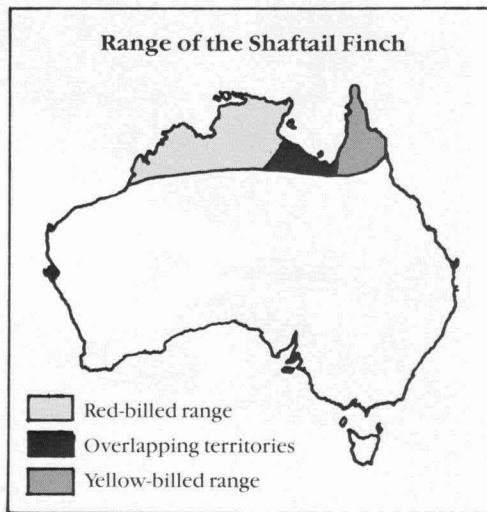


AUSTRALIAN FINCHES

The Shafttail or Longtail Grassfinch

(*Poephila acuticauda*)



by Jim Felix
Miami, Florida

The shafttail originates from the northeastern part of Australia where they come in two varieties, a yellow billed (*Poephila acuticauda*) and the red billed variety (*Poephila acuticauda beckii*).

A description of this bird is virtually unnecessary since it has become one of the best established finch species in captivity. One point the author would like to stress at the very beginning of this article is that crossbreeding the two sub-species should be avoided at all times.

The yellow-billed variety should have a yellow, not orange, beak and the overall coloring of its body does not show a reddish tint like in the red-billed variety.

The red-billed variety should have a very dark, deep red bill and a reddish tint in its feathering. In many countries in Europe an orange beak (light or dark) is penalized at shows and a bird showing such a beak never wins in competition no matter how good the bird is.

The yellow-billed variety lives in the most western part of north Australia while the red-billed variety is established in the northeastern part of Australia. Their territories do overlap in the wild and they do crossbreed in the wild, again this is a no-no in captivity.

Sexing

Sexual dimorphism is not present in these birds although certain characteristics can usually be attributed to the

different sexes.

a) The bib — the female usually has a smaller and narrower bib; the male usually a larger and especially at the base on its chest it is broader.

b) An overall more intense coloring of the male bird can be seen in both the red and yellow-billed variety. In the red-billed variety a darker reddish tone is visible in its feathering. Also the red-billed variety shows a darker grey skullcap in the male than in the female.

In the pure yellow-billed variety a more intense coloring in the feathering of the male is also visible, whereas the skullcap shows a dark, more brownish grey coloring. When you have interbred these different sub-species the above mentioned tones get mixed and therefore are not quite as distinguishable.

c) Longer tailfeathers are also usually characteristic of males.

d) The male is usually a more robust bird.

All of the above, however, are not absolutely sure ways to sex these birds. These are only indications to help you in choosing birds. The only sure way to sex these birds is the singing of the males. Not even two nesting birds are a sure sign since two males or two females will build nests and act like a mated pair.

Nesting

This bird is very well established and nests quite easily. It does well in aviaries

DISTRIBUTORS NEEDED Limited Offer!

Large International Company Needs Bird Oriented People to Handle Birds (livestock) and Full Line Pet Supply Business.

PROTECTED TERRITORY & ACCOUNTS

We need small business people that want to grow with us. We back you 100%. The following territories are available:

California	Minnesota	So. Louisiana
Oregon	Iowa	Oklahoma
Arizona	Mississippi	Texas
Nevada	Wisconsin	Florida
Idaho	Illinois	Missouri
Wyoming	Ohio	Michigan
Montana	Georgia	Kansas
Colorado	The Carolinas	
New Mexico	The Dakotas	
Virginia	New England Area	

For more details call I.C.C.
(516) 694-6478 ask for John or write:

I.C.C.
P.O. Box 4100
Farmingdale, NY 11735

If you love parrots ...
You'll love Parrot World!



Join us and receive a year's subscription to our fact-filled bi-monthly magazine. All about Parrots, Macaws, Cockatoo's, Conures and more. Expert tips on breeding, nutrition, taming training, health care, Q's & A's, classifieds. D.V.M. and bird-boarding referrals, shows, book reviews. DISCOUNT BOOK CLUB. annual photo contest. Much more. Only \$16 yearly (U.S. and Canada.) Foreign \$26. (U.S. funds only.)

National
Parrot Association

8 No. Hoffman, Dept. W, Hauppauge, N.Y. 11788

NOTICE TO
DISPLAY ADVERTISERS
Watchbird display ad rates will increase approximately 20% as of October 1, 1986.



Two shafttails — one showing the wild coloring, the other is a white or Ino shafttail.

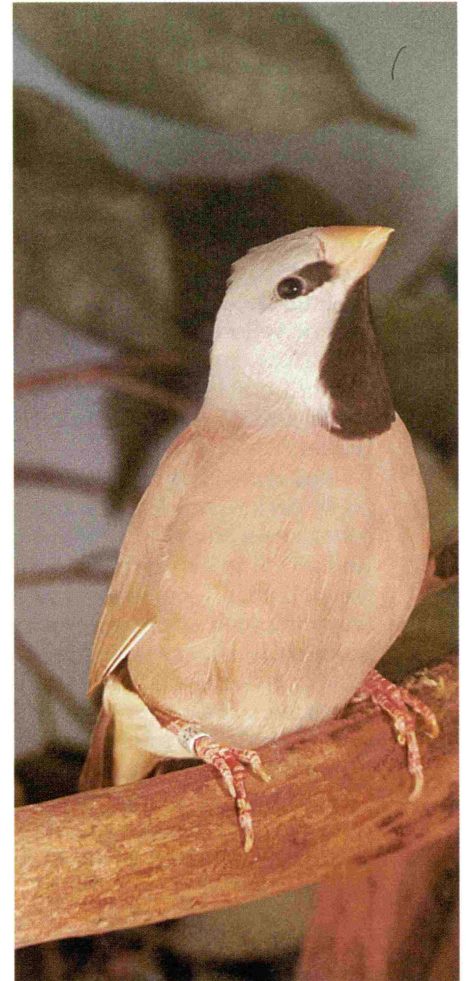


Fawn shafttail showing promising red beak.

Photos by H.J. de Vos, Utrecht, The Netherlands



Three shafttails — one brown, one color and one fawn.



One brown-white or bleak beaked shafttail.

and in breeding cages. Breeding cages, however, offer more controlled breeding environments. Shaftails take to all finch-type nestboxes and ample nesting material should be provided. A half open wooden finch-type nestbox seems to be preferred.

Their clutch usually consists of five to six eggs and the hatching takes 12 to 13 days. The young leave the nests at 21 to 22 days and are weaned by the parents two to three weeks after leaving the nest. Many breeders remove the nest box when the young leave the nest to insure that parents dedicate their complete attention to the young ones instead of going to nest shortly thereafter again.

The rearing of the young sometimes can bring problems. Parental instincts in shafttails, as in other Australian finches, leave much to be desired at times.

Ever since the export ban of Australia in 1960 these birds were mass produced in Europe and Japan under society finches.

This mass production has its pros and cons. The obvious pros are that because of this mass production these birds are now well-established, readily and inexpensively available to all. The cons are that the quality of these finches (size, red vs. yellow bill) against the quantity was neglected and, of course, parental instincts and behavior patterns were lost.

In Europe it is now very much in style with breeders to try to raise their finches in the most natural fashion. One way to bring natural parenting instincts back into these birds is to have them try to raise their own young. They usually let them try with society finch young and the first three or four clutches before they regain the desired behavior. However cruel it may sound, society finch babies are more expendable than shafttail babies.

Shaftails also seem to regain their parental instincts much faster if they are allowed to breed in aviaries and not breeding cages.

Because of the great numbers of shafttails that are bred in captivity some mutations were bound to surface. Some of these mutations are the following:

- 1) The Isabel of Fawn. A good, deep red beak is hard to find in this color variety. Make sure not to buy birds that have greyish overtones in their wings. Genetics: recessive.
- 2) The brown shafttail. Also called a dark fawn, comes in both red and yellow beak. Genetics: recessive.

- 3) The white or Ino shafttail. This latest mutation is quite beautiful. It is rumored to have originated out of a cross of a white parson (who was a true mutation) and a regular shafttail. Good red and yellow beaks are hard to find in this color variety. Make sure when you buy yours it has the two distinctive long tail feathers of a shafttail so that parson blood has been eliminated. Do not breed white on white birds, this will only result in many infertile eggs or very weak

young. Breed white against splits to ensure better fertility and better specimens. Genetics: sex-linked.

In captivity for the last couple of years or so we've also had another beak color. This is called the white or bleak beak. The beak is simply horn color. This type is bred a lot into yellow beaks (orange tinted) to produce better yellow beaks.

All in all a shafttail is a very nice and easily kept bird even for the beginning hobbyist. ●

BIRDS OF PARADISE



Birds of Paradise is a 25" x 28" print of sheer magnificence for any bird lover. Artist Mike Byergo is well known for emphasis on anatomical detail and accurate vibrant coloring. Many hours of research and careful attention to detail are spent before his subjects are actually painted.

SPECIAL LIMITED EDITION			
Only 700 signed and numbered prints are available on highly calendered 80 lb. fluorescent white lithography paper.		\$95.00	
UNLIMITED ARTIST'S STOCK			
Printed on a coated white artist's stock. Makes a perfect gift any time of the year.		\$12.95	
GREETING CARDS			
Same fine print on 4½" x 6" greeting cards with white envelopes.		\$1.25	

MIKE BYERGO PRINTS • ORDER FORM

QTY.	ITEM	COST	TOTALS
_____	limited editions	x \$95.00	_____
_____	artist's stock	x \$12.95	_____
	shipping & handling on posters only		\$3.00
_____	greeting cards min. order 6	x \$1.25	_____
	TOTAL		_____

name _____

address _____

city _____ st _____ zip _____

**PET STUFF • P.O. Box 427 • AF1
Bradley Beach • NJ • 07720 • 201-774-9400**