

# Blue-Faced Parrotfinch

*Erythrura trichroa*

by Leslie J. Kyle-Gillis, Madera, CA



Photo by Dale R. Gilkinson

*A Blue-faced Parrotfinch makes a wonderful aviary bird.*

his delightful winged jewel originates from New Guinea, Moluccas, Solomon Island and north-east Australia. It inhabits forest edges and grassland, cultivated areas and pastures and can be seen in small flocks of 30 or more birds and, at times, even larger numbers when there is a good feeding area.

The male is essentially a multi-shad-

ed (light yellow-green to dark blue-green) green finch with deep blue on the forehead and face. The tail is red to rusty red brown and the bill is black and stout. The male is about 5 inches in length (13 cm.).

The females are similar, but tend to have less of the vibrant blue on the face and appear slightly smaller and with a bit of a rounder head. The male

is very distinguishable by its singing of a trilling song. It was much easier to sex the wild caught birds than it is today's domestically bred birds. I am not certain what their diet lacks that causes some of the birds to fade and not have the vibrant blue of their wild counterparts.

## Housing

I prefer to see the birds housed in flights for many reasons. One of the most basic reasons is that they enjoy flying and they love to bathe (a lot!) and splash about. They also enjoy sun-bathing. When they are not flying, eating, or bathing, they become a bit more difficult to see in a planted flight, but I believe the rewards are happier and healthier birds.

I recommend that cage breeders let the birds go back together in a large flight pen during the non-breeding season. They can recondition themselves with good food, exercise, and lot of bathing.

In fact, you can leave this species in a flight to breed with no problem. I have included them in a mixed collection of finches (Lady Gouldians, Cordon Blues, Strawberries, Indian Silver Bills, and others) and they were peaceful and did well. The only aggression I noted was when the offspring were left more than three months with the parents and the male bird seemed to become aggressive to the young. Because of this, I highly recommend removing the young from the parents shortly after they are eating on their own (approximately 25 days after fledging). Doing this also encourages the parent to go back to nest.

Of course these birds can be bred in a cage. I know other breeders who have been successful at cage breeding, but again, I would encourage housing them in a large flight if at all possible.

## Feeding

In the wild they enjoy feeding on grass seeds and small insects as well as seed from the bamboo plants and wild figs, depending on where they are found in their broad range.

In captivity I feed them sprouted seeds, canary, millets, finch mixes, and very small meal worms are offered. An egg food mix was introduced to the

birds months prior to breeding season. In a mixed aviary, the Blue-faced Parrotfinches seemed to ignore the eggfood until they observed other finches eating it, after which I observed small amounts of egg food and eggshell being eaten by them while feeding their offspring. I also offered fruit flies cultured in a jar with wire mesh to keep the birds out of the rotting fruits peels.

### Breeding

My Blue-faced chose to breed in a tumbleweed which I suspended from the top of the aviary. It appeared they enjoyed building the nest with Bermuda grass and some of the coconut fiber I would set out as well. They also used small pieces of leaves. This nesting site made it more difficult for me to monitor their progress, but it seemed to please the birds and they did raise their offspring. The birds have also been known to breed successfully in small wicker baskets and in small wooden finch nest boxes. I provide all three nests types and let the birds choose.

These birds are really quite easy to breed and one pair can prove to be very prolific under the right circumstances. They lay between three to five eggs average, but some have laid as many as eight eggs. The average incubation time is between 14 and 16 days and the female does most of the incubation and brooding but the male was very active in feeding the nestlings. The young fledge around 21 days and continue to be fed by the parents for about 10 to 20 days.

### Conclusion

The only down side I found in them was they really were not very cold tolerant, but no more cold sensitive than the Gouldians. I am sure after properly acclimatizing them they will do fine. I am very cautious and during the cold winters (sometimes into the mid twenties) I will supply a 250-watt heating source for the birds' comfort and my peace of mind. I seldom have ever seen any bird perch next to it, but it did make me feel better to offer relief from the cold.

I encourage finch breeders to add this delightful little bird to their collection or, indeed, any of the other members of the *Erythrura* genus. 🐦

# A Truly "Rosie" Aviary

by Susie Christian, Morro Bay, CA

That's what it is like in Jeannette Duyn's corner of the world, *really Rosie* – except when it's Grey. She has been actively breeding birds in Templeton, California, since 1980 and started with cockatoos such as Moluccan and Leadbeater's, plus some Amazon parrots too. Through the years she has eliminated all other species and her focus is now entirely on Rose-breasted Cockatoos and African Grey Parrots.

### Innovative Aviaries

Privileged to visit this dazzling, bubbly redhead's domain, I saw many great ideas I'd never thought of before. The first great planning idea is that the aviaries all face a side of the house where they can be viewed at all times. If Duyn desires, she can walk out on a large deck for a closer look. Her nursery room is also on the aviary side of

the house so any time spent with the hatchlings, can also be spent observing what the pairs are "up to" in their outside cages.

Each enclosure is a work of art in itself, with much thought and care put into every aspect. All cages are 4 feet wide, 6 feet tall and 7 feet long with framing of 4 X 4s and metal pipe. Side panels are of 3/4 inch plywood and some of these panels are removable during the summer heat for increased air circulation. Wire for the aviaries is 1/2 X 3 inch, 12 gauge.

Perches are made of pine 2 X 4s. Double entry nests are used, with dimensions of 24 inches wide, 14 inches deep and 24 inches high. The nests are of wood with metal lining so the birds cannot chew their way out. The floors of the cages are sand which can be easily raked clean.

Aviary roofs are of PVC, rather than



Jeannette Duyn and her Rose-breasted buddy, "Rudy."

photo by Susie Christian