

Review

by Stash Buckley
and Carol Anne Calvin

This new book, published in 1993 by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, is on the whole a very complete, useful guide for identification and background information on all 290 species in the families Fringillidae, Estrildidae, and Passeridae. Its 73 color plates include, in addition to the usual illustration of males of each nominate subspecies, renderings of the previously neglected females, juveniles, and subspecies which should prove very useful in the field and in aviculture. Range maps and basic species information accompanying the plates are further enhanced by a detailed text which is easily located by page numbers given with each species in the plate section. The scientific name is also given in both plate and text sections which is very helpful in identifying a particular species since common names can so often be misleading.

A complete table of contents facilitates the location of a particular species, giving the bird's reference number, common name, scientific name, and text page number. The addition of plate numbers would have been desirable to save time and avoid confusion, as one might think the number given was the plate number when indeed it was the arbitrarily assigned reference number. Preliminary notes and labeled diagrams of avian anatomical features as well as the glossary of terms, bibliography, and index (by scientific and common name) add to the book's usefulness as a reference tool.

Being familiar mostly with estrildid finches, we must limit our following critique to the section on this group. Our comments reflect mostly our experiences as aviculturists rather than field investigators.

Having worked closely and



Mrs. Reynolds raises a lot of Bourkes, housing two pairs together or with other Neophemas.



These Turquoise babies represent the many grass parakeets which Mrs. Reynolds raises.

Photos by Nancy Vigran



The Reynolds' Peachface Lovebirds are offered one more nest box than there are pairs in a flight. The next boxes sit on a shelf and can easily be removed for inspection.

lived rather intimately with many of the estrildid finches over the past seven years, we have come to know a good deal about their morphology and behaviors. In many instances the authors are "right on" with their plates and narratives. There are, however, some errors with what we have found to be true of not just one or two representatives of a given species, but of groups of a species, observed over several generations.

One error, which could prove to be very misleading in the field, is the illustration of the Chestnut-breasted Negro-finch *Nigrita bicolor*, which depicts the bird as stocky, with a short, thick bill. In fact, the Chestnut-breasted Negro-finch is a slim, streamlined bird with a long, narrow pointed bill, rather like the Violet-eared Wax-bill *Uraeginthus granatina* in body shape and size. Its long, pointed bill is at least twice as long as illustrated, indicative of an insect-eater, not a seed-eater, consistent with *Nigrita bicolor's* dietary preference—insects and softfood, not seeds.

Another glaring flaw concerns the Blue-breasted Parrotfinch *Erythrura tricolor*. The authors suggest that this bird is rare and unknown. In fact, this bird has been in European aviculture for quite a few years. The suggestion that male and female differ only slightly is misleading. The male exhibits the deep blue of an Indigo Bunting, while the female is much paler, similar to the male Cordon Bleu. Also, females are smaller than males. As this species appears to be currently trapped from different islands than in the past few years, more recently trapped birds are much smaller in size, suggesting island variation. The call, a descending trill, is superficially similar to that of the Blue-faced Parrotfinch *Erythrura trichroa* to which it is closely related. We

strongly suspect the skin used for the illustration is the same one used by Derek Goodwin in *Estrildid Finches of the World* (1982), only from a different angle. The flaw is immediately apparent as it is in Goodwin's illustration: the bird is not only

blue-breasted but, is indeed, in life, a blue-bodied bird with green wings and a red tail.

Although it is interesting and important that the authors mention the naturally occurring yellow-headed mutation of the Royal Parrotfinch *Erythrura*

FINCHES & SPARROWS

An Identification Guide



Peter Clement, Alan Harris and John Davis

"Aviculturally Speaking"

"And so we made a nation; so we swept away the greatest hardwood timber reserve in the temperate world, simply to be free of it, while our cattle trampled down the wild bamboo, the cane; we exterminated the parouquet for its plumage, the passenger pigeon for its flesh."

Donald Culross Peattie 1938

Deadline Schedule

July/Aug '95

May 1 - editorial copy
May 15 - display ADS

Sept/Oct '95

Featuring LORIES

July 1 - editorial copy
July 15 - display ADS

Nov/Dec '95

Sept. 1 - editorial copy
Sept. 15 - display ADS

Jan/Feb '96

Featuring SMALL ASIAN HOOKBILLS

Nov. 1 - editorial copy
Nov. 15 - display ADS

Mar/Apr '96

Jan. 1 - editorial copy
Jan. 15 - display ADS

May/June '96

Featuring ECLECTUS PARROTS

March 1 - editorial copy
March 15 - display ADS



WATCHBIRD BINDERS

Hansome, sturdy binder holds a full year's issues of The Watchbird (6 issues). Of rich brown leather-like vinyl embossed in gold.

\$6.95 each

CONTINENTAL U.S.—Add \$2.75 Shipping/Handling for one binder. Add 75¢ for each additional binder.

FOREIGN—Add \$8.00 Shipping/Handling for one binder. Add \$2.50 for each additional binder. Please remit in U.S. funds.

Phone orders accepted using  

American Federation of Aviculture

P.O. Box 56218

Phoenix, Arizona 85079-6218
(602) 484-0931 • fax (602) 484-0109

cyaneovirens they have overlooked the naturally occurring red-headed mutation of the Crimson-winged Aurora *Pytilia phoenicoptera*. Indeed, our original stock of red-headed mutations were wild-caught.

Another problem we have with the book is the abridged version of the calls. We have video taped bird behaviors and calls for many years now and have worked with the Kulikoro Firefinch *Lagonosticta virata* for at least three generations and have not heard the whistling call the authors describe. However, if you go back to the original Goodwin text where he describes the call as whistle-like, similar to that of a canary, that makes sense. The calls of both male and female, although slightly different from each other, are a series of bell-like tones. Another example is the Bamboo Parrotfinch *Erythrura hyperythra*, where the authors' completely omit the crackling tones. This is the most salient aspect of the mating call, especially among birds that are performing the fencing ritual.

Our major criticism of the book is that it is mainly a rehashing of Derek Goodwin's classic work, *Estrildid Finches of the World*, with many of the "unknowns" incorrectly filled. With the exception of Robin Restall, the authors seem to have almost completely ignored the avicultural community as a source for current information. For example, although most of the current stock of Mindanao Parrotfinches *Erythrura coloria* are suspect due to their hybridization with the Blue-faced Parrotfinch, new birds have been recently imported into Europe, and one can immediately see the dimorphism between male and female, even down to the shades of green. Perhaps most interesting is that not only do the males sing (a rather guttural trill), but the females do also, a much sweeter version of his song. Granted, this sort of information is hard to come by, but can be acquired if one keeps close tabs with the avicultural community.

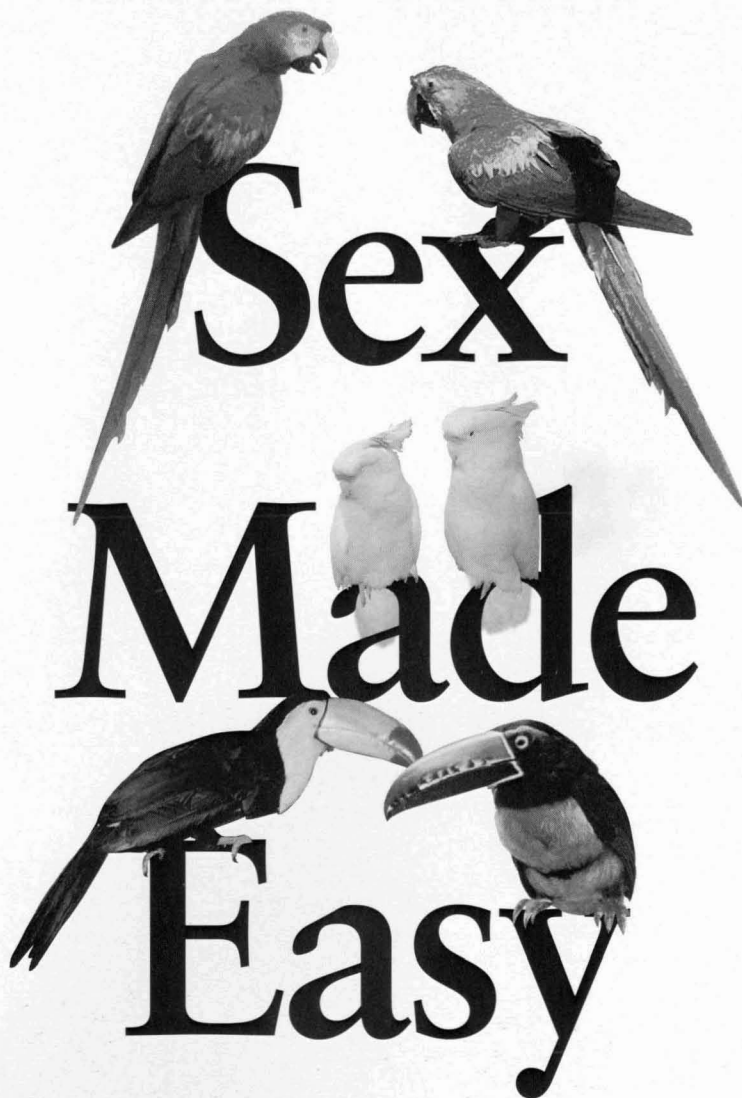
In many instances, however, the

book is remarkably perceptive as, for example, in the case of the Crimson Finches *Neochmia phaeaton*. The authors comparison of the appearance and behavior of the Crimson to that of the African grenadiers *Uraeginthus* is very accurate.

We also agree with the authors' difficulty in properly classifying the Blue-bills and Seedcrackers and their possible relationship to the Twinspots. This is evidenced by the fact that the chick Crimson Seedcracker *Pyrenestes sanguineus* and the chick Peters' Twinspot *Hypargos niveoguttatus* are quite similar, being the same skin shade—a dark grayish-blue—and are quite downy. The Red-breasted Blue-bill chicks *Spermophaga haematina*, on the other hand, are light-skinned, not as downy as the aforementioned chicks and have a broad yellow border on upper and lower mandible which is absent in the Seedcrackers and Twinspots. Also, the Blue-bill chicks have a unique begging response at a few days of age. They tend to stand up in the nest with their huge mouths agape, a response we have not observed in any other estrildid finch. This is probably an evolutionary adaptation in response to the huge bill of the parents, making the chicks easier to feed.

One of the most interesting and fascinating aspects of the book for us is the illustration (showing both male and female) of the subspecies of the Pintailed Parrotfinch—*Erythrura prasina coelica*—from Borneo. This is indeed an attractive bird and one we would like to see.

In conclusion, we feel this work to be a relatively complete and useful treatment of the family. Its beautiful color plates and informative text go beyond any previously published field guide. It is a pity that the authors did not consult with the many aviculturists worldwide who have gained intimate knowledge of their charges, especially the rarer finches, through years of close observation and study and could have added so much to fill in the gaps to make this an even more complete work. ➔



Sex Made Easy

DNA sexing provides safe, accurate results *without surgery*.

99.9% accuracy in over 150,000 birds.

Now, there's a better way to sex your birds. It's a DNA process called Sex Made Easy – and it's safer, easier and as accurate as surgical sexing. Sex Made Easy is non-invasive and requires no anesthetic, so there's minimal stress to your birds. And unlike surgical sexing, it can be used for birds of any size or age – even very young or small birds.

Sex Made Easy as 1-2-3.

All it takes is a single drop of blood.

1. Clip off the last 1/3 of the bird's toenail.
2. Fill the capillary tube with a drop of blood.
3. Mail the sample to Zoogen. No refrigeration or special handling needed. It's that easy!

Do it yourself.

Or, see your vet.

Collecting samples is so easy, you can do it yourself. Your free collection kit includes simple instructions. Or, your vet can collect the sample during a check-up or wing clipping. Sex a batch of offspring at one time and save. Results are mailed, faxed or available by phone in days.

\$30 each
11 birds or more
\$35 each
1-10 birds
at one time.



Zoogen
INCORPORATED

Sex Made Easy®

Call for your free sample collection kit or for more information.



U.S. **1.800.995.BIRD**

Canada **1.519.837.BIRD**

Europe/U.K. **44.0962.880376**



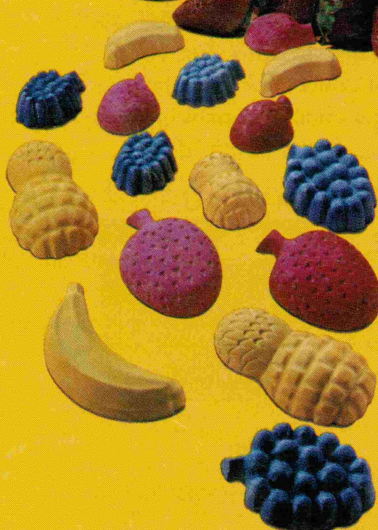
SUNTHING™ NEW!

FRUIT SCENTED & SHAPED SUNSCRIPTION™ MINERAL TREATS

New, SUN SEED "SUNSCRIPTION"™ Mineral Treats are prescribed to provide essential calcium and minerals to supplement your bird's diet. Their unique shape is designed to encourage chewing exercise and help maintain proper beak condition. Your bird will find these colorful, fruit scented Mineral Treats attractive and a bright addition to its environment. The fruit scent helps keep your bird's cage smelling fresh. Choose from a variety of flavors. Two sizes are available for large and small birds.



OFFICIAL
SPONSOR OF THE
AMERICAN FEDERATION
OF AVICULTURE



IT'S SUNTHING SPECIAL™

SUN SEED GUARANTEE
If you're not totally satisfied
with a SUN SEED product,
simply return the unused
portion for replacement,
substitution or a full refund.

