

Parrot finches (*Erythrura*) come from Asia, Indonesia and Australia. This group of beautiful birds is known for the rich plumage colors of parrot green, blue and red. Several mutations have occurred through captive breeding.

Parrot Finches in American Aviculture

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Although there are 11 recognized species of parrot finches, only six occur in aviculture within the U.S. Of these, the most common and easily bred are the Red-headed (*Erythrura psittacea*) and the Blue-faced (*Erythrura trichroa*). Due to its common name of Tricolor Parrot Finch, the latter is often confused with the true tricolor, or Blue-breasted, Parrot Finch (*Erythrura tricolor*). This bird does not now occur in the United States and has only very rarely, if



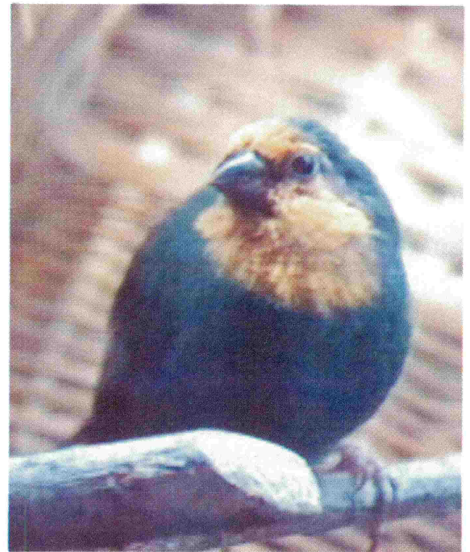
Normal Pintailed Nonpareil

ever, occurred here in the past. Although this bird does exist in Holland and now in Great Britain, its extreme rarity and high price (at least \$3000 per pair in Europe) puts it out of reach of most aviculturists, except for the most affluent who might be lucky enough to locate someone willing to part with them. This bird differs from the *trichroa* in that it is much smaller and the blue on the breast is very extensive, looking somewhat like a dark Cordon Bleu from the front. Only from the sides and back are the green wings and red tail visible.

The Red-headed Parrot Finch is perhaps the most popular parrot finch in the U.S. With its red head and tail, and green body, it is a very attractive bird. There are several mutations of this bird. One of these is a pied form in which the green is interspersed with yellow and the red tail with pink. Some individuals are quite striking. The sea-green form, or blue Red-head, is one in which the normal green areas are of a sea-green hue and the red of the head and tail replaced by an orange color. A pied sea-green is slowly starting to become established, and heavily pied birds are quite lovely. The yellow is much

paler than in the normal pied, almost cream color, and this, in combination with the sea-green feathers and pale orange head, make a pleasing appearance. Occasionally, normal Red-heads do occur with yellow heads, but we have yet to observe these birds and cannot comment on them.

The Blue-faced Parrot Finch is also not without its share of mutations. Perhaps the best known and most striking is the lutino Blue-faced Parrot Finch. This canary-like bird is quickly becoming established, for with its white head, yellow body, and pink tail, it is obviously a desirable bird. One drawback of this bird is its lack of eye-color pigment, creating a bird with red eyes which are very light-sensitive, necessitating lower light levels to improve its comfort and visual acuity. Another problem, which apparently was first noticed in Europe, is that in-breeding has pro-



Seagreen Redhead

duced birds with wing problems causing difficulty in flying. A pied form of the Blue-faced also occurs in Europe. However, our attempts to import some of these birds have proven unsuccessful. We therefore cannot verify this mutation within the U.S. A blue form of the Blue-faced is also cropping up, in which the

Photos by Carol Anne Calvin and Stash Buckley



Peales Parrot Finch



Bamboo Parrot Finch



Yellow-bellied Pintailed Nonpareil



Normal Redhead pair



Mindanao Parrot Finch



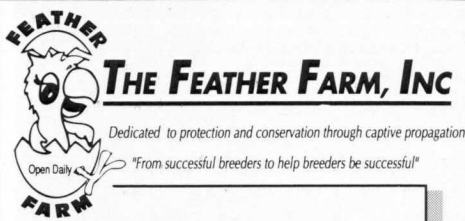
Pied Redhead



Lutino Blue-faced Parrot Finch



Pied Seagreen Redhead

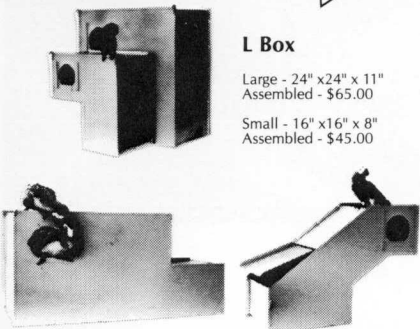


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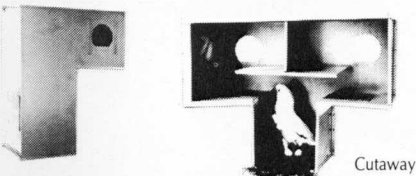
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green is replaced with a brilliant turquoise-blue. This mutation seems to be more prevalent on the west coast of the U.S. than on the east. A sea-green mutation of the Blue-faced is available in Great Britain and, perhaps, is the same as the blue form which is occurring now in the U.S.

Both the Red-heads and Blue-faced are very easily bred. We have had great success with single pairs in flights three feet long by two feet wide by two feet high.

The Pintailed Nonpareil Parrot Finch (*Erythrura prasina*), although a relatively common bird now due to a large number of imports, is in danger of disappearing from American aviculture due to the scarcity of people breeding this bird and the import bans now being imposed by the airlines. Although mutations do exist, once again their establishment is doubtful due to a shortage of individuals. The yellow-bellied form is one in which the red of the breast and belly and tail is replaced by yellow. This is a naturally occurring mutation, appearing in eight percent of the population. Most of these birds appear in the southern part of its range. We have one of these birds which appears to be a hen, in which the body appears blue. This is not due to a solid block of color, but rather a generous sprinkling of blue feathers throughout the entire bird. A pied form is also reputed to exist in Australia. Although having the reputation of being a difficult bird to breed, we have had great success breeding these birds in a colony situation. Our birds have the free run of our basement birdroom, which is approximately 12 x 24 feet and heavily planted with palms, weeping figs, and banana trees. We believe this is not an insectivorous species, however parents will feed their chicks with eggfood, which they greatly relish.

The Bamboo Parrot Finch (*Erythrura hyperythra*) shares the same fate as the Pintailed Nonpareil. Although easier to breed than the Pintailed, there is a definite scarcity of breeders working with this bird. In the way of mutations, a few pied specimens were known to occur, and some individual blue-bodied were observed on the west coast. We would also recommend breeding this bird in a colony situation in a large, planted aviary. Although our Bamboos raised their own young in such an environment, they seemed a lot

less steady than the Pintailed, and were much more easily distracted.

The Peales Parrot Finch (*Erythrura pealii*) is extremely rare in American aviculture. No mutations are known to occur, except for a blue specimen which occurred in Holland. This is a very attractive bird, and some cocks exhibit a large amount of blue on the breast, making them quite striking. This shade of blue is quite similar to the blue found on the normal Gouldian Finch. We have tried breeding this bird in a colony situation with only limited success. However, when we changed to one pair per three-foot flight, the results were quite dramatic. As with other rare birds, fertility seems to be a problem with only 50 percent of the eggs proving fertile. All our Peales are from European stock and what is definitely needed, we feel, is new, wild-caught blood.

The Mindanao Parrot Finch (*Erythrura coloria*) is the rarest of the parrot finches presently found in American aviculture. No mutations are known to occur. This is the smallest of the parrot finches, quite similar to the Blue-faced, but with a red-orange crescent behind the ears. This species has a great personality and is, we believe, the friendliest of the parrot finches. Although easily bred, once again the problem is fertility. Although several expeditions have been mounted to bring these birds out from their limited range — one mountain on one island in the Philippines — they have failed to locate individuals. Without new blood, the future of this finch in aviculture is bleak. Although we have had many eggs, all have proved infertile. We know of no successful breeding in this country.

As with other species of finches, the problem with the parrot finches is quite representative. We must place more emphasis on breeding and less on acquiring new stocks. As importation is now winding down, we must put ourselves in the position where we are breeding birds for trading with Europe, rather than always taking birds out, only to have them disappear in the excuses of American aviculture. They may have been doing it longer, but there is no excuse for us not to be doing it better. We must stop making constant withdrawals and start making substantial contributions to breeding stocks in this country and abroad if American aviculture and the precious birds it represents are to survive. ●