

The Fall and Rise of Siskins in Captivity

by John Quatro, Sydney, Australia

[Editor's Note: Taxonomy is constantly shifting and within the last 30 years or so, most of the birds formerly in the genus *Spinus* have for the most part been integrated into the genus *Carduelis*. To maintain consistency, the Watchbird uses Distribution and Taxonomy of the Birds of the World by Sibley & Monroe (1990) as its primary source for the scientific names of birds. SLD]

Breeding siskins in captivity is not as difficult as it seems. In the past, siskins were kept in cages only as song birds or used to hybridize with Canaries. It is only recently that siskin breeder societies have begun to appear and many species of these beautiful song birds are now being bred in their pure subspecies.

Although mutations of some siskin species are known (the Eurasian species *Carduelis spinus*, for example) breeding for mutations is not encouraged by most Carduelian societies. I have seen most of the mutations and that none are as pretty and majestic as the normally colored wild species.

Siskins are closely related to Canaries and, just as with Canaries, will not do well if you keep two pairs in one cabinet or aviary. They will most certainly not breed under these conditions. They are much too territorial. If breeding results are to be achieved, just one pair should be kept per aviary or cabinet.

It is also important to keep the various species and subspecies of siskins separate—hybridization does occur. In my opinion, every effort should be made to keep the 20 plus species of siskins pure in captivity.

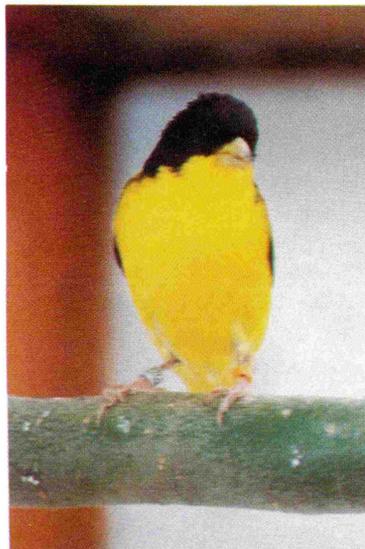
Some siskin species, such as the Red Siskin (*Carduelis cucullatus*) and the Saffron Siskin (*Carduelis siemerdzki*), are becoming rare or almost extinct in their native habitats. Others, the Yarrel Siskin (*Carduelis yarrellii*), for example, are known to be poor breeders in captivity—thus extremely



Yarrel Siskin (*Carduelis yarrellii*) from Brazil.



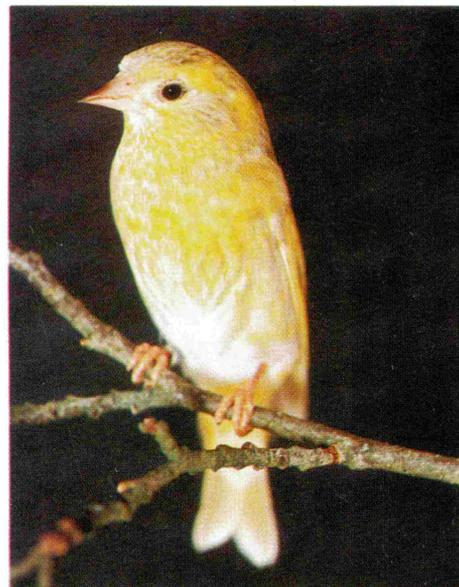
Red Siskin (*Carduelis cucullatus*)



Mexican subspecies (*Carduelis psaltria jouyi*).



Black Siskins (*Spinus atratus*)



Eurasian Siskin female in double dilute mutation.

high priced when they are available.

All siskin species require a special diet of green, leafy foods with their basic dry seed mix and a generous supply of sunflower and niger seeds. Half-ripe green seeding millets and grasses are required when the birds care for young in the nests. Black Siskins (*Spinus atratus*), especially, require seeds from certain South American plants such as *Amaranthus* which contain protein that is comparable in quality to animal protein and is complete in its balance of amino acids.

Being able to provide all this and offer a clean environment will ensure that the siskin species breed freely in captivity and provide excellent songs for their keepers throughout the breeding season. ➤