

Species Profile: Orange-breasted Bunting

(*Passerina lechlancheri*)

by Jack Clinton-Eitniear
San Antonio, Texas

Despite significant importation, principally during the '60s and '70s, few neotropical softbills have been established in United States avicultural collections. Normal market incentives have not motivated aviculturists to work with these birds. The classic statement being "these are birds that you have to invest \$500 and sell them for \$250!" The only exception to this might be the various toucans and toucanets. Nevertheless, a glance at the plates in Bates and Busenbark's *Finches and Softbilled Birds* will give you some insight as to what *was* available to aviculturists. The plates show numerous cotingas, tanagers and trogons no longer found in captive collections.

While aviculture may have lost the Cuban Trogon, it still has a glimmer of hope with various other species including the Orange-breasted Bunting (*Passerina lechlancheri*). Once imported from its native Mexico, the United States captive population seems to be reduced to only a few pairs mainly in zoos.

As with many species, it is the male that "sports" an attractive plumage. It has been suggested that during the '60s when it was being imported, principally males were available as the females are rather drab in coloration, thus commanded a lower price. Certainly the male with its azure-blue and yellow body highlighted with a green crown and orange breast is a very striking bird.

Inhabiting southern Mexico, principally from Jalisco south to western Chiapas, the bird is generally unknown to science with the nest and eggs yet to be discovered and described. Its range partially overlaps with an "endangered" relative's, the Rosita's or Rose-bellied Bunting (*P. rositae*). The Rosita's Bunting's eggs and nest have been described being a "compact assortment of black fibrilous rhizomes and leaves of bamboo grass with an inner lining of fine brown plant fibers." The eggs are "bluish white with blotches of browns and blacks."

While I can find no record of the

Orange-breasted Bunting having bred in captivity, despite Bates and Busenbark insinuating that it has, mention is made of Rosita's. It would appear that the late William Scheffler maintained two pairs of the Rose-bellied Bunting in his Los Angeles aviary. The birds nested in April in strawberry boxes suspended ten feet above the aviary floor. Unfortunately, due to disturbance of other foreign finches, they were unable to rear any young. William H. Timmis reported in the *Avicultural Magazine* breeding the Red-headed Bunting (*Emberiza bruniceps*) at the Chester Zoo in 1971. He maintained the birds in an aviary 49 feet long x 10 feet wide and 5 feet high with a shed at one end. The birds nested in a dense clump of honeysuckle. The nest was composed of dead leaves and grass being lined with hair and fine grasses. Incubation was done by the female alone and lasted 14 days. The young were fed soaked seeds and a variety of insects (maggots, mealworms, caterpillars, etc.). The fledging period lasted 14

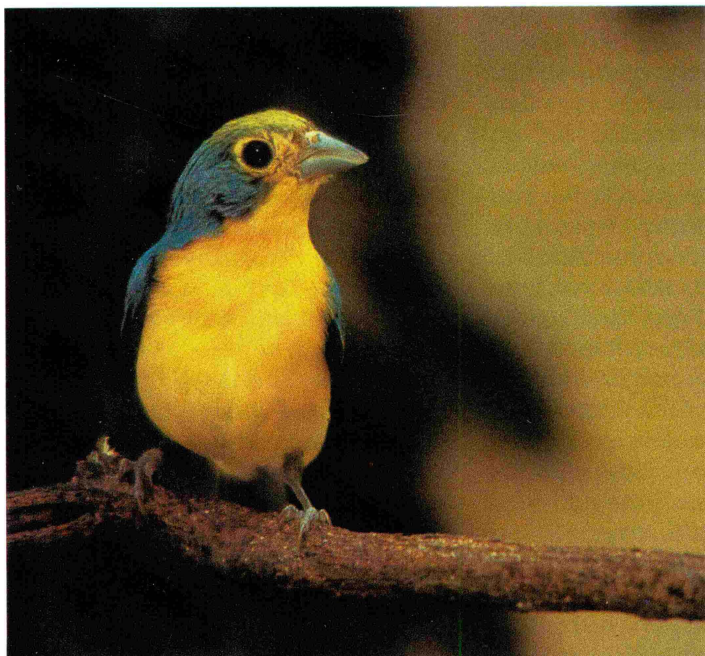
Second Translocation of Seven Ultramarine Lorries

by Alan Lieberman and Cynthia Kuehler • San Diego, California

Continuing the program which focuses on the conservation of Polynesian lorries, the Delegation of the Environment for French Polynesia and the Zoological Society of San Diego, successfully translocated a second group of seven Ultramarine Lorries (*Vini ultramarina*). Birds were captured on the Marquesan island of Ua Huka and translocated to the neighboring island of Fatu Hiva on 24 November, 1993. The Ultramarine Lorry is found only on Ua Huka, where it is threatened by human activities. The first group of seven Ultramarine Lorries was translocated in August 1992. Three individuals from this first group were seen on the most recent visit to Fatu Hiva. Local residents of the village of Omoa confirm that a flock of five birds is often seen. Future visits to Fatu Hiva will confirm the status of this translocated population. ●



Photo by Alan Lieberman



Male Orange-breasted Bunting at Sedwick County Zoo and Botanical Garden.



Female Orange-breasted Bunting.

days after which the two chicks perched near the nest. Mr. Timmis also bred the Yellow-breasted Bunting (*E. aureola*). Breeding information did not vary significantly from the previously mentioned Red-headed Bunting. Another *Emberiza* bunting breeding worth mentioning was that of the Ortolan Bunting (*E. hortulana*) by John Dowling. Mr. Dowling bred this species in an aviary measuring 10 feet long x 4 feet wide x 6 feet high, again with honeysuckle and bushes to provide cover. Surprisingly, the nest was built on the ground, out of grasses. Being fed a diet of soaked seeds, maggots and small mealworms, one bird fledged (three eggs were laid and two hatched). These being European records, I would be remiss if I failed to note the 1987 AFA First Breeding Award given to Gretchen Barker upon breeding the Gold-breasted Rock Bunting (*E. flaviventris*).

Whether the New World *Passerina* bunting's captive requirements differ greatly from the Old World *Emberiza* is not known. As with all softbills, one should consider the natural conditions under which the species exists in aviary and husbandry matters.

I am hopeful that a first breeding for the Orange-breasted Bunting will occur (if it already has not) within the next few years. Such an activity is needed if neotropical buntings are to remain in U.S. aviculture and not join the Cuban Trogon as a species that was....

Literature Consulted

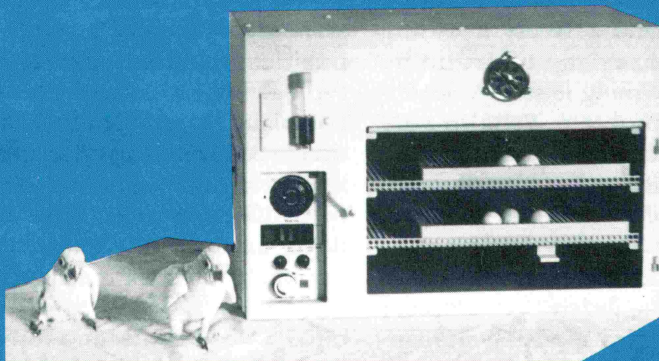
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