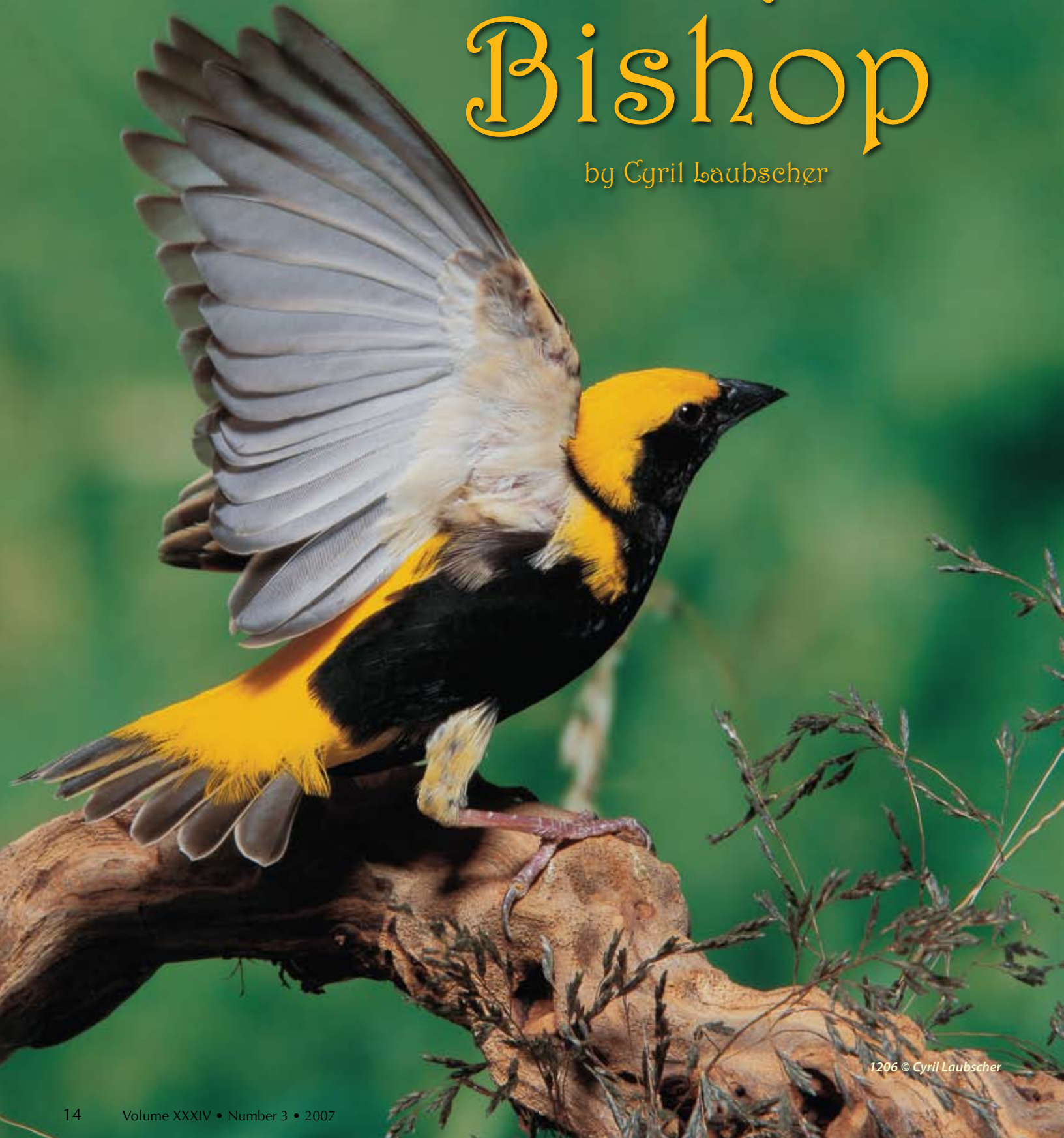


The Golden Bishop

by Cyril Laubscher



1206 © Cyril Laubscher

INTRODUCTION

"Golden Bishops" have been kept and bred by bird keepers worldwide for many years. The most frequently imported species from western and central Africa is the Yellow-crowned Bishop (*Euplectes a. afer*) or Napoleon Weaver, as it is known in UK aviculture. Three subspecies are recorded - *E. a. strictus* from Ethiopia, *E. a. ladoensis* from Sudan, Kenya, and northern Tanzania, and the most southerly subspecies *E. a. taha* from South Africa and neighbouring countries. All are around 4-5 inches with *E. a. ladoensis* the smallest at 4 inches (100 mm), and the South African race *Euplectes a. taha* at just under 5 inches (120 mm).

As a teenager growing up in South Africa, I was particularly fascinated by the birds that looked like colourful, fluffy little yellow and black balls flying slowly back and forth across the marshlands that are a feature of the local landscape in parts of Johannesburg.

Later, I found out that these conspicuous and common birds were Golden Bishop (*E. a. taha*) males in display flight - with their brilliant yellow and black plumage puffed out. The males would continue these display flights - often referred to as "puffballing" - for as long as they were in their nuptial (breeding) plumage, which lasted for most of the summer months from December to March. During these display flights, they would utter a "sip-sip" call. Males also make a harsh buzzing sound as they chase other males away from their territory.

Grassland, and cultivated areas are frequented by Golden Bishops. In some cities and towns, they can be seen in suitable gardens and parks where low grass and reed beds have been planted. Flocks join other weavers, especially Red Bishops (*E. orix*) when roosting. For nest sites, they favour tall grass standing in water, occasionally seen alongside but separate from Red Bishop colonies in reed beds.

Virtually all weavers, including Red, and Golden Bishops, are polygynous - that is, they enjoy "plurality of wives". The males build prospective nests using fresh green pliable grass stems or strips of reeds, and seek to attract the dull brown sparrow-like females to occupy one of the nests. A male continues to build more nests, in the hope that if a female does not approve of the first choice, an alternative nest may win approval.

As the dull brownish female alights on the top of a grass or reed stem, the male flies to a nearby perch from where he performs a "swivelling from side to side" display,

while perching in an upright posture and performing his "chee chee" call. If successful in his conquest, the male then sets off to attract other females.

When her choice is made, the female then lines the nest with soft seed heads, and this lining of the nest continues after the first chicks hatch. In a nest that I found when I observed a female carrying grass seed heads to, I was pleasantly surprised to find two tiny nestlings that had presumably hatched that day or the day before. The female continued bringing seed heads for a considerable time during the two days that I was observing the colony.

AVICULTURAL NOTES

When I lived in Johannesburg as a young and budding bird keeper, I managed to obtain a couple of pairs of Golden Bishops for my aviaries. Unfortunately, the aviaries - while well constructed out of bricks, timber and wire - were not really suitable for these weavers, as they were not well planted and contained far too many birds.

Any aspiring bird keeper who can successfully simulate the correct natural conditions in a planted aviary - especially one with a small area of taller grasses around 2-3 feet high and preferably growing in water - should consider buying a male and 2-3 females of Napoleon Weavers for their beauty and potential breeding activity. The "puffballing" and other displays of the male in a large aviary will surely enthral their owner. These displays can also be seen occasionally in a smaller aviary, but the real beauty of this species is best seen in a larger planted environment.

Some reports of "aggressive behaviour" have been made, but I believe that it is more boisterous display by a male in defence of potential nesting sites.

Golden Bishops have been bred in Europe and even if only one female is present, breeding success can still be accomplished. The normal clutch is 3-5 whitish speckled eggs that hatch around 12-14 days. Raising the brood takes 13-16 days, and is entirely the responsibility of the female. The male takes no part in this activity. Young birds resemble the female, as do males when in eclipse (non-breeding) plumage.

Relatively simple to cater for, Golden Bishops need a seed mixture containing Canary, White, Yellow and Panicum Millet, plus millet sprays. Live food and insects or caterpillars, plus seeding grasses are essential when breeding or rearing young. Grit should always be available. They should have access to a heated shelter during inclement winter weather. 🐦



In breeding plumage, the Napoleon Weaver male has a bright yellow breast with, or without, a chestnut centre patch. 1203 © Cyril Laubscher



From the back, males of subspecies are similar in markings. In flight, the bright yellow back is very conspicuous and eye-catching, especially when a male performs his "puffballing" display. 1202 © Cyril Laubscher



Golden Bishop males of the southern Africa subspecies *E. a. taha*, and also *E. a. ladoensis*, in nuptial (breeding) plumage have black fronts extending from the throat to the vent. 1204 © Cyril Laubscher



This female Golden Bishop is virtually indistinguishable from the lighter coloured female Napoleon Weaver. Males in eclipse (non-breeding) plumage resemble females, as do the young, apart from the buff edges to the feathers of their upper parts. 1205 © Cyril Laubscher