

wrapped the aviary again with plastic and used two quartz heaters to keep the building warm as the weather was very cold. Again, all survived.

Again, in 1996, they laid their first clutch of eggs in February, their last clutch in December using the same methods as the year before. One chick hatched and was taken in at four days old. Spring was unusually cold and the weather did not actually warm up until May therefore we decided to artificially incubate the next clutch of eggs. We incubated two eggs in a Roll-Ex incubator at 99.5° F. and hatched two chicks exactly 14 days to the hour after they were laid, one each day.

We watched the chicks hatching which was very exciting and then our real work began. They babies were put in small containers, wrapped in warm towels, and not fed until they were six hours old. We gave them only pedalyte the first 24 hours, one drop at a time. They took four drops each feeding. They were kept in the brooder at 99.5° F. overnight then moved to another brooder set at 97° F.

The next day, we mixed a little hand feeding formula and lactobacillus into the pedalyte. They took a few more drops with each feeding and by the end of the week were eating one to two cc's each feeding every two hours. The temperature was then reduced to 93-94° F. We raised eight babies last year.

All incubators, brooders, feeding instruments, pipettes or syringes, cups, containers and towels were disinfected after each use. It is very easy to transmit bacteria to a very young chick. Bacteria are the major cause for poor hatches and survivability in mynahs. Using a good disinfectant that will kill gram positive and gram negative micro-organisms will help to eliminate this problem. After disinfecting feeding instruments and cups, they are placed in a bath of Novasan and kept there until used. Do not wash the Novasan off. We also keep all eggs or clutches separate in different incubators and brooders until the chicks are at least three weeks of age.

Twice a year the parents are treated with Albon 58 suspension for internal parasites as a preventative precaution—a few drops in each juice cup each

day for a week since they live outside.

All babies are closed banded at 10 days of age. We use a size 9½ on the Java Hill Mynahs.

A hand fed Java Hill Mynah makes a wonderful pet. They are curious, attentive, loveable hams. Once they begin speaking, they will talk to anyone, at anytime and probably in your voice. They are capable of actually speaking in many different voices, depending on who lives in the house. They love to imitate sounds, and almost carry on conversations as they grow older. They also enjoy singing. If you sing off tune, so will they so be careful.

We suggest a cage with a minimum length of four feet for hopping back and forth. Height is not as important as length. A healthy mynah is full of energy and needs the exercise. Provide a nest box at one end and a shelf made of cage wire on the other for feeding in dishes. We place a large bowl with about two to three inches of water on the cage bottom for bathing as mynahs love water. They love safe hanging toys, shiny objects and some, a swing.

With good care and diet, most mynahs today should live for 25 years. They begin speaking as young as two months old and continue to learn throughout their life.

Mynah News

Note: for information about the Mynah News, and to be put in touch with other mynah bird lovers contact:

Linda Leger
641 Invader Street
Sulfur, LA 70663
318-527-7641

To register your Java or India Hill Mynah in the official studbook, send a SASE to Gayle Anderson-Nixon P.O. Box 423 Manitou Springs, CO 80829.

Note: for information about the Mynah News, and to be put in touch with other mynah bird lovers contact:

Linda Leger
641 Invader Street
Sulfur, LA 70663
318-527-7641

To register your Java or India Hill Mynah in the official studbook, send a SASE to Gayle Anderson-Nixon P.O. Box 423 Manitou Springs, CO 80829.

ESTRILDID FINCHES IN AVICULTURE...

Black-bellied and White-bellied Crimson Finches

by Stash and Carol Anne Buckley,
Magnolia, NJ

When discussing avicultural skills needed for breeding Australian finches, one generally has in mind Gouldians (*Chloeba gouldiae*), Shaft-tails (*Poephila acuticauda*), and the like—birds which require a level of talent and expertise on par with those required for eating a hamburger. However, the Black- and White-bellied Crimson Finches (*Neochmia phaeton phaeton* and *Neochmia phaeton evangelinae*) are usually not included in such discussions in this country due to their perceived difficulty in aviculture.

Black-bellied Crimson Finch

The Black-bellied Crimson Finch is not often imported and when it is, commands a high price—\$600 to \$800 a pair. Coupled with the fact that it has a bad reputation as being hard to breed or even keep alive, it is usually ignored by American aviculturists. Also, most of the literature regarding this bird is either misleading or downright incorrect. This has further muddied the water. In fact, most published reports declare this to be a community bird, nests being found in Pandanus Trees and gutters of houses and such. One of the first things one learns when housing these birds is that this is a very aggressive species. The aviculturist walks away scratching his head wondering how his charges can be so belligerent in captivity yet so laid-back in the wild.

Recently we discussed this with Mike Fidler who has done much research in Australia on the behavior of estrildid finches in the wild. We were hoping he could shed some light on this subject. Fidler said that occasionally something will appear in print that is not true and that this misinformation may be repeated over and over



again by other authors referring to it in their own writings. Because it appears in print so often, it is accepted as truth.

With the Black- and White-bellied Crimson Finches, the truth is that they will stay together as a family unit only until the juveniles are driven off by the cock's desire to recycle. Fidler confirms this is an aggressive species with bonded pairs having their own breeding territories. In this respect, they should be treated as Violet-ears (*Uraeginthus granatina*) and housed one pair per flight.

In fact, this has been known by the Europeans for several years and is one reason they have been so successful with this Australian estrildid. Hence, most of the imported bloodlines come from Europe. Sadly, there is only one breeder in England who has been keeping the Black-bellies going for 10 generations. When people there need new bloodlines they invariably go to this one breeder. In the States, when we need new blood, we habitually resort to the European breeders. On a positive note, when pairs have bonded, they do so for life and really are quite gentle with one another.

Black-bellies can be housed in a cage 3 ft. long x 2 ft. wide x 2 ft. high, and several pairs can be housed in the same room, provided cages are not placed adjacent to each other. Crimson finches who hear and see each other will encourage one another to breed, but must have space between their cages to serve as a buffer zone.

When introducing pairs for the first time, always introduce the cock to a hen who has already established her own territory in her own cage. Cocks in such an environment will feel a bit disoriented and will tend not to bully the hen so much. In our experience, pairs in such situations will readily bond within a week or so if they are going to bond at all.

In extreme cases, where no bonding occurs, we have found it necessary to take matters into our own hands and cut the primary flight feathers (save the first two) of both wings of the cock. Upon re-introduction of the male, we find his cockiness a bit subdued in his compromised situation. Now his energies are directed to survival and maneuvering within the

cage.

Surprisingly, cocks such as this accept their mates and would rather breed than battle. It is certainly sad to watch such a compromised cock hop from perch to perch and climb up the screen wall with nesting material in beak, headed for the nest. However, when you remember that a few days ago he was ready to kill his mate, it is a small price to pay to bring an incompatible pair to the edge of breeding. In the next molt his feathers will grow back but the pair should remain compatible.

Black-bellied Crimson finches will generally nest in a typical closed large wicker finch basket. Certain cocks will habitually pluck all the accessible feathers from their backs and bellies to line the nest. Once one has become accustomed to doing this, it is virtually impossible to break him of it. On a positive note, he generally does not pluck feathers from the hen.

In our experience, Black-bellies usually lay two eggs per clutch. We believe these small clutches are the result of the constant need to inbreed, both here and abroad, just to keep these birds going. They make wonderful parents, raising their young on eggfood.

Prophetically, this bird is a true barometer of the ability of Americans to breed finches, as it is a bird that novices generally will buy, having had reasonable success with other Australian finches such as Gouldians. They believe they will be able to "crank out" lots of babies and sell them at a large profit. This is just not the case. These are simply not money-making birds.

There are two mutations of the Black-bellied Crimson finches: one where the red is replaced by orange (in Germany) and one where it is replaced by yellow (elsewhere in Europe). Most importers are reluctant to import these mutations due to their prohibitively high prices.

White-bellied Crimson Finch

White-bellied Crimson Finches from New Guinea are not imported as frequently, are smaller, and are generally easier to maintain than their Black-bellied cousins. They are less expensive at

about \$200 per pair. Their clutch size (approximately five eggs) is much larger than that of the Black-bellied, and chicks are easy to raise using newly molted mini-mealworms. The same fundamentals should be strictly adhered to—such as one pair per flight—even though the White-bellied cock is usually less aggressive than the Black-bellied.

Juveniles can be housed in large community flights 4 ft. long x 2 ft. wide x 3 ft. high for about a year until their natural breeding urges overpower their tendencies to live peacefully together. Carefully watch for this as many losses can occur before you even realize what is going on. On the other hand, Black-bellied juveniles should always be housed in individual cages. Neither Black- nor White-bellied Crimson Finches should be housed with any other species.

There are no known White-bellied mutations. There is, however, a third type of crimson finch having a white belly, the *Neochma phaeton albiventer*, which is native to the Cape York Peninsula in Australia, but is not found in aviculture.

Overall, crimson finches are delightful and are one of the most intelligent of all estrildid finches. In fact, when shooting videos of these birds it is difficult to keep them in focus as their curiosity pulls them so close to the camcorder that it is virtually impossible to maintain the depth of field necessary to make the hardware cloth of their cages seem to disappear. Also, when the keeper is distributing mealworms the birds press themselves against the wire and squawk, not unlike Purple Grenadiers (*Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*). In fact, the crimson finches in general are the Australia/New Guinea lowland counterparts of the African Purple Grenadiers.

As you have probably already guessed, this is not a bird which we recommend to the beginner, but, rather, one of our all time favorites which, without a doubt, belongs only in the hands of those with the advanced avicultural skills and altruistic dedication needed to do justice to this lovely though, unfortunately, increasingly rare avian gem. ➔