

The Cuban Finch

by Doug Hill
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Common Names: Cuban Grassquit, Melodious Grassquit.

Distribution: Cuba to the Isle of Pines and Jamaica.

Visual Sexing: The sexing of the Cuban finch is by visual means. The Cuban does not have an eclipse plumage. The cock has a black face and throat. The back is an olive green, starting on the top of the head and extending down to the rump and the tail is a darker olive than the rest of

him. The chest is black and blending to grey as it progresses toward the vent and tail coverts. The cock gets darker with age. The hen is similar to the cock with the colors much more subdued. The black is much paler and the grey much lighter.

Housing: Cubans are best kept in aviaries, whether they are small or large open types. It doesn't really matter. They do not do as well in cabinets. It is essential that they be protected from cold winds and draughts.

Compatibility: Pugilistic. Some individuals are very peaceful, and some extremely violent. I suppose it depends on the strain that you acquire. There are all sorts of stories of the cock Cuban killing all sorts of species. If you want to keep Cubans it is entirely up to you.

Breeding Season: These birds are said to be free breeders in Australia now, as they will readily go to nest if the aviary conditions are right, regardless of the time of year. Cuban pairs should not be separated, as they may



not go to nest again. Cubans can have up to six nests a year.

Nesting Receptacles: Cubans will readily breed in any type of receptacle, be it woven cane nest baskets, tins, and half-open nest boxes. Their favorite nesting site is in shrubbery attached to the walls of the aviary. They do not build a roosting nest. The nest is made up of just about anything they can find. I have had them use November grass, cotton wool, feathers, teased hessian, plant fibre, spider webs and shredded paper. I think they will use anything that is on hand. The nest is usually large and untidy.


Breeding Diet: A good diet of finch mix, seeding grasses, gentles and/or termites is all you need to breed these birds. Also needed is fresh clean water daily, as these birds like to bath frequently in hot weather. They are also fond of sprouted seed and milk thistle.

Austerity Diet: Just a good finch mix with plenty of grit and cuttlebone is all that is needed in the non-breeding season. To give them a treat once or twice a week you can give them some seedling grasses.

Eggs and Young: Two to four small spotted oval eggs are laid. Incubation is usually 14 days depending on the time of year. The young nearly always appear to come out of the nest prematurely. They are independent of their parents after a further four weeks and should be removed from the breeding aviary to a holding aviary at this time.

Common Ailments: Feather plucking may be found with some individuals. If your birds are prone to this conduct, it would be wise to replace the offending culprit. A good worming program is also very beneficial.

Life Expectancy: Cubans have a life expectancy of around seven to eight years.

General Comments: A delightful little bird with a delightful song. Given the right circumstances the Cuban is a joy to watch flitting around the aviary. 



This Issue

Please keep in mind that there are a number of zoogeographical areas in the world and when we "visit" any one of them, that location is by no means exhausted. We'll return in later issues and feature a whole new selection of birds.

This issue has a focus on Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, a region from which we have a number of birds in aviculture. Never mind political protocol, we will begin with the sweet singing Cuban Finch, long a prized avicultural gem. Read about the bird and, should you have a chance, listen to its melody. From Cuba, we visit Mexico and learn about the Mexican Parrotlet, the most northerly of all parrotlets and, surprisingly, one that inhabits a dry desert climate. There is a serious effort afoot to improve its status in aviculture.

Another parrot from the arid regions of northern Mexico is the Thick-billed Parrot we all know about but no longer hold in aviculture (except by permit). Aviculture provided some Thick-billed Parrots for a release program aimed at reestablishing them in the Arizona wilderness where they once resided – our only native parrot since the demise of the Carolina Parakeet. The release did not accomplish its goals but much was learned about releases that bode well for other birds and future releases.

South into Central America we run into the seldom seen Hoffmann's Conure and the remarkable story of its sojourn in aviculture beginning with just 36 birds imported into the U.S. in 1980. The small flock dwindled to 11 birds and eventually made a startling comeback. From 11 there are now about 600 Hoffmann's worldwide. Check page 14 to learn what happened.

We'll read of Central American Scarlet Macaws, and, for the first time in an American Magazine, see all three subspecies of the small White-fronted Amazon. We also get to accompany Joseph Forshaw on a parrot-watching trip in the Caribbean. Forshaw paints vivid verbal pictures that will make your heart beat faster. Some of the most beautiful amazon parrots are in the Caribbean.

Of course we include many features outside the zoogeographical region. One that will really capture your attention is the first-person recounting of the devastating hurricane Iniki that ripped the Hawaiian Islands. Learn the fate of an exotic bird farm. The photos will amaze you. And if you don't know what a "service bird" is, check page 31. You'll be delighted and surprised.

For you lovers of African parrots, there is a follow up article on the Brown-headed Parrot, and Ian Hinze continues his detailed treatise on the waxbills – this issue featuring "feeding" them. Those who attended the 2000 convention might have seen the talking finch named "Turkey." The rest of you can read about the adventures on page 43. Then we get to the fun photos. The convention was a real blast – I can't recall one that was more fun. Share in some of the frolic via a few photos with lots more to come in following issues. As usual, space has run out too soon. And don't forget to check-out the AFA store on the inside front cover.

Enjoy this issue of the AFA Watchbird.

Sheldon Dingle, Editor