

EX LIBRIS

Book Review

by Graeme Hyde,

Elliminyt, Victoria, Australia

KEEPING AND BREEDING FINCHES AND SEED-EATERS

by Russell J. Kingston, Indruss Productions, New Farm, Queensland, Australia. Over 270 color photographs, plus numerous black and white illustrations and distribution maps for each species. Hard cover, 526 pages, 6.6 x 9.5 inches, 3lbs. \$A70 (\$US45.50) retail.

Although American readers of Watchbird may not be aware of the ornithological, birdwatching, and avicultural books published "Down Under" I can assure them that Australia has produced several fine publications. In fact, I could quite easily write an article discussing the range of titles that have hit the bookstores during the last decade, and their specific contributions to the "world of birds."

The book under review – *Keeping and breeding Finches and Seed-Eaters* – is an excellent book by one of Australia's best, and best-known, finch breeders. Published about the middle of 1998 it is an updated and, dare I say it, an improved version of Kingston's earlier work, *A Complete Manual for the keeping and breeding of Finches*, which was launched by the author at the Avicultural Federation of Australia's (AFA) Seventh National Avicultural Convention held in Melbourne, Victoria, in March 1994. (The A.F.A. in Australia, which was fledged in 1980, is based on the American Federation of Aviculture.)

When reviewing the "Manual," Ian Lynch, a well-known and successful Victorian finch breeder, wrote: "... it represented one of the most significant additions to avicultural literature for many years" (*Australian Aviculture*, June 1994, pp. 131-132).

Although I agree with Lynch's comment, I believe that I am obligated to

say that, in my opinion, although the *Manual* is an excellent publication (despite its softcover), Kingston's latest book will become the definitive Australian work on finches and seed-eaters well into the next millennium. It is well planned, well researched, well written, well produced, and beautifully illustrated with over 270 color photos. It highly informative, "chock-full" of valuable information based on the author's personal experiences and, most important of all, it is easy to read.

In an effort to keep the retail selling price as low as possible the publishers (husband and wife team, Russell & Indra Kingston, viz, Indruss Productions) decided that the original 1994 book would be a soft cover. This was of concern to many Australian aviculturists because a book as thick and as heavy as the *Manual* requires a hard cover simply to prevent it from coming apart at the seams – especially if it is in constant use as an avicultural reference tool.

What then are the author's credentials? He has kept and bred finches and seed-eaters since 1956 when his (late) father gave him a pair each of Zebra Finches, Owl Finches, Red-browed Finches, and Spice Finches. Over the ensuing 40-plus years, Kingston has

kept and bred Budgerigars, canaries, finches, pigeons, quail, parakeets, lovebirds, pheasants, and waterfowl.

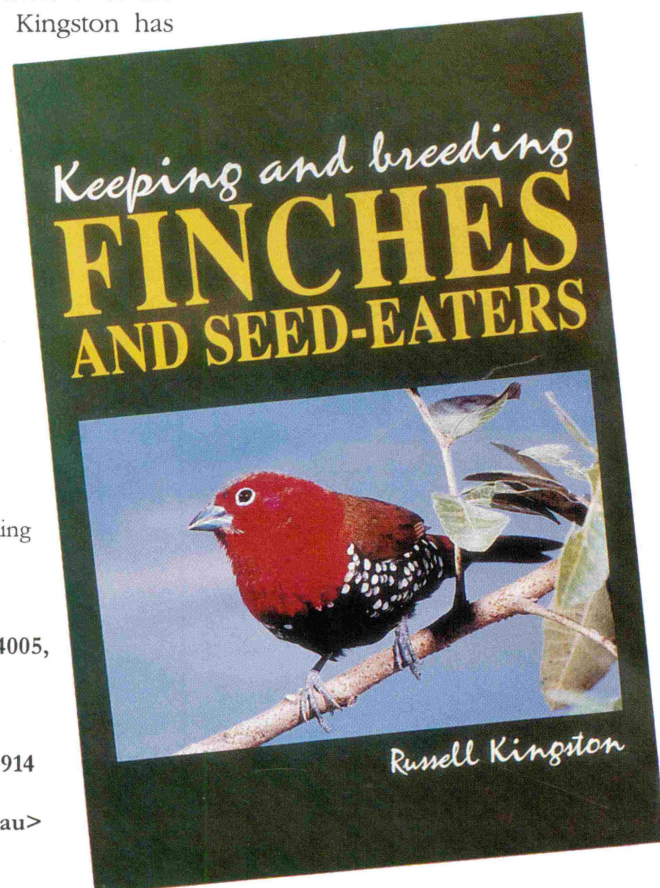
However, despite his wide-ranging experiences, his first love (read: obsession) has always been finches – both Australian grassfinches and non-Australian species. In 1987 he became co-owner and the hands-on manager of a large commercial bird-breeding farm at Caboolture, Queensland. He has since returned to being a hobbyist concentrating on breeding Australian and exotic finches and seed-eaters at his Brisbane home.

The 14 chapters cover and discuss an incredible range of topics including Preparation and Stock Acquisition, Housing, Husbandry, Breeding, Nutrition, Health, and Trouble Shooting. The birds featured in the text are grouped into five separate chapters in an interesting way, i.e. all subspecies and common (English) names are listed alphabetically which, according to the author is to "facilitate easy finding."

He comments, "As this is an avicultural publication, they [viz, species and subspecies] are not listed in scientific order. I have, however, grouped the

Readers interested in obtaining a copy should direct their enquiries regarding postage rates, etc., to:
Indruss Productions,
P.O. Box 30,
New Farm, Queensland 4005,
Australia

fax:
International+61 7 5498 9914
e-mail:
<indruss@bigpond.com.au>



birds into their various families, so as to alert the reader to their similarities and common heritage."

Whilst the purist may not agree with this system of grouping, its readers should be reminded that, as Kingston has clearly indicated, it is not a book aimed at the bird watcher or ornithologist. It is an avicultural textbook written by an aviculturist for the benefit of other bird breeders.

As a long-standing avicultural editor I was particularly impressed by the page layout featuring two columns to a page. This makes for easier referencing and reading and, together with the inclusion of an index of scientific names and English names, is one of the special features of this splendid publication.

Watchbird readers who haven't seen the original publication [viz, *Manual*] may be interested to learn that the author has included an additional 17 species in this edition compared with the 1994 version. Furthermore, on the odd occasion when he hasn't had personal experience with a particular species, he has published information on the birds concerned written by experienced aviculturists (e.g. Bamboo Parrotfinch – Mike Fidler, England; Paradise Whydah – Neville Brickell, South Africa). A special feature is the inclusion of a distribution map with each species which provides "the reader an approximation of the species location."


Although Russell Kingston is well known in his home country for the excellence of his color slides (and the lectures he gives) he had access to photographs taken by 11 other aviculturists to illustrate particular features of specific birds which weren't in his own extensive photographic library. For example, where three photographs were used to illustrate the Gouldian Finch in the "Manual," this time six are used – in addition to two photographs of a special Gouldian nest box, and one each of eggs and a nestling. Likewise, the three color pictures of the Masked Finch have increased to six.

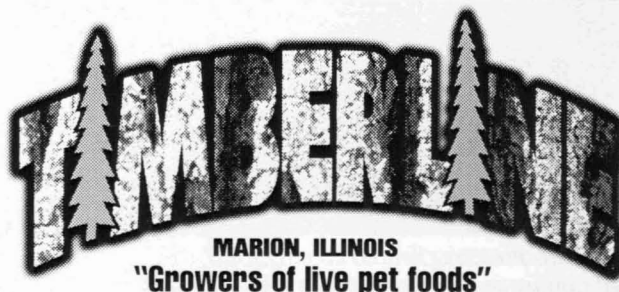
An important feature of this book is the inclusion of specific habitat photographs (e.g. Painted Finch and

spinifex grass; Orange-cheeked Waxbill and its general habitat in the wild) which add a special interest and value to the book. Such illustrative information can be useful when planning a planted aviary for a particular finch or seed-eater.

The Foreword by Neville Brickell, Director, Avicultural Research Unit, Natal, South Africa, gives the book an important international touch. After all, aviculture as we know it, is an internationally recognized and practiced activity. This superb book will greatly

enhance the knowledge and, hopefully, the breeding achievements of bird breeders wherever they live – either the Northern Hemisphere – or the Southern Hemisphere.

In complimenting Russell J. Kingston on this excellent publication I simply say, "It is such an informative and well produced avicultural publication, that it deserves to be owned (and read) by both novice and experienced aviculturist because it is, quite simply, a remarkable storehouse of avicultural knowledge." 



Nutritionally Complete Selection of Live Pet Foods for Birds

- **STANDARD MEALWORMS** Mini, Sm., Md., Lg. 
- **GIANT MEALWORMS**
- **SUPERWORMS** Sm., Md., Lg. 
- **WAX WORMS**
- **CRICKETS** 10 standard sizes. Custom sizes available 
- **OTHER WORMS & ACCESSORIES**

Enjoy the highest quality live pet foods from Timberline's state-of-the-art growing facilities. Featuring unmatched customer service with Timberline's extended business hours. And only Timberline offers Superworms in three sizes to accommodate all your needs.

GUARANTEED LIVE DELIVERY

Extended Customer Service Hours!

800-423-2248 • Fax (618) 997-4692 • www.timberlinefisheries.com