

first breeding of the Fischer's Touraco

(*Tauraco fischeri*)

by Sid Milne
Fallbrook, California

The distinctive characteristics of the Fischer's Touraco are its crimson, white-tipped crest and nape. It has a red mandible and its back, rump and tail feathers are a glossy blue-green in color. The underparts are a straight bluegreen and the flight feathers are a beautiful crimson-red. The sexes are alike in coloration and size so these birds must be surgically sexed or feather sexed to guarantee that one has a true pair.

The range of the Fischer's Touraco is from Somalia, Kenya and Tansania. It is also a resident on the Island of Zanzibar. They have been known to live from sea level to as high as 5,000 feet. These birds are quite rare in American aviculture.

My first encounter with this family



Photos by Sid Milne

Young touracos are covered with sooty grey and black down feathers. This young Fischer's Touraco is approximately one week of age.



Juvenile Fischer's Touracos show similar plumage as the adults except that it is much duller. They develop very rapidly after hatching, taking approximately four weeks until weaning. These babies are seven weeks old.



The Fischer's Touraco is one of the uncommon touracos found in captivity. It is noted for its crimson crest and nape.

of birds was with the Red-crested Touraco (*Tauraco erythrolophus*) several years ago. After setting them up in a breeding situation, they produced several young. After breeding the Red-crested Touraco, which is quite common in captivity, I decided to try to reproduce the rare Fischer's Touraco. When a few wild-caught birds were imported, I acquired a pair. When looking through several books to acquire more knowledge on this species, I found that this species had not been bred before. When the Fischer's Touracos were in my collection for two years, they laid two eggs which, much to my delight, were fertile.

The diet of the parent birds consisted of grapes, papaya, canteloupe and other melons, ripe Mexican bananas, apples and Science Diet dog maintenance pellets. Calcium and a good vitamin supplement was placed over most of their favorite fruit.

These birds were housed by themselves in an aviary 8 feet wide, 8 feet high and 16 feet long with a shelter measuring 4 feet. The nest was placed in one of the corners underneath the shelter. It measured 12 inches square by 6 inches deep. Twigs and grasses were placed within this shallow box to help stimulate them to breed. The pair completed the nest by adding more twigs and laid their first egg on the 31st of March, 1991. They laid a second egg two days later to complete their clutch. After five days into incubation, the parents abandoned the eggs. The eggs were then removed and placed into an artificial incubator. After a total incubation period of 23 days, the first egg hatched on April 23, 1991. The second egg hatched one day later. They were both successfully reared.

The diet of the chicks consisted of grapes, papaya, canteloupe and small pieces of soaked dog food. They were also given calcium and a good vitamin supplement.

The chicks were very delightful to hand raise. When hatched, they were covered with black down feathers and their eyes were open. It took from three to four weeks for them to be weaned. The Fischer's Touraco is a very quiet and enjoyable bird to have in the aviary.

Editor's note: If any person knows of a successful breeding of the Fischer's Touraco prior to the above article, please inform Dale R. Thompson, Chairman, Avy Awards Committee, through the AFA Home Office in Phoenix, Arizona. ●

Observations of Sunbirds in Aviculture

by Dennis Riphenburg
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Sunbirds, I feel, are certainly the jewels of the bird world. Not many birds can match the curious and friendly personality, iridescent colors, intriguing behavior, incredible courtship displays and beautiful songs that many sunbirds possess. I have kept birds for more than 29 years. During the past three years I have experienced keeping sunbirds and only wish I would have worked with them much earlier. They are indeed a challenge to breed, however, I feel they are certainly a very worthwhile venture. Unfortunately not a lot of information is readily available on this fascinating family *Nectariniidae*. I have been successful in keeping these birds in what appears to be very good health and have even had nest building activity by several species. Hopefully the information in this article will add to information already available and/or spark an interest in the large family of sunbirds.

All sunbirds are native to the Old World. They range from Africa (where most species are found) to Australia (where only one species is found). When people see my sunbirds and ask what they are, I tell them they are the Old World version of hummingbirds, even though no formal relationship exists between them. All sunbirds are dimorphic, with most females being rather somber and cryptic in coloration. Males of some species go into an eclipse plumage during the spring and summer months. I have had experience with ten different species, eight from Africa and two from southeast Asia. I have truly found these birds extremely delightful and perhaps my favorite of not only softbills I have worked with but all birds I have worked with throughout the years.

Housing

My preference for housing all birds is in large, outside aviaries. However, many of us, including myself, do not have either the luxury of the space and/or the climatic conditions to house birds outside. I keep my birds in a modified green house in cages

measuring 48 inches x 18 inches x 18 inches. Each of the cages contains natural perches and various types of live plants. The upper cages, which receive most of the light and heat, are planted with *tillandsias* and *bromeliads* mounted on various types of wood or in pots. Small ficus plants and Spanish Moss poke through the top wire in various places. In the lower cages I use various types of ferns, philodendrons, bromeliads and a few orchids. I use Spanish Moss in these lower cages as well. It is my opinion the live plants give the birds a feeling of security instead of living in stark, empty cages. The plants also provide potential nesting sites other than boxes, baskets, etc., as well as provide a place to escape if males tend to be overly aggressive. The plants are placed away from the perches to avoid being soiled. They are misted periodically and I find the sunbirds thoroughly enjoy this time since sunbirds prefer to leaf bathe instead of bathing in a pool of water on the floor or ground.

Diet

The basic diet I give to all of my sunbirds is soaked Zu-preem monkey biscuits, Avico Sunbird Nectar, various diced soft fruits, kernels of corn, green peas, shredded spinach or lettuce, mealworms, wax worms and small fly larvae (*Musca domestica larvae*). As far as fruits, I offer pears, bananas, kiwi, oranges, etc., to the sunbirds since their bills are not strong enough to soften apples and other harder fruits. I sprinkle vitamins and minerals over the biscuits, fruit and vegetables. Also, I disinfect the feeding tubes and dishes every day. There are several good products on the market, including good old bleach and water. I happen to use Nolvasan and am very happy with it.

It is not my intent to recommend one commercial product over the other, however I prefer Avico Sunbird Nectar for the sunbirds. Any sunbird which has yellow and/or red feathering will quickly fade in captivity (like many other birds) unless the proper diet is provided. I found using Avico both restores and maintains the yellows and reds in the plumage. It is essential that a constant supply of nectar be provided, similar to hummingbirds, otherwise their health will quickly deteriorate and the birds will die. As far as the soaked Zu-preem, I prefer to soak it in water instead of nectar. I have found the birds tend to eat more of it soaked in