

Editors Note: This breeding has been nominated for a U.S. first breeding award. Anyone having knowledge of a previous successful reproduction of this species please contact Dale Thompson, AVY Awards Chairman, through the AFA business office in Phoenix, AZ.

Photo by Bonnie Cano



The Five-colored Mannikin bred, possibly for the first time in the U.S.A.

Who's Your Momma ?

The Five-colored Mannikin

by Bonnie Cano, Phoenix, AZ

[Editor's Note; The five-colored Mannikin is classified as the Five-colored Munia *Lonchura quincolor* in the book *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* by Sibley and Monroe (1990). This bird originates from the lowlands of Lesser Sunda Island but is also found on neighboring islands.]

In April of 1994 my husband Renne and I were shopping at the Way Out West Bird Expo. We were to meet a friend there who was selling out his finch collection. The finches in his collection were somewhat rare in aviculture. He had a pair of Timor Sparrows that would go well with the two pairs I already had in my aviary. It

was another pair of birds, though, that I became excited over as I had seen this species only once before and had never worked with them in my own collection. These birds were called Five-colored Mannikins and we purchased them along with the pair of Timor Sparrows. We, however, left the pairs with our friend while we took in the rest of the Expo.

Later in the day when we made our way through the crowd and found our friend, he seemed very upset. He apologized and explained that he had lost the male Five-colored Mannikin earlier in the day. He further explained that the bird had escaped its cage and flew away into the large building where the Expo was held. This was a great dis-

appointment to us as our friend had said earlier how this pair of birds were very bonded to each other.

The good news was that our friend had seen another vendor at the Bird Expo who also had some Five-colored Mannikins. With this information we went to this vendor to find another male for the female we had just purchased. When we approached the other vendor, I was greatly surprised to see the escaped male Five-colored Mannikin (or what I hoped was him) land on the outside of a cage full of the same species. This new vendor confirmed that I had a female Five-colored Mannikin back with my friend and that the escaped bird appeared to be a male and that it was not his bird.

Numerous attempts to catch the escapee were made over the next few hours and it finally resulted in success. Finally, after some discussion with Ed Hernandez, the new vendor, he gave me the male he had caught without charging me. This was very nice of him, indeed, especially since I had purchased three additional species from him. We were very happy when we arrived home.

All of the new birds went immediately into a quarantine room in our house. There the birds could spend some quiet time especially after their ordeal at the Bird Expo. During the quarantine period the birds were pampered and well cared for. They were given plenty of food, including vitamins and we wormed them with Ivermectin. They would soon be released into their permanent home outdoors.

When they finished their quarantine time they were removed from the small, confining cages in the quarantine room and released outside into a large roomy aviary. The Timor Sparrows, along with the other finch species were very compatible and all settled into their new aviary very well. The Five-colored Mannikins (also called Chestnut and White Mannikins) were placed into an aviary 8 x 8 x 6 ft. that was planted with ficus trees.

Housed in the same aviary were one pair of Gouldians, eight St. Helena Waxbills and one pair of Green Singing Finches. They all became accustomed to their new aviary and we were very pleased with our new additions. The Five-color Mannikin is a species not easily reproduced and success was not expected to come very soon. We were

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just happy to have a chance at breeding them.

On October 9, 1994, while taking care of these birds as we had since they'd arrived, tiny little cries were first heard. Our excitement was great as the St. Helena Waxbills had been building their nests for several weeks and we were sure that some of their babies had hatched. Because of this, more mealworms and crushed hardboiled eggs mixed with wheat bread was added to their diet. During this time we listened for the babies while we were around the aviary but we were careful not to disturb the birds. What little sounds that could be heard came from a nest that we had constructed out of two feet of chicken wire filled with hay. This nest hung about six inches below the top of the aviary roof and

no visible signs of a nest could be observed from our viewpoint.

On October 28, 1994 we were surprised to see on the floor a baby finch that was about double the size of a St. Helena Waxbill. The baby tried desperately to get its little wings to work so it could fly. This baby was dark brown in color and its beak was lined with bright yellow edges.

Our first thought was "Who's your Momma?"

From a process of elimination we surmised that this baby could only be a Five-colored Mannikin. With the excitement of this success, we took several photographs of the baby. It was during this picture taking session that its momma came down to feed the nervous youngster. It was now confirmed that we had successfully reared a Five-colored Mannikin.

The very next day three more youngsters fledged from the nest and the parent birds tried diligently to keep all of their offspring together and safe. The parents continued to feed the babies but kept it very private as we seldom observed them feeding. Their weaning time seemed very short to us

as they appeared to be on their own after nine days.

The pair of Five-colored Mannikins nested again in March of 1995. This time the parents chose to nest in a large wicker nest that had been filled with nesting material by other birds. The Mannikins did not build an elaborate nest within the basket.

The nest was in full view. The mother incubated the nest full time as it appeared that she never left the nest. By our calculations, we expected them to hatch around March 5. The first time the babies could be heard was on March 19. After two days we inspected the nest and the parents left immediately. We could see directly into the nest without touching it. Two large babies were observed, just showing signs of pinfeathers. The babies had dark skin and their black beaks were lined with bright yellow. It appeared that the babies at this age were able to open their eyes. The parents came immediately back to the nest when our inspection was done. It appeared that one of the parents stayed with the babies at all times. The parents could be seen standing beside the babies or leaning over them. The babies fledged on March 30 and the parents stayed close to the youngsters, being very protective of them. They stayed close for about four days. Even so, it appeared that the youngsters were weaned in a very short time – about seven to eight days.

Our problem now is that we have only one pair of Five-colored Mannikins. We do not know what contributed to the success of reproducing these birds as we have not changed anything in the aviary. They certainly are a "bonded" pair and we hope that someday this finch can be recognized and appreciated by more people.

[Note: This breeding of the Five-colored Mannikin has been submitted to the American Federation of Aviculture for a first U.S. breeding nomination. If any readers have reproduced this species or know of someone reproducing this species prior to the date described in this article, Please inform Dale Thompson (Chairman of the AFA's AVI Awards Committee) through the AFA Business Office, P.O. Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079-6218. Please include the name address and telephone number of the breeder and the hatch date of their successful breeding.] ➔

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