

The Blue-breasted Parrot Finch

(*Erythrura tricolor*)

by Stash Buckley and Carol Anne Calvin
Magnolia, New Jersey

The Blue-breasted Parrot Finch, also known as the Forbes, Timor, or Tenimber Parrot Finch, is the smallest species of parrot finch and, in our estimation, the most beautiful. We think it is even more handsome than the Royal Parrot Finch (*Erythrura cyanovirens*), at least the seed-eating group which resembles a sea-green Peale's Parrot Finch (*Erythrura pealii*) with a rather large beak. In fact, it is the "in" finch in Europe right now, although this status is currently being challenged by the Purple-crowned Finch (*Rhodospingus purpureus*), a rare type of *Rhodospingus* from South America.

It is also among the most costly. The average price of this bird world-wide is \$1500 per pair, although birds have been known to sell for as high as \$2000 per pair. One importer has sold them for as low as \$600 per pair, a ridiculously low price for so rare a bird.

Wild-caughts sell for more than domestics, due to the rarity of these birds. The Indonesian government allows the release of approximately 40 birds per year. These are eagerly sought after by serious breeders world-wide who rarely sell the wild-caughts but release only the domestics.

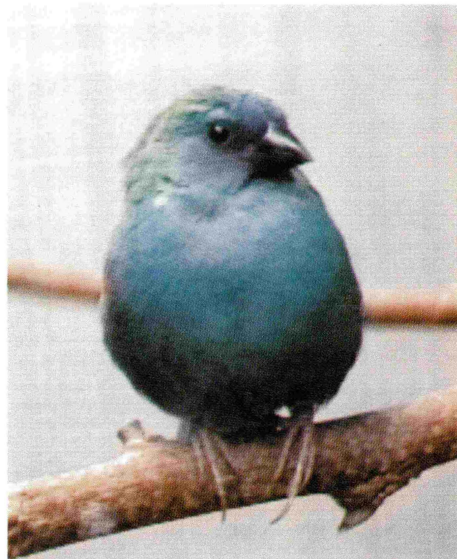
These birds were first imported into this country in the summer of 1992, when we imported some domestics from Holland. Since then, other domestics have been imported, along with three confirmed shipments of wild-caughts: two by Richard Schmidt — the first consisting of 10 birds and the second of 20, and one by Ed Hernandez, consisting of 10 birds.

One of our reasons for writing this article is the concern we have that outcrosses are being imported, reportedly originating from Denmark and Belgium. Although we have not seen these birds, we hear that they look like the pure bird, but are about the size of

a Blue-faced Parrot Finch (*Erythrura trichroa*). As we have mentioned before, the Blue-breasted Parrot Finches are tiny birds, only about two thirds the size of a Blue-faced, even



This male Blue-breasted Parrot Finch vividly shows the blue breast feathers for which it is named. This is the smallest species of parrot finch and is one of the most beautiful.



The hen Blue-breasted Parrot Finch also shows the blue breast but not the intense colors of the male.

smaller than the Mindanao, or Mount Katanglad, Parrot Finch (*Erythrura coloria*). It is our concern that unscrupulous dealers and importers will be dumping these birds on a naive American market. This has happened before with the Mindanao Parrot Finch and may also be happening with the Peale's Parrot Finch which, although we have not observed personally, reportedly are smaller and paler than they should be. The pure-blood Peale's is quite a large bird, causing us to believe that it is being out-crossed to its smaller relative, the Red-headed Parrot Finch (*Erythrura psittacea*), producing a smaller, washed-out looking bird. Likewise, the Blue-breasted, we believe, is being out-crossed to the Blue-faced Parrot Finch, producing a larger bird, but one still recognizable as a Blue-breasted.

The Blue-breasted Parrot Finch is extremely hardy and, in fact, may be almost as tough as the Peale's Parrot Finch, the sturdiest of the parrot finches with which we have worked so far. In the wild, these birds occur on the Indonesian islands of Timor and Tenimber and are trapped in small groups along the borders of bushes. It appears, due to the rapid destruction of their habitat, that it won't be long until the collection of this species reaches a critical point. It is for this reason that serious attempts should be made to breed this bird and allow no individuals to fall into the hands of "unproductive" collectors.

The keeping and breeding of this bird will be a departure from the more familiar parrot finch species. This bird should not be fed mainly seed, as with the others, but should be supplemented heavily with fresh fruits and vegetables, namely apples, oranges, cucumbers, and romaine lettuce. Although a small bird, it is not a sluggish one like the more familiar Red-headed and Blue-faced Parrot Finches. The Blue-breasted are fast, acrobatic fliers, reminiscent of the Pintailed Parrot Finch, and for this reason should not be kept in small cages, but in as large an area as the keeper can permit. Also, if forced to eat primarily a seed diet, these birds will get fat, especially the cocks. Obesity in cocks appears to be the number one cause of infertility in this species. This point we cannot stress strongly enough. European breeders inform us that the birds need the opportunity for vertical

Photos by Carol Anne Calvin and Stash Buckley



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flight, which strengthens the muscles required for successful breeding.

Although we offer our birds a variety of nesting sites, they seem to choose the most open and accessible spots. One pair even chose to nest in their mealworm dish. Richard Schmidt informs us that he observed his pairs feeding each other, which would make the Blue-breasted the second estrildid finch known to do so, along with the Peale's Parrot Finch. He also saw his birds chewing at the wooden aviary framework, a behavior we can't explain. Nesting material used seems to be typical for captive estrildids — strands of dried grass and burlap. A well-known Dutch breeder tells us that a nice clutch size is about five. However, our birds average two or three, which we attribute to the obesity of the birds. Our birds like to nest high, using closed wicker baskets and free-standing structures built in greenery. The egg size is very large for a finch this small. We would also recommend supplements of Neo-Calglucon (calcium gluconate) to the drinking water, for egg-binding appears to be a problem with younger birds.

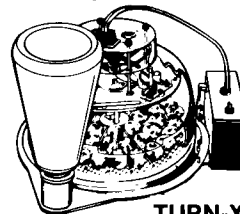
We have tried community breeding which works well for such parrot finches as the Pintails (*Erythrura prasina*) and Bamboos (*Erythrura hyperythra*), but have gotten better results with single pairs, by themselves, in a large flight, four feet long by two feet wide by three feet high. Apparently this is how they breed them in Holland: cage-bred in single pairs, chicks fostered to Society Finches, pairs then released into a large outdoor flight for a rest period and exercise for slimming down.

The Blue-breasted Parrot Finch is a very active, nervous bird requiring rather specialized care. It is also breathtakingly beautiful and fascinating to watch — well deserving of serious study by experienced breeders who are willing to keep accurate breeding records. There are very well-respected breeders in Germany, Holland, and the United Kingdom who keep track of where each wild-caught shipment goes so as to attempt to keep bloodlines pure.

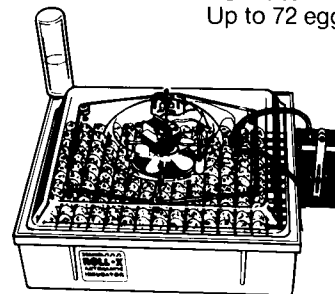
The beautiful Blue-breasted Parrot Finch is most certainly a bird which is well worth the effort and will, we sincerely hope, be a part of aviculture for many years to come. ●

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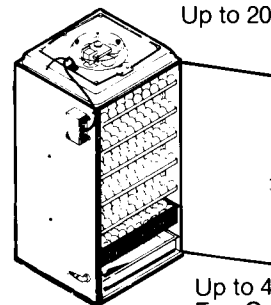
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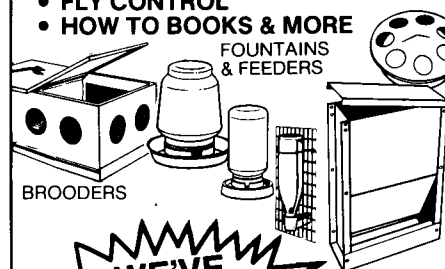
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