



Written & Photographed
by Harry Bryant

Raising the Brown Twinspot

Clytospiza monteiri

The Brown Twinspot (also known as “Monteiro’s Twinspot”) is uncommon in the US and is seldom available to aviculturists, so I jumped at the chance to own some when they appeared on an importer’s list several years ago. At that time, I immediately purchased three pair (later purchasing the rest of the dealer’s stock), which were then released into separate 6’ x 4’ x 6 high indoor flights that had been heavily planted.

DESCRIPTION

The Twinspots are a group of medium to large sized waxbills who take their name from the ‘paired’ white spots, one on either side of the shaft of the feather, on the sides of the lower breast and flanks: sometimes also elsewhere. 1 Currently they are distributed among four genera. The genus *Hypargos* contains the Peters Twinspot and the Rosy Twinspot; the genus *Euchistospiza* consists of the Dusky Twinspot and the Dybowski’s Twinspot, the genus *Mandingoa* includes the Green Twinspot while the genus *Clytospiza* consists of the Brown Twinspot.



A pair of Brown Twinspots.



Male Brown Twinspot. Notice the red throat which is white in the female.



Female Brown Twinspot. Notice the paler underparts than seen in the male.

Brown Twinspots are 13cm (5") in length and are found in the grassland scrub country over much of Africa, south of the Sahara.

Male: Entire head slate-grey; nape, mantle, back and wings are dark brown, rump and upper tail coverts are a reddish orange; the tail is blackish brown; sides of the neck are slate-grey; chin and throat are red, the breast, belly and rest of underparts are chestnut-brown, spotted and barred with white. The legs and feet are brown. The long bill in both sexes is a greyish blue-black.

Female: Same as male except for a white throat, underparts are slightly paler.

Juvenile: Young that have just left the nest lack the throat coloring, and are more subdued in color. The white spots start appearing about ten days after leaving the nest.

Nestlings: Have dark skin and pale down. Their mouth markings consist of five black spots on the yellow palate, a black band, narrowing centrally across the flesh colored tongue and a black crescent inside the lower mandible.¹ The yellow and white gape flanges (with a black spot inside of the gape) are very evident, especially when the chicks first leave the nest.

CALLS, COURTSHIP AND MATING

The 'close' contact call has been described by Goodwin¹ as a repeated "vay-vay-vay..." which is



A clutch of Brown Twinspot eggs



Brown Twinspot nestlings at 7 days ...



and again at 10 days

intensified and uttered in a longer series as a 'distant' contact call. They also will utter a rather 'hoarse' guttural call of "tic" or "tec" while hidden in the brush. Recently fledged young will also cry out with a loud "Eck-Eck-Eck", which is probably a contact call to let their parents know where they are.

Courtship has been described by Goodwin¹ as being similar to that of the Peters' Twinspot, except the movements are jerkier and less graceful.

In the wild, they have been reported to use the nests of other birds, as well as building a domed, loosely built grass nest which is often found in the forks of trees. ² In captivity they will use a large bamboo finch basket, either on the floor of the cage or at various heights in the corners. Mine seem to alternate between a basket on the floor and one in the upper left hand corner of the cage.

A normal clutch is 3 to 5 white eggs. Incubation period is 12 to 13 days. Incubation is shared by both the cock and hen. The parent birds cease to brood the chicks when they are approximately ten days old, especially if the weather is warm at the time or they are housed in a warm bird room. The young fledge at about 21 days. Young in captivity return to the nest to roost for some nights after fledging.

FOOD AND FEEDING HABITS

The Brown Twinspot feeds mostly on the ground, where it moves along in quick hops eating grass seeds, termites and spiders.

My birds always have access to a bowl of standard finch mix and a small dish of Birdcare's "Feast Insectivore" and a bowl of clean water. Every day they are given about twenty to thirty small mealworms and when available, are also given small or "mini" crickets.

When rearing young, they receive the same food, as well as almost unlimited whiteworms which they love.

AVIARY NOTES

My Brown Twinspots were originally set up in indoor flights. Living in northern Ohio, my birds are kept indoors, in a basement bird room. My flights range from 3' x 6' x 6' high to 6' x 14' x 6' high. All of the flights have a 4' fluorescent shop light that are on fourteen hours a day. Temperatures in the bird room

Examples of Brown Twinspot nests...



Basket nest



Ground nest

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Roosting nest

range from 68° F at night to 78° F during the day. I set them up 1 pair to a flight, and included plants and artificial foliage in their flights. I use corncob bedding on the floor of the flight. Various size tree branches are provided as perches, and I often add a few large marsh reeds, bull-rushes or cattails to one side of the flight for the birds to investigate and/or hide in. An assortment of standard wood nest boxes and large bamboo finch baskets are provided at different heights, and they will use both.

After almost a year, there was no breeding success and I hardly saw the birds, as they would remain hidden in the foliage or grass whenever I was in the bird room. I decided to try something new, and moved them to wooden box cages measuring 3' wide x 3' high x 5' long. I placed a couple of pieces of artificial foliage in them, as well as an assortment of standard wood nest boxes and large bamboo finch baskets in the breeding cages. Within three weeks, one of the pair had laid eggs and was incubating in one of the nest baskets.

They tend to use coconut fibers, soft grasses to build their nest, lining it with a few feathers and then a white cotton & hair mix which I obtain from Orchid Tree Exotics (<http://www.orchidtreeexotics.net>).

They are usually good parents, and a typical clutch will consist of three to five eggs, and incubation is 13 to 16 days. They will leave the nest about 3 weeks later, and the parents will continue to feed them for another three weeks. Adult plumage is obtained three to six months later. I leave the babies in with the parents for a month before removing them. The

parents don't bother them, but I like to get them out of the breeding flight so it's not so crowded.

SPECIAL NOTES

I have noticed that they tend seem to be somewhat prone to overgrowth of the mandibles, which I trim as needed (about every three months). I will have young birds available to experienced finch breeders only this fall. Hopefully within a year or two we can get this species established in the U.S.

REFERENCES:

- 1 Goodwin, Derek, *Estrildid Finches of the World*, 1982, Cornell University Press (ISBN-0-8014-1433-4))
- 2 Avicultural Research Unit, *African Finches in Field & Aviary – A Guide to a Mixed Collection*, 1997, African Bird Book Publishing (ISBN 0 620 21438 4)
- 3 Robin L. Restall, *Finches and Other Seed-eating Birds*, 1975 – Faber and Faber (ISBN 0 571 10353 7)

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