *Nectarinia jugularis*; see Fig. 4), which appears as the redeemer of the friarbird in two variants of the Nage myth. As discussed elsewhere (Forth 2004: 126–127), it is the boldness that Nage ascribe to the sunbird – an attribution grounded in ornithological fact – that explains why, in one variant, both the pigeon and the friarbird are described as being afraid of the sunbird, and why the *tiwe* is able to ransom the friarbird, even though the tiny bird is too small to carry the banyan fruits (or figs) which the Imperial pigeon, in keeping with the dietary habits of the species, evidently requires. This aspect of the sunbird's nature does not of course explain why this bird should take the side of the friarbird. But an answer may be found in perceptual similarities reflecting phylogenetic linkage between the two avian kinds. As noted, friarbirds are large members of the Meliphagidae (honeyeaters), whereas sunbirds belong to the Nectarinidae. While ornithologists disagree as to how closely related the two families might be (Cameron and Harrison 1978: 232; cf. Coates and Bishop 1997: 480), small honeyeaters, especially, closely resemble sunbirds in form and behaviour; and, accordingly, Nage include small honeyeaters (genus *Lichmera*), together