# The National Finch and Softbill Society


JULY

AUGUST

1967

# JULY/AUGUST 1987

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| Region Four (Mid-West) | (402) 339-8772 | Paul Williams |
| Region Five (Mountain) | (303) 574-1594 | Martha Wigmore |
| Region Six (Pacific Coast) | (805) 872-1063 | Hal M. Koontz |

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Finally! Published in this issue is the first NFS Finch and Softbill Census. Although the response was not as good as we had hoped, we feel it is a good start. The next census will be published at years end.

Our 1987 Annual Show is advertized in this issue. We feel even though the show is held held away from the lodging, that all will be very successful. Our Central Ohio affiliate will be providing van shuttle service between the Rhodes Center and the Hotel throughout the four days of the event. With our Panel Judge, George Warren there is sure to be a big showing; surely a show you won't want to miss.

PLEASE NOTE NEW HOME OFFICE ADDRESS:
NFS, P.O. BOX 18607, EAST HARTFORD, CT 06118.
MEMBERSHIP SERVICES: C/O RUSS ARMITAGE JR. 345 BOSTON ROAD, MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457.
BAND ORDERS: BAND SECRETARY, ROGER O'CONNELL, 451 MOODY ST., Box 114, Waltham, MA. 02154.

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NOTICE TO ALL CLUB DELEGATES

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The September/October issue of the NFS Bulletin will be the last your last chance to have your show listed in the Bulletin. If your club is listed below, we do not have complete information published. Please write the NFS home office at P.O. Box 18607 with the needed information by August 25, 1987.

GOLDEN GATE - MARY PAYNE'S PHONE NUMBER
NORTH COUNTY - VICTOR SWATSEK'S PHONE NUMBER
SANTA CLARA - MARTY VON RAESFELD'S PHONE NUMBER
SAN DIEGO - WAYNE SCHULENBERG'S PHONE NUMBER
SUNSHINE STATE - JEAN FISHER'S PHONE NUMBER
PANHANDLE - ALL INFORMATION
MINNESOTA - LOCATION AND PHONE NUMBER
ASTORIA - ALL INFORMATION
PENNINSULA - ALL INFORMATION

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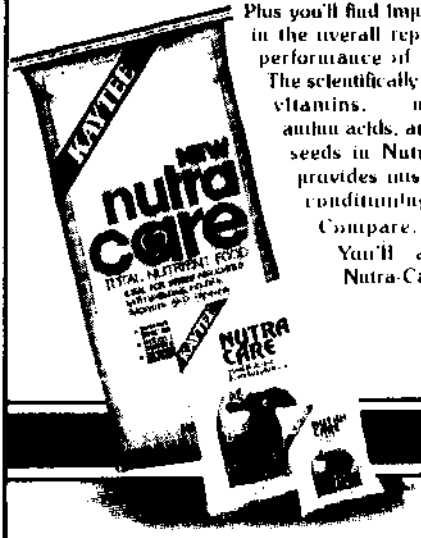


### SELECTED ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS

| | Nutra-Care Minimum Levels | % of Suggested Requirements |
|---|---|---|
| **Vitamins** | | |
| Vitamin A | 20,000 IU/kg | 670 |
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| Riboflavin | 20 ppm | 500 |
| Niacin | 150 ppm | 300 |
| **Minerals** | | |
| Calcium | 1.10% | 220 |
| Zinc | 150 ppm | 300 |
| Manganese | 170 ppm | 340 |
| Iron | 280 ppm | 375 |
| **Amino Acids (protein components)** | | |
| Lysine | 1.05% | 160 |

*Although precise nutritional information does not exist for exotic birds, the suggested requirements are considered to adequately meet normal dietary needs.

The nutrients listed above are those most often associated with nutritional problems in exotic birds. All nutrient levels in Nutra-Care™ are based on their presence in the usual diet and their relative importance.

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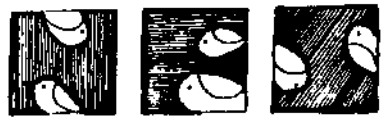


# The National Finch and Softbill Society

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____

STATE_____ZIP_____-_____

OFFICE USE ONLY

NFS#____Sel#____

Reg.#__Dues_____

Ann.Date_____

Check type of membership desired:

Single [ ] 15.00, Dual [ ] 20.00, Junior [ ] 7.50(-16yrs), Canada add $5.

Foreign add $10. Canada and Foreign Subscriptions are first class.
Please list other name to be included in a dual membership:

_____

Please answer a few questions for us:

How long have you been involved in finches and softbills? ___yrs.
How many species have you kept?_____
How many species have you successfully bred?_____
Do you exhibit in bird shows?_____
Do you keep softbilled birds?_____
Please list an occupation or special talent that may be helpful to the NFS (printer, artist, lawyer,etc.)_____
Are you interested in participating in the NFS Judges Panel?_____
Please indicate below the items you are most interested in.
Nutrition__breeding__managagement__exhibition__bulletin_____

PLEASE MAIL YOUR APPLICATION AND DUES TO:

NFS Member Services c/o Russ Armitage Jr.

345 Boston Road, Middletown, CT 06457

# The National Finch Society

1987 CLOSED ALUMINUM LEG BANDS

THE STANDARD NFS LEG BANDS FOR MEMBERS ONLY

Bands are available in standard NFS color of the year only

| Size | For | Cost |
|---|---|---|
| A | Seedeater Waxbills & Owl Finches | MAY BE ORDERED IN LOTS OF 10 BANDS AT $1.25 PER LOT |
| B | Cordon Bleu, Firefinch, & Lavender Finch | |
| C | Zebra Finch Gouldians, Stars, Heck's Grass Finch, Cutthroats, Parrot Finches, etc. | |
| D | Chestnut Breasted, Yellow Rumped, & Pectoralis | |
| E | Society Finches, Nuns, Firetails, & Diamonds | |
| G | Larger Waxbills & Canaries | |
| J | Yorkshires, Norwich, Pekin Robins, etc. | |
| K | Java Rice Birds, Indian Shama, etc. | |
| L | Quail, Doves, & Other Softbills | |

NFS bands may be ordered in lots of 10 bands, consecutively numbered at $1.25 per each lot. $1.00 shipping and handling should be included with each order, whether 10 or 100 bands are being ordered. Bands will be shipped within 30 days of receipt of your order, although most orders will be shipped the same week as received. There is no color choice. The standard NFS color of the year will be used. Each band will have stamped: "NFS", the band size code, year and number. All numbers will be recorded by the NFS band secretary for permanent record.

Please make your check or money order payable to NFS and send your order to:

NFS BAND SECRETARY
Roger O'Connell
451 Moody Street, Box 114
Waltham, Mass. 02154

Please send me the following bands. (Multiples of 10 only.)

A ( ) B ( ) C ( ) D ( ) E ( ) G ( ) J ( ) K ( ) L ( )

Total number of 10 units ( ) x $1.25 per unit + $1.00 shipping = $ ( )

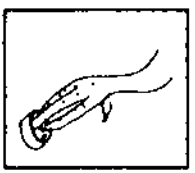
ORDER YOUR 1987 NATIONAL FINCH SOCIETY BANDS TODAY ! ! !

NAME _____ MEMBERSHIP NO. _____

ADDRESS _____

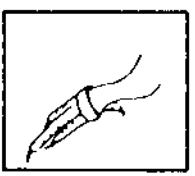
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

# Leg banding Procedure courtesy of the NATIONAL FINCH SOCIETY



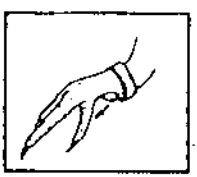
The most important thing to remember when you begin to band a finch is to do it over a counter or table in case the chick makes a sudden move, it will not fall to the floor.

The age of the bird to be banded varies with the species. Generally it will be between five and six days old. You can tell by looking at the ankle joint (the joint where the toes come together) and the size of the band.

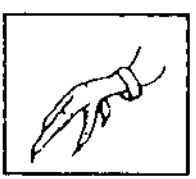


The band is generally placed on the right leg of the bird. Banding just before the nightly roost will help prevent picking of the band by the parents. By the next morning the birds will have forgotten about the band.

Have the band ready with a toothpick (or other blunt instrument and a lubricant. Hold the chick firmly but in a way not to cut off the air supply or to hurt the bird.



Put a little bit of lubricant on the bird's foot and slide the band over the front three toes and finally over the ankle joint. The back toe will probably have to be pried out from under the band with a toothpick. The band is now in the proper location between the ankle and elbow joints.



It is best to check on the chick after a few days to make sure the band has not slipped off. Before banding, make sure the band is right side up so that it can be easily read.

# NFS AFFILIATED CLUBS 1987

CALIFORNIA

The Fresno Canary and Finch Society.
Delegate: Richard Lujan
Call: (408) 984-1453
Show: Oct.30-31, Nov. 1, 1987
Panel Judge: Joe Krader
Place: Madera Dist. Fairgrounds

Capitol City Bird Society
Delegate: Helen Caudle
Call: (916) 933-1619
Show: Oct. 16-17-18, 1987
Panel Judge: Conard Meinert
Place:

Golden Gate Avian Society
Delegate: Mary Payne
Call:
Show: Nov. 14-15, 1987
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place:
Reg. 6 Regional Meeting

The Aviary Assoc. of Kern Cty.
Delegate: Hal M. Koontz
Call: (805) 872-1063
Show: Dec. 5, 1987
Panel Judge: Joe Krader
Place: Kern Cty. Fairgrounds

North Cty. Aviculturalists
Delegate: Victor Swatsek
Call:
No show this year.

Santa Clara Valley Canary and Exotic Bird Club
Delegate: Marty Von Raesfeld
Call:
Show: November 27, 1987
Panel Judge: Charles Anchor

San Diego Bird Show Club
Delegate: Wayne Schulenberg
Call:
Show: Nov. 14-15-16, 1987
Panel Judge: Ray Johnson
Place: Del Mar Fairgrounds

COLORADO

Colorado Cage Bird Assoc.
Delegate: Martha Wigmore
Call: (303) 574-1594
Show: October 10, 1987
Panel Judge: Hal Koontz
Place: Colo Spgs. Auditorium.
Reg. 5 Regional Meeting

Rocky Mt. Society for Aviculture
Delegate: Mary Kay Buchtel
Call: (303) 422-6529
Show: October 31, 1987
Panel Judge: Conrad Meinert
Place: Embassy Suites, Denver.

CONNECTICUT

The Conn. Assoc. for Aviculture
Delegate: Chris Voronovitch
Call: (203) 649-8220
Show: October 24, 1987
Panel Judge: Jerry D'Agata
Place: Vet.Mem.Bldg. E.Hartford.

New England Finch Fanciers
Delegate: Russell Armitage
Call: (203) 346-5875
Show: September 26, 1987
Panel Judge: Daren Decoteau
Place: Vet.Mem.Bldg. East Hartford
Finch Judging only.

FLORIDA

Gtr. Miami Avicultural Society
Delegate: Hector Ugalde
Call:

Gold Coast Exotic Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Karl Kline
Call: (305) 276-8711
Show: October 31, 1987
Panel Judge: Juanita McLain
Place:

Suncoast Avian Society
Delegate: Juanita McLain
Call: (813) 726-8326
Show: Oct. 17-18, 1987
Panel Judge: Juanita McLain
Place: St. Pete Hilton Towers

Sunshine State Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Jean Fisher
Call:
Show: October 10, 1987
Panel Judge: A.E. Decoteau
Place:

The Panhandle Avicultural Society
Delegate: Charles Richardson
Call:
Show:
Panel Judge:
Place:

Miami Parrot Club, Inc.
Delegate: Marco Arida
Call: (305) 251-3895
Show: September 13, 1987
Panel Judge: Marco Arida
Place: Biltmore, Coral Cables

GEORGIA
The Georgia Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Cecil Gunby
Call: (404) 251-2877
Show: October 2-4, 1987
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place: Holiday Inn Crown Plaza.
Reg. 2 Regional Meeting

THE GREAT AMERICAN BIRD SHOW
Delegate: Ray Johnson
Call: (404) 461-8675
Date: October 2-4, 1987
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place: Atlanta Int. Airport
Holiday Crown Plaza Hotel,
Atlanta, Georgia

ILLINOIS
Gtr. Chicago Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Charles Anchor
Call: (312) 543-3757
Show: Nov. 6-8, 1987
Panel Judge: Conrad Meinert
Place: Holiday Inn, Itasca

INDIANA
Indiana Bird Fanciers
Delegate: Val Clear
Call: (317) 642-0795
Show: October 10, 1987
Panel Judge: Charles Anchor
Place: Ft. Wayne, IN.

IOWA
Mid-America Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Rhoda Shirley
Call: (515) 243-2255
Show: Oct. 2,3, 1987
Panel Judge: Paul Williams
Place: Airport Inn Best Western
Des Moines, ID

LOUISIANA
Gulf South Bird Club Inc.
Delegate: Evon Kruse
Call: (504) 469-2435
Show: October 17, 1987
Panel Judge: Daren Decoteau
Place: Clarion Hotel, N.Orl.

MARYLAND

The Baltimore Bird Fanciers
Delegate: Brenda Geesey
Call: (717) 854-2604
Show: October 17, 1987
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place: Holiday Inn - Chesapeake
Aberdeen, Maryland

The Maryland Cage Bird Assoc.
Delegate: Catherine Gaffney
Call:
Show: September 26, 1987
Panel Judge: A.E.Decoteau
Place: Gaithersburg Comm. Center

MASSACHUSETTS

The Boston Cockatiel Society
Delegate: Helen Jabre
Call: (617) 641-3430
Show: December 5, 1987
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place: Cedars Lebanon Church
Jamica Plain, MA.

The Boston Society for Aviculture
Delegate: Helen Nolmes
Call: (617) 322-1562
No show this year.

The Massachusetts Cage Bird Assoc.
Delegate: Shirley Eaton
Call: (401) 333-5594
Show: October 17, 1987
Panel Judge: Charles Anchor
Place: Assabet Vly.Reg.High School
Marlboro, MA.

The Western New England
Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Bob Clark
Call:
Show: November 28, 1987
Panel Judge: A.E.Decoteau
Place: Ludlow Elks Club

MICHIGAN

The Mid-Michigan Bird Club
Delegate: Mary Rue
Call: (517) 394-1047
Show: November 7, 1987
Judge: Jon Hoffman
Place: McCurdy Pk. Corunna, MI

The Mid-West Canary and
Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Mary Kaszyca
Call: (313) 285-5168
Show: November 14, 1987
Panel Judge: Charles Anchor

MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Micheal Bronson
Call:
Show: October 10, 1987
Panel Judge: Dr. Val Clear
Place:

MISSOURI

The Missouri Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Tom Rood
Call: (217) 774-5265
Show: Nov. 6-8, 1987
Judge: Ed Hohn###
Place: Day's Inn, Eureka

NEBRASKA

The Gtr. Omaha Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Wayne Eichelberger
Call: (308) 872-2947
Show: Oct. 30, 31, 1987
Panel Judge:
Place: Ramada Airport Inn

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Birds of a Feather
Delegate: Larry Brandt
Call:
Show: September 19, 1987
Panel Judge: A.E.Decoteau
Place:

The New Hampshire Avicultural Society
Delegate: Michael T. Putnam
Call: (603) 352-2846
Show: October 10, 1987
Panel Judge: Ray Johnson
Place: Hudson Mem. School, Hudson.
Reg. 1 Regional Meeting

NEW YORK
The Astoria Bird Club
Delegate: Alex Grivas
Call:
Show:
Panel Judge:
Place:

The Rochester Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Jeanne Murphy
Call:
No show this year.

NORTH CAROLINA
The Charlotte Metrolina Cage
Bird Society
Delegate: Patricia Gibson
Call: (704) 588-1616
Show: September 12, 1987
Panel Judge: Charles Anchor
Place:

OHIO
Central Ohio Bird Fanciers
Delegate: Joan Gangle
Call: (216) 666-9773
Show: November 20-22, 1987
Panel Judge: George Warren
Place: Rhodes Center, Columbus

The National Finch and Softbill
National Show held with the NCBS.
Show: November 20-22, 1987
Panel Judge: George Warren
Place: Columbus, Ohio
Lodging: Hyatt on Capitol Square
Exhibition: Rhodes Center of the
Ohio Exhibition Center
NFS Annual Meeting: Hyatt Hotel

OKLAHOMA
The Bird Fanciers of Oklahoma
Delegate: Gene Miller
Call: (405) 382-7066
Show: October 24, 2987
Panel Judge: Earl Courts
Place: Cent.Plz.Hotel, OKC.

The Oklahoma Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Laura Bewley
Call: (918) 369-2717
Show: October 25, 1986
Panel Judge: William Parlee
Place: Cent.Plz.Hotel, OKC.
Region 4 Regional Meeting

PENNSYLVANIA
The Central Pennsylvania
Cage Bird Society
Delegate: Brenda Geesey
Call: (717) 854-2604
Show: November 14, 1987
Panel Judge: George Warren
Place: Quality Inn, York Valley

Chester County Bird Breeders
Delegate: William T. Trace
Call:
No show this year.

The Philadelphia Avicultural Soc.
Delegate: Rosemarie Priemon
Call:
No show this year.

TENNESSEE
The Middle Tennessee Cage
Bird Club
Delegate: Eva Duffy
Call:
Show: Oct. 24, 1987
Panel Judge: Ray Johnson

VIRGINIA

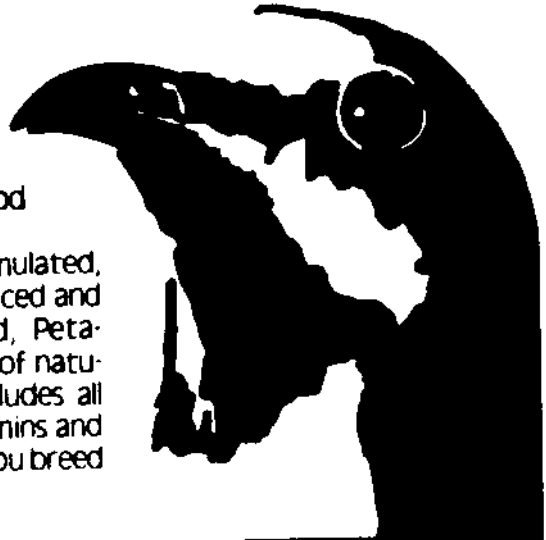
The Penninsula Cage Bird Society
Delegate:
Call:
Show:
Panel Judge:
Place:

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Cage Bird Club
Delegate: Kathryn Konkol
Call:
Show: October 31, 1987
Judge: Ron Philip###
Place:

INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATES

ENGLAND
The Australian Finch Society
Delegate: Martin Mogg
U.S.A.
The International Dove Society
Delegate: John Pire
NEW ZEALAND
The New Zealand Finch Breeders
Delegate: Valerie Hughes
ENGLAND
The Zebra Finch Society
Delegate: J.A.W. Prior



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# PARROT FINCHES
## by Rose Gianferrara

I was amazed at how friendly and calm the pair of Red-headed Parrot Finches were, that I had just purchased. Everything I had read on the species was so negative, it scared me half to death. I wondered if I did the right thing by purchasing these birds.

I should state her that a lot of material on these birds and others is outdated. This is a shame, as it keeps many people from purchasing certain species. Most books are talking about "wild caught" birds. Today many birds are home raised and acclimated to our conditions.

I acquired this pair at the end of February 1987, three months ago as of this account. I put the Parrot Finches in my outside aviary with my Owls, Fire finches, Lady Gouldians, Strawberries, and others. They were not aggressive or shy, and made themselves right at home.

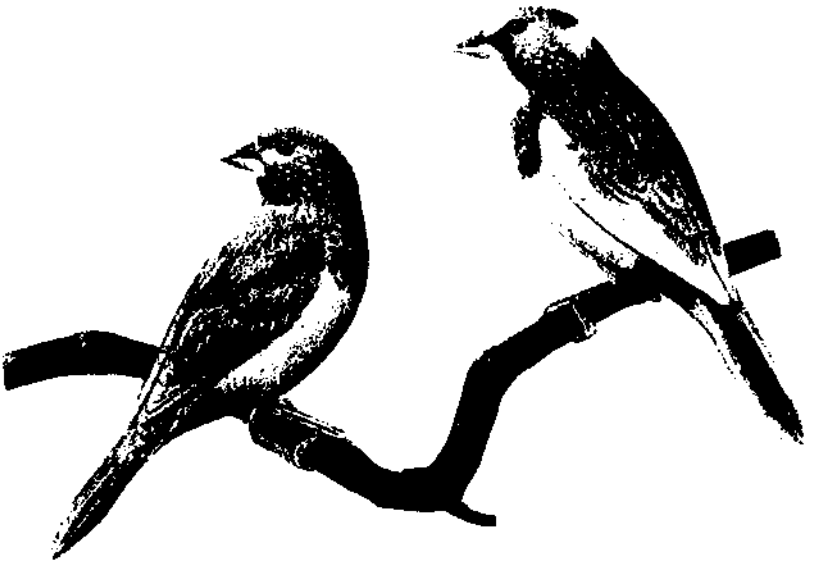
Within the first week he had a next built and she laid four eggs by the third week. I took them away and fostered them out to Societies. One was fertile, hatched and he's is in the flight right now. Within two weeks she had four more eggs which all were fertile. I again, fostered them out. All four grew and are now flighted. Another four were born this week. I can't believe it! The pair is now sitting on more eggs. This time I will let the pair raise their own. I hope all goes well!

The male comes down from the perch and takes meal worms right out of my hand. He seems to enjoy the familiarity. Taking the que from he behavior, all the other finches come around to check out what's happening.

It's strange that I write and article on Parrot Finches, when for ten years I've been raising Lady Gouldians, and never wrote an article on them. I just felt the fancier should know about these charming birds, and should not be "turned off" by some of the outdated printed matter on them. There have been many negative writings on the Gouldians as well, but look at all the accomplishments breeders have made with that species and its' mutations.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rose Gianferrara is an NFS member from Florida. We thank her for writing, and making the point on articles and books available today. When ever reading about a species in a book, look for the copyright date. A book may state that a species is readily available, and quite inexpensive. The book may have been written in 1954 when those statements were true. Things change, knowledge is gained, always check the date of your source of information. An NFS advertiser, Avian Publications, offer some well written, up to date books on Finches, as well as other Avicultural subjects.

# ARMY'S AVIARY



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Will Ship

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NFS NOTES AND NEWS. . . .

The NFS Sept/Oct issue will include these among other items of interest.

Violet-eared Waxbills II by Brenda Geesey

Hal Koontz's column returns.

Applications for the "FINCHSAVE PROGRAM".

Breeding the Green Singing Finch by Tim Morris.

News updates on the "National" and the Great American.

Understanding a General Standard for Finches, by Jon Hoffman.

Show Season Survival, by Bill Parlee.

Overseas Patronage Project, by Tom Rood.

Minutes and notes from the Seattle Board Meeting.

CLASSIFIEDS. . .

LADY GOULDIANS - Normals, White-breasted, split/white. Red, Black, yellow-headed. Connie Doyle, Hayward, CA (415) 581-9486.

A-1 AVIARY - All kinds of finches at reasonable price. Call (305) 352-1593. (12/87)

EXTRA HENS - Florida Fancy and Penguin Zebras; Eva Duffy, Tennessee, (615) 361-5939.

NEEDED - Female Melba Finch, Joe Moreno, Missouri, (314) 361-8659.

WANTED - Crimson Pileated hen, Green-back Twinspot hen (Schlegeli) Tina Hennenway, Pennsylvania, (215) 752-1565.

EXTRAS - female Fisher's Wydahs, Diamond Sparrow female, female Cinnamon Rock Bunting, Ken Archer, Missouri, (314) 221-6723.

FINCH AND SOFTBILL ENTHUSIAST, you can relate your avicultural experiences by writing an article for the NFS Bulletin. Contact Bill Parlee, Editor, P.O. Box 18607, East Hartford, CT 06118-0607.

**NFS PANEL JUDGES 1987**

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630 Lake Park Drive
Addison, IL 60101
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Miami, FL 33173
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# RAISING VIOLET-EARS
## by Brenda Geesey

Their proper name is Uraeginthus granatina, they're sometimes classified as Granatina granatina and they're commonly called Violet-eared or Violet-cheeked Waxbills. They are a small long-tailed South American finch, adapted well to hot arid climates. They live on a highly insectivorous diet including the larvae of the mound building termites.

The male's beak and prominent eye ring are bright pinkish red. The narrow band above his beak between his eyes is bright blue. His cheek patches are brilliant violet, and extend a little above his eyes and well behind and below them. His throat and chin are black, the top of his head, his back, chest and belly are a rich reddish-brown shading to dark greyish in the vent area. From his vent area and the nape of his neck one to six "wires" may extend as long as an inch. His flight feathers are more brown (less reddish), and his tail is black. His rump and upper tail coverts are brilliant blue. These feathers are longer and more narrow than other body feathers. His feet and legs are greyish.

The hen's colors are much more subdued in the same patterns. She is basically biscuit brown above, shading almost to cream at her vent. Her chin is pale beige, her cheeks are light lilac. Juveniles are dull brown on top, paler brown underneath with black tails, and the rump and upper tail coverts blue. Their black beaks begin to change about the fifth week and a partial moult occurs about the sixth to seventh week when the cheek color, brow colors, and chin colors define their sex.

I first saw them four years ago and bought the first four I saw. I knew little about their delicacy then and soon lost three of the first four. It took me almost two years to get the remaining male into good condition. I suspect he had some parasites because he never really thrived until I treated him last spring with Ivermectin. Last summer I began feeding all my finches an eggfood recipe from Robert Black's book. The Violet-ear was among the most reluctant of all the birds to eat this, until I followed Mr. Black's suggestion and removed the seed dish for at least four hours each day after putting in the fresh eggfood. Leaving him with no alternative, he did change his mind and eat the eggfood. He has always eaten small mealworms very well, and when he began to eat more eggfood his plumage improved, and he began to sing occasionally. A rather loud song for a small bird, very melodic and sweet. He was in a mixed group of small finches in a 5'x3'x3' cage in the dining room with weeping fig plants and full-spectrum fluorescent lights on a 14 hour cycle.

Owning these Violet-ears has been a series of periods of despair and elation for me. Thrilled when I bought them, upset a lot when I lost

the three, delighted when he came into good condition, and dejected because I didn't think I'd ever find a mate for him. Then a local club member told me he had just one, a hen, and he'd be willing to give her to me! She looked just great. I brought her home and took all the other finches out of the cage but him. I hung a 5" cube nest box with a one and one-half inch slit opening all the way across the front, high in one corner, and sheltered from view by a cabinet door and the plant leaves.

One of the thrills was watching his reaction when I put her in the cage. He must have been thinking there weren't any hens around just as I was, because the double-take he did was hilarious. He sang that day till he was hoarse and for the first time we saw him dance. A very dramatic and stylized dance holding a piece of grass or a feather by the very end and a lot of bobbing and bouncing on the perch in a very rigid "heads up" position with flared cheek patches, head feathers and tail. She was the typical unimpressed hen, eating canary seed and gazing off into the distance.

By the next day he was carrying grass and hay into the box. About then I read that they like to use feathers in the nest. The timing was good as my Yellow-naped Amazon parrot was moulting. I gave the Violet-ears his feathers as they fell. His flight feathers didn't interest them but they loved his contoured body feathers. This inspired even more frenzied nest building, wild dancing, and high speed pursuits of the hen. I never saw her pick up a piece of nesting material, but she did make regular inspections of the nest as he progressed. He made a deep depression in the back corner, lined with only the softest feathers which he chewed to limber up the shafts. Then he made a slight depression at the opposite front corner which he slept in as his night guard post later on.

Most of the literature speaks of them as shy but this has not been my experience with this pair, the other pair I acquired, or the chicks. I have found them to be bold, steady and very curious. All of them are very interested in anything that goes on in their sight. They come up to the front of the cage to observe anything going on and show fear only of the vacuum cleaner and seldom anything else. With this original pair I have been able to make nest box inspections quite easily as the box has a hinged lid and is on the exterior of the cage. When they have had eggs or chicks, opening the lid never has spooked them. In fact, if she is on the eggs I have to touch her and at times practically lift her to get a look. When she reluctantly steps forward she goes slowly and returns quickly. If he is on the eggs when I open the lid he hisses and has bitten us several times. It is usually impossible to get him to vacate the premises. They never have been flighty when people walk by the cage.

When they are breeding they are positively brazen! They breed on perches, the dishes, and the floor while people were at the dining room table, only two feet away. This made possible some interesting observations of both people and birds. He always begins the sequence by dancing for her with

receptive she squats a little and spins her tail in little circles. When he mounts her he flaps his wings vigorously and sing. Copulation lasts at least 30 second, a long time for a finch. Some dinner guests have found this so entertaining they have laid down their forks to watch while others refused even to glance over their shoulders, eating faster and ignoring the whole episode.

All of the adults I have are very finicky eaters. Fortunately the chicks I've raised are less reluctant to try new things. I think if I hadn't found this good eggfood recipe and virtually forced them to eat it, the adults would never have gotten going so well. I've tried various dried insectile mixes, probably all that are available, and never gotten them to eat more than a tiny bit of any of them. Mini-mealworms they both like, pin-head crickets she ate and he ignored. Waxworms, corn grubs and moth larvae apparently revolted both of them because they never even sampled them.

She was a more "eager eater" from the beginning than he has ever become. I still remove the seed mix for about four hours a day but even so she will go directly to the fresh eggfood each morning. She also pecks a lot at the cuttlebone which he never does. He did develop a fondness for wheat germ which I think may contribute to his high fertility. They both like milk stage seeds of grasses and weeds. Canary seed is their favorite in the seed mix with the small red millet a close second. I don't think they have ever eaten any of the greens I've tried but if the greens are wet when put in the cage, they will hop around in them and sometimes almost roll in them. This must be a substitute for bathing, I think. All of my finches have large shallow water dishes all the time and most bathe enthusiastically. I've never seen this hen bathe and when the male does, he just tosses a few drops over his shoulder while standing on the edge of the dish. He never has stepped into the dish. Last summer I started misting them very lightly with warm water every morning, including their plants and their wire cage floor. This brought their plumage to a nicer sheen. They don't like the mist and I don't drench them. Just a light spritz.

During this time of nest building and acclimations, I kept renewing their supply of feathers. Current favorites are the contoured feathers from my white Mynahs. I often see him playing with them, pinning them down on the perch with his feet and chewing the shafts. I think the feathers are very important to their sucess in nesting. They incubated very faithfully from the very first clutch.

The ceremony they perform when changing places on the nest is charming. She does most of the incubation, and he seem to feel the need to coax her out for food, exercise, and copulation. He gets one of his favorite feathers and goes up to the perch just in front of the nest box with it, does a subdued version of the courtship dance. He chirps a soft insistent little song, not the bold bright usual song. When he comes out, he goes

in immediately with his feather. He arranges it behind the eggs, sort of up on edge and he settles down gently. When she has eaten and had a flight or two around the cage, he often comes out and courts her and they breed before she goes in. Sometimes if she dawdles around he'll call her back into the nest. A few times we've seen him drive her back when she tarried too long. Often during incubation he'll take favorite feathers into the box while she's sitting and arrange them around her, again sort of standing on edge. If they block her view, she moves them. During incubation she developed almost a ninety degree bend in the last inch of her tail feathers due to the location in the box, but neither of them tried to relocate the nesting hollow. At night he sits in the front, almost in the opening of the box; on guard.

When she laid her first tiny bright white egg, I was so elated I told everyone I thought would have any interest. She only laid two. They incubated from the second egg with great dedication but the eggs were clear (infertile). More dashed hopes for me. They recycled very quickly. This time a clutch of five was laid. They incubated very well. All five were fertile and three hatched. The chicks were very dark, almost purple-black with a sparse bit of very long beige down. The down is primarily on their backs and they had two very prominent tufts on their heads that still show through the feathers when they fledge. They are tiny, smaller than Owl finch chicks. They have small bright blue gape nodules and very, very, tiny mouths. The chicks seemed strong and begged actively. In the first few days when begging they roll their bodies somewhat to the side, lift their heads, and twist them from side to side.

Looking into the box from a distance we saw the parents in turn bending over the chicks. We were sure they were taking turns feeding. They brooded the chicks faithfully and were very reluctant to even stand up so that we could see them when we opened the top of the box. Looking at the chicks we saw no food in the crop area of any of the chicks. Being optimists we still thought they were being fed. Later experiences taught us that even in these tiny chicks, even in the first days any feeding would have been visible. These parents were not feeding, only preening. The chicks starved to death. We had a pair of Societies who had just raised Cordon Bleu chicks. We decided to try them as foster parents. The Violet-ears recycled quickly again and we exchanged their eggs. The Societies also failed to feed the chicks. Because of the Violet-ear's blue gape nodules, we decided to try a good feeding pair of Gouldians with the next clutch of eggs. The Violet-ear pair soon laid again. We gave the eggs to the most reliable Gouldian pair, they mutilated the chicks and threw them out of the nest.

I began to discuss the feasibility of hand-feeding with Carole Wheeler, the most competent person in that art that I know. Although I had raised a clutch of Red-rumped Parakeets, I didn't feel capable of feeding tiny finch chicks. I was confident of her skill, but neither of us knew of a

proven formula for finches. The next clutch began hatching under Societies. They didn't feed so I removed the first two and tried to feed them with a feeding "needle". I used a commercial formula for hookbills. Either because it was inadequate or probably because I damaged and/or aspirated them, they died. Carole Wheeler volunteered to feed the next one. Only one more hatched and the Societies fed it half-heartedly for four or five days, and then quit. I took the chick to Carole. Terry Dunham put us in touch with Carole Martin in Florida who had successfully raised Purple Grenadier chicks with an eye-dropper and a commercial formula, fortified with human infant formula soy milk replacer. Carole Wheeler added stained carrots to that formula for fiber content. She fed it to him with a curved tip glass eye-dropper

On day fourteen I went to pick him up. Carole had the chick fat, slick, and thriving. He had lots of quills and a few open feathers. It's eyes were open and bright. The chick was strong and lively. Quite an achievement and I'm really grateful to her. At this age he was relatively easy to feed. Feeding was two to two and one-half hours apart from 6 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.. He continued to beg noisily and insistently and was taking as much as two and one-half droppers full of the formula at the time when he fledged from the bottom of the box to the top edge on his 24th day.

Editor's Note: Brenda Geesey is the NFS Second Vice-President. There is more to this chronicled story, which Brenda promises to share with us in our next issue. Hearing some of the things that don't work, are just as educational as learning what eventually did work.

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EGG FOOD RECIPE:

This is Black's egg food recipe that Brenda speaks of in her account. Make fresh each day from freshly cooked eggs, boil 20 minutes, crack and cool. For each egg: 1 teaspoon Vionate and 1 teaspoon soya protein isolate. For each three eggs: Open and sprinkle in 1 capsule B complex and 1 capsule A & D powder. Crush thoroughly and sprinkle in 1 trace elements pill.

Mix shells and all dry ingredients in food processor (blender may work). Add eggs and mix briefly. Should be the texture of fresh cornbread crumbs. Serve about 1 level teaspoon per finch pair on a shallow, broad dish so in the course of a day it will dry. Remove at the end of the day.

This diet is based on information from Robert G. Black's excellent book "Nutrition of Finches and Other Cage Birds".

Sources: A&D caps; Twin Labs., Ronkonkoma, NY 11779. Trace; Solgar Co., Lynbrook, NY 11563. Soya; Fearn Nat. Foods Corp., Melrose Park, IL 60106. B Caps; Revco Drug Stores. Vionate; any pet shop.

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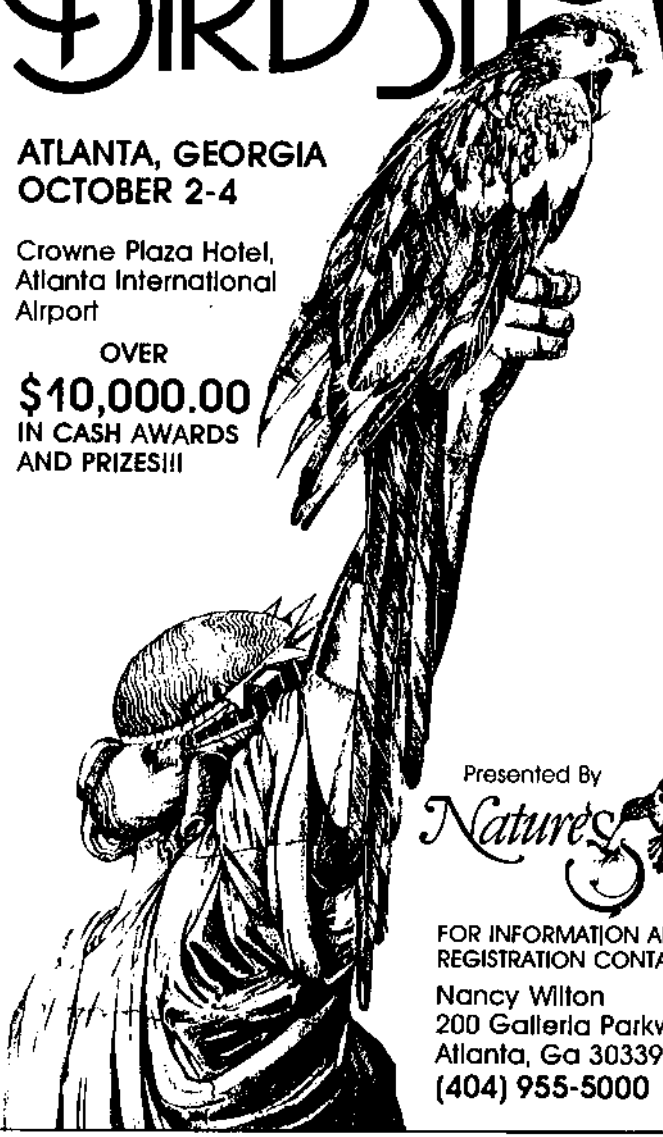

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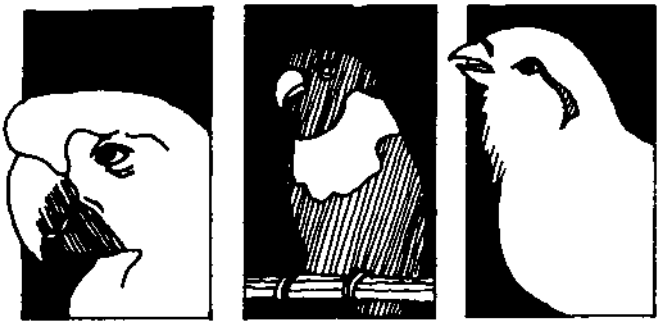

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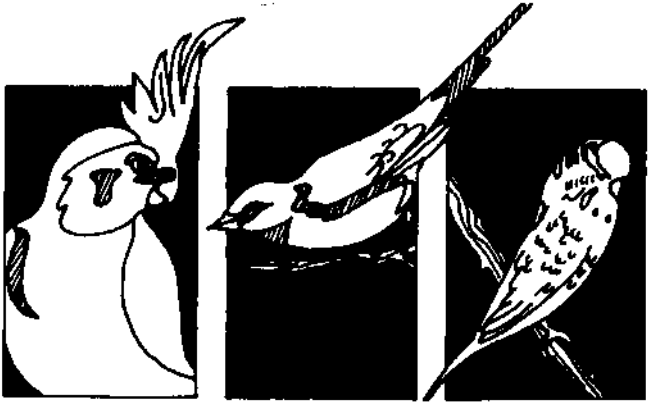

# TWO TANAGERS by Diane Weyer

SCARLET-RUMPED AND CRIMSON-COLLARED TANAGERS

"Tanager" comes from the language of the Tupi Indians in the Amazon. Appropriately, of the 222 species of Tanagers, 218 live entirely in Central and South America, and the four species which breed in North America spend the majority of the year farther south. Tanagers are small, brightly colored birds that range from four inches to six inches in length. They live up to the image of colorful tropical birds, presenting an outstanding variety of colors and diversity of patterns. Nearly all tanagers retain their bright colors year round, and, in most species, the females are as bright as the males.

The Scarlet-rumped Tanager (Ramphocelus passerinii) and the Crimson-collared Tanager (Phlogothraupis sanguinolenta) are two of the most startling tanagers in Central America, both being combinations of velvet black and brilliant red with piercing red eyes. The Crimson-collared's entire head, neck and chest, is a vivid blood-red while the rest of the body is black. The eye color is identical to the surrounding crimson plumage and gives a protuberant, almost artificial impression - no real bird eye could be that color! Its beak is large, pure white, and very powerful. Most tanagers have short conical bills with a notch or tooth in the cutting edge near the tip of the bill, which is slightly hooked. Anyone who has ever attempted to remove a Crimson-collared from a mist net for banding purposes, can attest to both the "tooth" and the force that can be brought to bear by such a bill construction - these birds being exceedingly willing to demonstrate both points! Both male and female Crimson-collared are marked identically.

Only the male Scarlet-rumped Tanager is brightly marked. He is solid black except for his brilliant scarlet rump, which extends well up his back. His eye color also matches his red feathers, but the area of red is smaller and the eyes appear more normal, if a bit vicious. (His looks are totally belied by his temperment, Scarlet-rumped Tanager are the least argumentative of birds.) The bill of the Scarlet-rumps is dark blue, tipped with black. The female of the species is a most uninteresting combination of dull browns and greenish olive tone, except for her rump and chest, which varies from yellow to bright orange.

The Crimson-collared Tanager has a leisurely song composed of short metallic phrases with high-pitched "sissing" sounds randomly interspersed. Tanagers are not generally noted for their songs, but the Scarlet-rumped makes a brave attempt and generally has sometimes

been called the Song Tanager. Nevertheless, its song is indifferent and suggest that of many other birds. What the Scarlet-rumped lacks in musical skills, it makes up in effort, and it sings far more than most tanagers, including the Crimson-collared.

Both species range from southern Mexico throughout most of Central America, though the Scarlet-rumped is found farther south in Panama than the Crimson-collared. They also share similar habitats, both liking tropical and subtropical areas of low forest, second growth, thickets and shrubs, and abandoned farms. The Scarlet-rumped will live and breed close to people and come into their yards, which the Crimson-collared will not do. On the other hand, the Crimson-collared is more willing to venture into the forest and to forage in much taller trees than the Scarlet-rumped will. The Crimson-collared is the less social of the two and, while widely distributed and by no means rare, neither is it a really common bird anywhere. The Scarlet-rumped is frequently found in flocks and is one of the commonest and best known tanagers in Central America.

Scarlet-rumped Tanagers, while not truly colonial birds, not only frequently flock together and roost gregariously, they will also nest close to one another. They do no appear to be territorial, but when two nest are built within a few feet of each other, both females will act "nervous" because of their proximity to each other. Nest building starts in late February or March. Nests have been found anywhere from a foot off the ground to 20 feet up in a tree, though most birds prefer low thickets for nest sites. Several birds may nest in the same bush. The nest is open and cup shaped, seldom taking more than five days to construct. Thieving of nest materials is common, though never fought over.

Females do the nest building alone. The male may "escort" the female on flights to gather materials, and may sit nearby and sing while she works, but that is all. As females substantially outnumber males, it is tempting to do a little "women's lib" theorizing, especially as the males don't share in the incubation process at all. Though males do feed the young, the females do the majority of the providing too. To top it off, there are reports of females forming "irregular" attachments and raising their young independent of male help. Certainly some females nest, lay viable eggs and raise their resulting babies with no noticeable male presence. Most males appear to be monogamous, escorting only one female and accepting partial responsibility for providing for her brood. But "single" females do lay viable eggs, so one must presume some "extra marital" activity.

Scarlet-rumped Tanager eggs differ considerably both in shape and color. Some are long and tapered, other short and oval. They can be pale blue, grey, or whitish and marked with varying designs of black, brown, lilac or some combination thereof. Usually the marking are

concentrated around the large end of the egg and taper off to a light scattering of marks over the rest of the surface.

All incubation is done by the female and she incubates between 70 and 80% of the time. They young hatch on the 12th or 13th day. Male Scarlet-rumped Tanagers do help substantially with the feeding of the young, although "single" females raise broods successfully on their own. When a male is present, he provides from around a third to nearly half of the food brought to the nestlings. The female provides the rest and does all the brooding.

Like many tanagers, the Scarlet-rumped eats a wide variety of fruits and insects. Bananas and plantain are favorites, as are the dry, green fruits of the Cecropia. Berries from any of the melastome family as well as those of the scrambling shrub (Tournefortia bicolor) are regularly eaten also. They eat a lot of insects and spiders, especially caterpillars and grasshoppers. Scarlet-rumped Tanagers even act as "flycatchers" when the termite nuptial flights take place, and are surprisingly adept at catching termites in mid-air. On occasion they will even eat young mice. Though the adult diet is proportionally higher in fruit, the nestlings receive a greater percentage of insects, which provide more protein. But from the time they are hatched the nestlings are fed a certain amount of fruit.

Not all young live to leave the nest. There is no lack of predators, of which toucans, especially aracaris, and snakes are probably the most important. A Scotch reports an unknown parasitic disease that affects these tanagers too. The young that survive leave the nest after 11 to 13 days and remain hidden in the shrubbery for about three weeks, rather like fledgling Song Sparrows. Males begin to acquire their scarlet and black adult plumage at this time. Then soon after leaving concealment the young join in the flocks of adult birds.

Strangely enough, virtually nothing appears to be known about the life history of the equally colorful Crimson-collared Tanager. However, researches from Monomet Bird Observatory banded several Crimson-collared Tanagers in 1983 and 1984 in Belize. So, perhaps someday one can say more about them than ". . .their life history is probably similar to that of other typical tanagers." Until someone studies their private lives, I shall stick to my strictly personal conviction that they are much more aggressive birds than the Scarlet-rumped Tanager - and I can't imagine two Crimson-collared Tanagers peacefully nesting in the same bush!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks go to the Honeycreeper, the magazine of the International Softbill Society, and to the author, Diane Weyer, for this wonderfully enlightening article.

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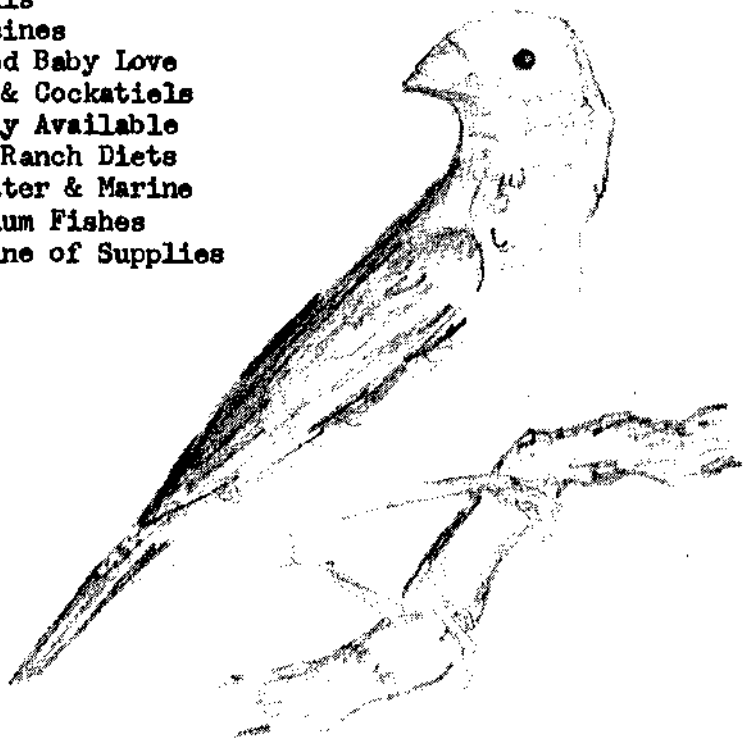

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# NFS CENSUS RESULTS

Here's how to use the census. The first two letters of the code are the state then the member number and availability code: BA = babies available, NA = not available. Below is a list of the participants with their telephone numbers.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| CT001 | CONNECTICUT | WILLIAM PARLEE | (203) 528-1458 |
| IL043 | ILLINOIS | TOM ROOD | (217) 774-5265 |
| CT045 | CONNECTICUT | JUDY & LAURA BECKER | (203) 435-2263 |
| IN101 | INDIANA | JON HOFFMAN | (812) 333-5638 |
| CT106 | HAWAII | BERNICE PATTERSON | (808) 536-5983 |
| NC107 | NORTH CAROLINA | AUDIE BLOISE OVM | (919) 667-1109 |
| PA118 | PENNSYLVANIA | BOB & TINA HEMENWAY | (215) 752-1565 |
| CN134 | CANADA | JOHN BENNETT | (416) 473-5612 |
| PA180 | PENNSYLVANIA | BRENDA GEESEY | (717) 854-2604 |
| FL184 | FLORIDA | JOSE ALEMAN (A-1) | (305) 352-1593 |
| NC200 | NORTH CAROLINA | ANN COTRUFO | (919) 467-2946 |
| FL205 | FLORIDA | JIM HUNTER | (305) 232-0970 |
| PA219 | PENNSYLVANIA | HAROLD HARNISH | (717) 872-9198 |
| PA268 | PENNSYLVANIA | PATRICIA JAMANN-FRY | (215) 536-5770 |
| OK271 | OKLAHOMA | CAROL GARDNER | (405) 376-4213 |
| NC274 | NORTH CAROLINA | DOROTHY MCGOWAN | (919) 847-3542 |
| IN288 | INDIANA | LADONNA ALLEN | (317) 769-3577 |
| GA297 | GEORGIA | BETTY SMITH | (404) 461-6254 |
| NY298 | NEW YORK | SISTER SHIVA KUMARI | (212) 924-2272 |
| FL316 | FLORIDA | ROSE GIANFERRARA | (813) 992-6331 |
| CA327 | CALIFORNIA | BILL NOVICKAS | (805) 589-2081 |
| CT336 | CONNECTICUT | HARVEY FREEMAN | (203) 371-6414 |
| PA350 | PENNSYLVANIA | DEBRA FOOTE | (814) 967-2866 |
| NY352 | NEW YORK | HELEN HARRIS | (914) 225-2463 |
| CO374 | COLORADO | MARY KAYE BUCHTEL | (303) 973-0290 |
| CA380 | CALIFORNIA | MARY PAYNE | (415) 449-8719 |
| TX414 | TEXAS | LOLLY HARDING | (512) 395-2244 |
| WI424 | WISCONSIN | FRED EGGERT | (608) 985-7240 |
| AZ435 | ARIZONA | ANN GREEN | (602) 783-5007 |
| CA457 | CALIFORNIA | JERRY MARSTON | (916) 756-3323 |
| PA472 | PENNSYLVANIA | RAY SLEMOK | (412) 884-4102 |
| MI505 | MICHIGAN | LINDA COYNE | (313) 769-3877 |
| NY518 | NEW YORK | BRUCE HESSELBACH | (718) 463-5947 |
| NY521 | NEW YORK | JOAN RAE | (212) 988-2543 |
| MO528 | MISSOURI | KENNETH ARCHER | (816) 221-6723 |
| CA533 | CALIFORNIA | CONNIE DOYLE | (415) 581-9486 |
| MN545 | MINNESOTA | KENNETH NORKEY | (612) 544-7218 |
| VA565 | VIRGINIA | ROBERT HUGHES | (804) 823-1236 |

| SPECIES | TYPE OR MUTATION | CENSUS |
|---|---|---|
| AURORA | PYTILIA | NY521NA PA268BA |
| AVADAVIT | GREEN | MN545NA AZ435NA |
| BICHENO | OWL FINCH | PA180BA VA565NA MI545BA NC107NA FL316BA OK271BA NY518NA MT055NA AZ435BA GA297BA |
| BLACK & WHITE | MANNIKIN | CT045NA PA118NA |
| BLACK-HOODED | NUN | MO52BNA |
| BLK-CHEEKED | WAXBILL | CA380NA PA268NA |
| BRONZE-WING | MANNIKIN | FL1848A PA350NA |
| BUNTING | ROCK | MO528NA |
| BUTTON QUAIL | SILVER | VA565NA NY521NA |
| CHERRY FINCH | | AZ435BA |
| COMBASSOU | | MN545BA |
| CORDON BLEU | AND BLUE CAPPED | PA268NA MT055BA AZ435BA MY298NA IL101NA CT045NA MI505NA MN545NA CO374NA NC107NA MO52BNA PA118BA IN288NA FL205NA FL1848A PA219BA NY352NA OK271BA NC274NA NY521NA CA380BA |
| CUTTHROAT | | CT045BA NC274NA |
| DIAMOND DOVE | NORMAL | VA565NA NC107NA PA350BA |
| DIAMOND | SPARROW | MO528NA PA472BA PA219NA CA380NA OK271BA CNI34NA |
| FIREFINCH | | NY521NA MN545NA NC107NA MO528NA PA118NA FL316BA OK271BA CA180BA NY298NA |
| FISHER'S | WHYDAH | MO52BNA |

| SPECIES | TYPE OR MUTATION | CENSUS |
|---|---|---|
| GOLD-BREASTED | WAXBILL | MN545NA CO374NA NC107NA FL1B4BA PA219NA NY352NA OK271NA NY521NA PA268NA MT055BA |
| GOLDEN SONG | SPARROW | NY521NA |
| GOLD FINCHES | EUROPEAN | MO528NA OK271NA |
| GOULDIAN | BLACK-HEADED | PA1B0BA MN545NA CT001NA NC107BA PA457BA CA533BA H1106BA FL1B4BA |
| | RED-HEADED | NY29BBA CN134BA GA297BA PA350BA CA327BA CT336BA HI106BA FL1B4BA PA219BA NY298NA NY352BA PA350BA OK271BA CA380BA PA1B0BA MN545NA NC107BA CT001NA MO528NA FL205NA PA457BA CA533BA |
| | ORANGE-HEADED | PA1B0BA CT001NA MN545NA CA533BA |
| | WHITE-BREASTED | PA1B0BA FL316BA CA533BA GA297BA CA327BA CT336BA |
| | RARE MUTATIONS | CA533NA CA327NA |
| GREEN SINGER | | CT045NA CO374BA FL205BA PA457BA FL1B4BA WI424BA PA350NA OK271NA NC274NA NY521NA IL043NA MT055BA CT336NA |
| GRENADIERS | PURPLE | PA180NA MN545NA AZ435NA |
| HECK'S | GRASSFINCH | MN545BA MO52BNA 1L043BA CN134BA |
| JACARINI | | MO52BNA |
| JAVA RICE | GREY | VA565NA MN545NA TX414BA NC200NA PA350BA CA380NA PA350BA |
| | CALICO | PA350BA |
| | WHITE | MN545NA IL101NA |
| LAVENDER | WAXBILL | MO52BNA NY521NA MT055NA |

| SPECIES | TYPE OR MUTATION | CENSUS |
|---|---|---|
| MASKED | GRASSFINCH | CNI34BA |
| MELBA | | CT001NA MN545NA PA219NA AZ435NA |
| ORANGE | WEAVER | IN2B8NA |
| ORANGE-CHEEK | WAXBILL | MI505NA MO52BNA FL3I6NA FL1B4BA PA26BNA NY29BNA |
| PAINTED | EMBLEMA PICTA | AZ435NA |
| PARROT | BLUE-FACED | MO52BNA HI106NA PA219NA |
| | RED-HEADED | MO545NA FL3I6BA OK27INA |
| PARSON | | MN545NA AZ435NA |
| PEARL-HEADED | AMADINE | PA219NA |
| PEKIN ROBIN | | NCI07NA WI424NA PA2I9NA |
| PILEATED | CRIMSON | PA11BNA |
| PYTILIA | YELLOW-WINGED | PAII8NA ILIOINA |
| QUAIL FINCH | | MN545NA PA2I9NA OK27INA |
| RED-EARED | WAXBILL | MI505NA CO374NA IN2B8NA FLI84BA NY29BNA OK27INA AZ435NA |
| RED-HEADED | ROSE FINCH | MN545NA |
| ROSY-RUMPED | WAXBILL | CA380NA |
| SCALY-HEADED | WEAVER | GA297NA |
| SHAFTTAIL | NORMAL | NY29BBA PA3508A PAI80NA VA565BA NC107BA PA11BNA HII06BA WI424BA NC2748A |
| | FAWN | PA180NA |
| | WHITE | PA472BA |
| SILVERBILL | | CT045NA PAI80BA NY52INA CT336BA |

| SPECIES | TYPE OR MUTATION | CENSUS |
|---|---|---|
| SISKIN | BLACK-HEADED | PA219NA |
| SOCIETY | BANGALESE (ASST.) | VA565BA CO374BA NC107BA CT001BA IN288BA FL316BA FL316BA PA457BA FL184BA MN545BA WI424NA NY298BA NY352BA PA350BA NY521NA MT055BA CT336BA |
| | CINNAMON | MI505BA MN545BA MO528NA |
| | CRESTED | PA180BA CA457NA HI107NA WI424NA PA268BA CT001NA IL101NA |
| | CHOCO PIED | MI505BA MN545BA NC200NA IL043NA IL101NA GA297BA IN288BA |
| SPICE | | MI505NA MO528NA IN288NA FL184BA WI424NA NY521NA |
| ST.HELENA | WAXBILL | PA118BA |
| STARFINCH | | CT001NA NC107BA PA118NA FL205BA NY298BA PA457BA HI106BA AZ435BA |
| STRAWBERRY | WAXBILL | CT045NA MO528NA IN288NA FL205BA FL316NA WI424BA NY298NA PA550NA NY521NA MT055NA AZ435NA |
| | ORIENTAL | VA565NA PA268NA |
| TWINSPOTS | DYBOWSKI'S | AZ435NA |
| | GREEN-BACKED | PA118NA AZ435NA |
| | PETER'S | HI107BA MT055NA AZ435NA |
| VIOLET-EARED | WAXBILL | PA180BA |
| WHITE-HOODED | NUN | MN545NA MO528NA IN288NA FL184BA |
| ZEBRA FINCH | ASSORTED & GREY | GA297BA PA350BA CA327BA NC274BA WI424BA PA118BA MI505BA CT045BA NY521BA PA350BA NC200NA CT001NA FL184BA IN288BA CA457BA NY518BA CA380BA IL043BA CN134BA |

| SPECIES | TYPE OR MUTATION | CENSUS |
|---|---|---|
| ZEBRA FINCH | BLACK-BREASTED | CA457NA CA327BA |
| | BLACK-FRONTED | CA327BA |
| | C.F. WHITE | CT001NA PA180BA CA457NA CA380BA CN134BA IL101NA GA297NA CA327BA |
| | CREAM | PA180BA CA380BA |
| | CRESTED | NC200NA CT001NA |
| | FLORIDA BLUE | MI505BA |
| | FLORIDA FANCY | IL101NA CT336BA |
| | FAWN | CA457NA IN288BA IL043BA GA297BA CA327BA |
| | ORANGE-BREASTED | CA327BA |
| | PIED | CN134BA IL043BA CT001NA |
| | SILVER | PA180BA CN134BA CA380BA |

The present plan is to print the next census in the January/February 1988 NFS Bulletin. The deadline for getting your next census mailed to the home office will be November 30, 1987. A blank census form will be printed in every bulletin until that deadline.

To improve upon the census, I make the e following suggestions. When reporting census information for finches in which there are several mutations, please list the mutation. For instance, I feel that there are several more people that wished to list Black-headed Gouldians, however they listed them as normal. I put them into the Red-headed classification. They same thing was true of Zebras. Grey should be stated as grey, there should be no assorted, and etc..

In closing, let me say that this is a good effort put forth on this initial census. We must receive more than a 10 percent return, however, to make the census truly valuable. For instance, again, I know of at least five members that have Masked finches, yet only one is listed. I know of four members with Violet -ears, yet only one is listed. We must have a more complete census for the benefit of our breeders. Remember, breeding the rarer species in large numbers is the only hope we have of preserving these species for future generations. Thanks for helping.

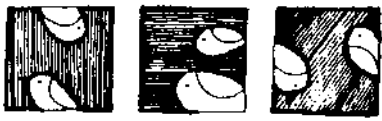
# Bill Parlee

PANEL JUDGE

NATIONAL FINCH AND
SOFTBILL SOCIETY

SOCIETY OF PARROT BREEDERS
AND EXHIBITORS

JOIN "FINCHSAVE"



The National Finch Society

# A Field Study of the Beautiful Firetail Finch

by Brian O'Gorman, Stawell, Victoria

## FOREWORD

*Members of the grassfinch family hold a special place in the affections of many fanciers, both amateur and professional. Their fascinating habits, beautiful fastidious plumage and, not least, their minuteness make them favourites. Alec Chisholm called them "the feathered atoms". Their small size, nevertheless, makes them very difficult subjects to study in the wild, unless of course, they become tame and confiding.*

*Prof. Klaus Immelmann was the first person to undertake intensive fieldwork on grassfinches and his classic book, "Australian Finches" was the result. He further elaborated his findings in a long article (196 pages) in German. He also wrote another book in German, called "In Unknown Australia" in which he describes the delights and rigours of fieldwork in Australia. Partly due to limitations of time he was not able to make intensive investigations on the beautiful firetail so that, until Brian O'Gorman's work, the species remained the least known of all the Australian grassfinches, with the possible exception of the blue-faced parrot finch.*

*Brian has chosen the rarest, least known and shyest of the grassfinches for investigation. Not only has he followed in Immelmann's tradition but he has made one of the few long term studies on grassfinches in Australia. This aspect makes it particularly valuable. One reason for his success is that he has been able to study the birds in captivity as well as in the field. Consequently, he has combined the qualities of the field worker, namely, patience, determination and perserverence, with the skill and understanding of the aviculturist. He has seen the detailed behaviour in the aviary and its natural context and purpose in the wild.*

*The following article on the beautiful firetail provides a general, non-technical account for the reader. It is hoped that Brian will be able to find the time to write up the more technical aspects, especially those related to habitat requirements. This will be of great importance in prescribing measures for the conservation of the species.*

Richard Zann, Ph.D.
Department of Zoology
La Trobe University

## INTRODUCTION

By any criteria *Emblema bella*, or as it is more commonly referred to the beautiful firetail, is, and always has been, one of Australia's rarest and least known finches. It has rarely been sighted by Australia's growing number of aviculturists and in all probability it will remain so, for only an optimist could say that none of our native birds will fail to decrease in numbers as the years go by and as the pressures on them increase.

This bird has rarely been kept in aviaries. Quite a few "old-timers" tried in the late 1920's and early 1930's but the firetail's mortality rate was so high that it was deemed to be a most difficult bird. Along with its closely related Western Australian cousin, the red-eared firetail *E. oculata*, it was granted total protection within those States where it naturally occurred. For these reasons it has rarely been kept in captivity and on the few occasions when it was bred, little or no record of the techniques used to obtain these results was published to assist others. I know of only three "official" breedings on the mainland. Two in Sydney: the early 1920's (Werd) and in 1929 (Pier), plus one in South Australia in 1934 (Chinner). I am

aware of a successful breeding in South Australia in the early 1960's, which for legal reasons can't be confirmed.

This species was first exported to England in 1870 but it is certain that no further exports overseas will occur. The rarity of the beautiful firetail can be confirmed by the fact that, officially, little is known about the species. A search of the literature failed to reveal any reference to the courting display — nor had the courting song been heard. Immelmann could conjecture that, in all probability, it resembled the red-eared firetail in both aspects. Therefore, it is evident that my study involved a very rare bird indeed. One that had remained an enigma since its description in 1801 by Dr. John Latham. What I have attempted to do is shine a light in a corner that remained fairly dark for over 180 years.

**Beautiful firetail** *Emblema bella*
Drawn J Clement

I grew up in Sydney some 40 years ago and the outskirts were vastly different to today. There was always a large number of finches around and when trapped (by the youth of the day) they were sold to suburban pet shops. They included the diamond firetail, doublebar, redbrow and zebra. It was on one of these finch-trapping trips that I first saw the beautiful firetail. Then it was called **the firetail** and it was the only finch with that name.

I well remember when about five of us were trapping redbrows on the flats alongside the Georges River, behind what is now the Bankstown Aerodrome and we caught a beautiful firetail. I can still see it! It was, to me, the most beautiful bird I had ever seen and I was horror-struck when the most knowledgeable member of our group released it. He said the pet shops wouldn't buy it and it would fret to death in a few days if caged. Shortly after we caught another nearby, again it was released, took off like an arrow and I didn't realise I would not see another one for over 35 years.

Those first early sightings probably triggered the motivation in later years. I just couldn't understand why that finch fretted and others didn't.

Well-read aviculturists will note that this study varies greatly from what little is published about the species. Immelmann's studies appear to be confined to the Tasmanian population and certain differences in habitat have been noted. In addition his study was compiled in a few weeks and confined to a particular area. Mine was spread over a four year period and, like my diamond firetail study, conducted as a year long study of behaviour. All aspects were studied: feeding, breeding, courtship, mating, pair bond, etc. It is quite possible that this is the most comprehensive study

ever undertaken on a single Australian finch species. I stand by both the findings and disclosures.

It is presented under separate headings to highlight how complex the behaviour is, how it varies, **and** how it varies from other species. Some sections are brief but, in many cases, they represent the "total" knowledge that has been accumulated on that aspect. Although brief each took considerable time to compile.

## THE STUDY AREAS

Four areas provided data. Three in Victoria and one, the main one, in the south-west corner of south-eastern Australia.

When my field study of the diamond firetail was published (*AA*, January 1981) I made the mistake of identifying certain locations of known colonies. Shortly after, I returned to find that extensive commercial trapping had taken place. I vowed then I would never again disclose specific locations. Also, I promised the South Australian National Parks Service that I would never disclose the locations to aviculturists. Two of the Victorian locations provided the first known sightings for those areas. However, one area was so vast that it had received little attention from the authorities. This is no longer the situation.

The South Australian study is, I believe, the most important. The sample of birds studied, 200, in the 2830 hectare area ensured behaviour noted was general for the species. Because of the isolation, 25 kilometres from the nearest human presence, behaviour would not be influenced by exterior forces.

## DISTRIBUTION

The distribution map confirms it is primarily a coastal species. Where it goes further inland it does so by way of mountain range or dense foliage, as can be found on the river systems, such as the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales. I've stated with certainty that the numbers have in recent years contracted south-eastwards in the northern part of their range and south-westwards in the southern section.

**Distribution of the beautiful firetail finch**
Drawn J E Buchan

The development of coastal regions in these areas, with its subsequent clearing of foliage, appears to be the main cause for these contractions. Likewise, bushfires in the Blue Mountains region and the Royal National Park (New South Wales) must have also severely depleted numbers in those areas. Evidence available suggests that although numbers have decreased in the northern part of its range, numbers in the western part hold firm or have increased.

## THE HABITAT

The habitat varies according to where it is found. In Eastern Australia in the Blue Mountains and National Park regions then south to Gippsland in Victoria it is found in mountainous regions along heavily brushed gullies but in close proximity to heavy timber. Along the south-eastern and south-western coast of Victoria and in the south-eastern corner of South Australia the habitat is invariably confined to dense scrubby coastal tea-trees including *Melaleuca ericifolia, M. uncinata* and *M. neglecta*, amongst swamp banksia, usually in damp swampy areas or where surface water prevails for most of the year. In the latter the growth is so dense that unimpeded movement is almost impossible. My usual practice was to follow "game trails". In all cases the areas are remote, most border on grassland or uncultivated pastureland, the reasons for the latter will be explained under *Feeding*.

I've been able to identify three separate habitats, the first is country bordering perennial flowing streams in mountainous country, one at considerable altitude. The second is pastoral heath, tea-tree and swamp banksia where growth is extremely thick and bordering on grasslands. This is extremely wet for most of the year and is devoid of heavy timber. The third is inland country where it is very thick with tea-tree, swamp banksia, devoid of heavy timber, but wet for most of the year. The average height of the tea-tree being 2 metres. This area also fronts onto open grassland. It seems that in each habitat there are two or three essential prerequisites. They are:

- thick to dense cover (by dense I mean undergrowth so thick that actual movement is restrictive);
- the country remains marshy or swampy for most part of the year;
- whenever the habitat occurred it had to have access to grasslands and be remote.

## SIZE OF TERRITORY

This aspect was the most difficult to investigate. A way was found and the findings accurately compiled. But the answer is not a simple one!

Immelmann states that the territory is large, but that is not a satisfactory statement. Pair bonding is strong and retained throughout the year, so for the most part of the year they are in pairs. Several pairs would use the same feeding area but never in company. When groups are found they are usually young birds forming small adolescent flocks prior to their first breeding season; or else established pairs with their young before they have been driven from the area. Feeding territory can cover several kilometres but is shared by many pairs and not at the same time. Nests were no closer than 50 metres in the 2830 hectare scrubby area, with about 100 pairs in residence.

## FOOD

This is difficult to cover in detail due to the wide range of herbage that I could not identify. I have established that sources are extensive and greenfood comprises a large percentage of the birds daily intake.

Sources definitely identified comprise: *Phalaris tuberosa*, tog grass *Holcus lanatus*, spear grass *Stipa spp.*, wallaby grass *Danthonia spp.*, panic *Panicum spp.*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, strawberry clover *T. fragiferum*, veldt *Ehrharta calycina*, panicum *P. maximum*, dock *Rumex conglomeratus*, wire weed *Polygonum aviculare*, winter grass *Poa annua*, milk thistle *Sonchus oleraceus*, capeweed *Cyptostemma calandula*, sorrel *R. angiocarpa*.

Feeding times are regular. The birds emerge from cover shortly after first light feeding for a couple of hours. They then take to cover, emerging late afternoon. Time in cover was divided between nest building, courting, establishing territory, plus a number of other functions, such as feeding on open ground where advantage

is taken of any available cover. Due to undulations in the ground feeding birds are difficult to observe unless seen to alight. After a long observation of feeding, I would suggest the variety of food sought and partaken is extensive. Birds were observed to pay particular attention to seeding banksias, but investigation revealed these seeds were extremely hard so I think an insect was the source of attention. 30% of all banksia seeds fail to mature due to predation by an insect (and aviary birds relish aphids). Petals of some flowering herbs and berry bushes are also eaten.

This species has been observed (B.R. Hutchins, pers. comm., 1983) feeding on the seeds of the drooping sheoak *Casuarina stricta* in the Coorong area of South Australia.

An aviary equivalent to this is the consumption, in quantity, of the petals of thriptomene and native ericas. Another unusual food source (observed in field and aviary) is the occasional practice of pulling up stems of a particular food source and consuming the stalk end, especially when feeding on clover species. Studies of food and feeding constituted a major part of the study with **over** 12 months allocated to it. Feeding has been a major factor in my captive breeding of this species — but that's another story!

## FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

Whilst feeding on open ground the beautiful firetail is extremely nervous and never ventures far from cover. Generally they feed in pairs and although many pairs avail themselves of the same source in the area, they do it separately or at different times. One bird always appears on guard and if disturbed they seek cover by the shortest possible means. Even though this might bring them quite close to the cause of their alarm. This means that they do not try to put distance between themselves and the source of disturbance but go straight to cover. I have been able to verify this in my own aviaries. When attempting to obtain seed heads, the birds climb onto the stem of a desired seed head and allow their weight to carry it to ground level, utilising their weight to secure it prior to feeding. When multiple seed heads are in close range they anchor themselves on one and drag another across and use the other foot to hold it in range of the bill. On open ground they constantly "screen" themselves with small stones, pieces of timber, even cow dung.

When feeding, movement is by rapid hops. These are more pronounced, or higher, than any other finches I've studied. It could be an adaption of life in areas where grass growth is high. Feeding is selective, the area is used for a particular seed or head for a few days and then deserted for another area. These visitations to a particular area achieve a regular pattern, timewise, during the study period.

## GROUND SPECIES

The beautiful firetail can be regarded as a ground species as all its behaviour is conducted at, or near, ground level — even courtship. If you examine the colour plates, it is evident that the beak is less conical with a much finer point than most Australian species. No doubt an adaption for the gathering of very fine seeds and small insect life. Although mealworms and termites are offered to my aviary birds, their prime source of protein appears to be the small aphids and scale insects gathered off plants.

## WATER

Water, both in quality and quantity is of great importance. They drink deep and often, and not always from ground sources, often preferring to quench their thirst from the leaves of surrounding foliage. Being mainly a coastal species both rainfall and overnight dews are steady and regular. The birds drink in small sips and incline the head well back. It is fond of bathing and takes many baths. After a shower of rain it will relish small pools but mostly it uses the damp foliage of trees and shrubs, similar to honeyeaters who select the heavily foated branch, and can gradually work its body through — similar to humans using a face cloth or sponge. Time is then spent preening and can last for 10 minutes.

Established pairs and adolescent young birds will engage in mutual preening. When bathing in ground level pools the birds totally immerse themselves, consequently they become quite saturated but it doesn't appear to impede flight prowess.

## THE MOVEMENTS

It must be regarded as a sedentary species. In most instances it spends its whole life in a comparatively small area, however, movement within this area is constant, birds will be feed in a certain area for days, and then disappear to another 6-7 kilometres away.

Most of my discoveries have been made available to professional people (e.g. zoologists) and to establish credibility certain procedures are followed to definitely prove behavioural assessments. Although this is of little interest to aviculturists I must state that I went to considerable lengths to make my findings authoritative.

## FLIGHT

Its flight is extremely fast with few undulations. Wing beats are fast and the wings almost touch over the bird's body on the upbeat and descend well below the body on the downbeat. Flights are of usual short duration and when longer flights are required they are never made in open country but are accomplished within cover.

This first action of other finches is to put longitudinal distance between themselves and then to seek cover whereas this species goes straight for cover. I've had them flash in front of me, being no more than 0.5m away. Another peculiarity is they rarely alight at any height as do other species. Usually they enter cover about a metre above the ground appearing to crash straight through the foliage. As a result sightings in the field are extremely difficult, brief, and only possible by experience.

Its flight is extremely manouverable, it swirls and dips at extremely high speeds. It is the most speedy and agile flyer of the Australian finches and, when descending to ground level, from amongst cover will appear to plummet down and into the foliage like a hawk. This is unique among Australian finch species.

## THE PAIR BOND

The pair bond is strong and maintained throughout the year. Pairs identified in 1979 still maintained original partners in 1983. From such evidence it would appear as if the bond is a lifetime one and like its cousin, the diamond firetail, is formed at a young age. Present aviary studies yet to be published will provide greater insight and detail of this aspect. It would seem that its normal life span is equal to other Australian species (approximately 6 years). As the original pairs were adult when the study commenced, it could exceed other species. Only aviary studies of birds, whose true age is known, can provide the answer. It could be years before this can be substantiated.

## THE THREAT DISPLAY

Unlike any other Australian grassfinch it is restricted to the cock bird alone and is carried out mainly in the breeding season and can occur when the cock bird is defending the feeding source.

He raises his tail and fans it similar to that of a crimson finch, both wings are slightly opened from the sides of the body and lowered so that the tips almost touch the ground, from where the display mostly occurs. The beak is agape and the bird assumes this pose while he hops rapidly across the ground, or branch, to confront his quarry. In most cases this has the desired effect and the threatened bird departs. I have seen the cock assist this result by removing a few feathers. He then fluffs out his feathers similar to a bird that has just bathed in water and then goes about his duties. **I believe that these observations have not been recorded before.**

**BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL – MALE**
*Emblema bella*

The photo illustrates a male out of breeding condition
Photo: Brian O'Gorman, Stawell, Victoria

**BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL – FEMALE**

Female beautiful firetail *Emblema bella* at the nest entrance. Note the wide opening and the extremely dry or dead material used in this. The outside section of the breeding nest, which gives the nest the appearance of being abandoned. The photo illustrates a breeding bird in the author's well planted aviary at Stawell, Victoria, with the blue eye ring of the breeding bird and the vivid red rump both being clearly evident.

Photo: Brian O'Gorman, Stawell, Victoria

## AGGRESSION

It can be regarded as a sedentary species and to maintain territory a certain amount of aggression takes place which is combined to drive off interlopers

Defence is left to the cock bird acting alone. When confrontations occur between individual birds, flight at ground level is usually the way that the bird makes its escape. Although the cock appears to be extremely paternal to his offspring once they fledge, it's usually the cock who drives them out of his area, once he assumes they are independent, which is between 5 and 6 weeks after fledging. At the onset of the breeding season (October/December) many confrontations occur between individual cock birds, aerial chases take place but I've been unable to observe actual contact. With this species aggression appears to be limited to intimidation only.

## HARDINESS

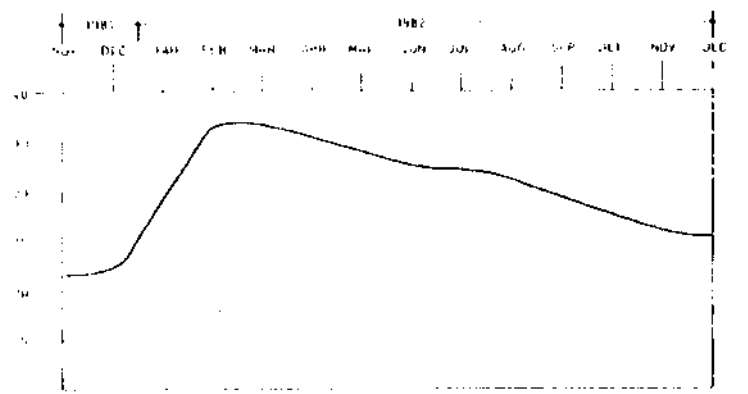
Beautiful firetails can be regarded as a hardy species. It's habitat is mainly coastal and the largest number of birds occupy areas within a 95 kilometre coastal fringe. Where they do occur further inland this intrusion is usually gained by way of waterway or mountain range.

In the Blue Mountains of New South Wales favourite habitats are those of high rainfall, heavy dews and frosts. I have recorded temperatures as low as minus 9° Celsius. A colleague in Tasmania advises that tossea among Tasmanian aviary birds usually occur in hot weather.

Further evidence of their hardiness is their apparent disregard of wet or wintry conditions. They continue to feed on open ground – even in heavy rain. *This behaviour is unique among our native finches.* Consequently severe wintry conditions don't worry them.

## NUMBER OF BROODS

Until now I've recorded multiple broods on a few occasions but they were isolated cases. It appears as if one brood is normal. Availability of food, seasonal factors and rainfall are influences yet to be studied and documented. The late nesting season, the time taken in nest construction and the care of the young long after fledging all should be taken into account.



**This graph, representing 6 pairs, indicates how the original number of birds in a given area does increase at the end of the breeding season, February – early March, and then declines gradually over the next 10 months. The column on the left represents the number of birds.**

Drawn: J.E. Buchan.

## THE CALLS

I attempted to tape-record the various calls, but the results were unsatisfactory because I lacked sophisticated equipment necessary for clarity. Tapes were made and given to Dr. Richard Zann, a former colleague of Klaus Immelmann.

Four calls were recorded, they were:

- **The communication call** — This call of the beautiful firetail although extremely low pitched, is to me the most musical or pleasing. It is usually rendered between pairs, whilst feeding in cover, and sounds like "cherr-it", not unlike the communication call of king quail. The pitch is low, and can only be heard a few metres away. Its recording and documentation was made possible only by observation of my own aviary birds.
- **The identity call** — This is usually given in a wide range of circumstances to establish contact or to claim territory. If the reader can imagine a redbrow trying to imitate a diamond's long drawn out call, it would probably be similar.
- **The nesting call** — this call is only given at brooding changeover, it's of a low key and given in three series of two calls, and sounds thus — "two-eee", "two-eee", "two-eee". The return call is even lower and sounds like "tit-e", "tit-e", "tit-e", with the "e" being uttered with something of a quaver. If no return call is given the relieving bird will leave without entering the nest. With the exception of the identity call, all other calls were made possible by intensive study of my aviary birds. To record them in the field would be a daunting task. To my knowledge only the identity call has so far been documented or recorded.
- **The alarm call** — This is loud, not unlike that of the cordon bleu finch, and sounds like "tup", "tup", "tup" and is always given in a series of three calls. It is the loudest of the calls and given when young are approached.

All others are only variations of the identity call, the variations being of different durations. For me to describe them would be extremely difficult, they are:

- brooding changeover;
- before feeding young;
- during nuptial flight.

## THE COURTING DISPLAY

Immelmann's *Australian Finches* is an updated version of Cayley's original book and contains the most up to date information available on the Australian finches. In the latest edition (1982) Immelmann admits that the courting display of the beautiful firetail has **never** been observed and writes "...*but having in mind the close relationship to the red-eared firetail the courtship behaviour of the two species may be regarded as similar*". If the reader understands this, then maybe, he can imagine my thoughts and feelings the first time I saw this display! **I knew it was a historical moment.** It made all the hours of watching and waiting worthwhile.

The first time I observed it was in my own aviaries. I am fairly certain that it will never be witnessed in the wild. I observed the cock fly off to a horizontal branch with a long piece of grass in his bill (about 200mm) and held by the thick end. He alighted on a horizontal branch and, still holding the piece of grass, proceeded to nod his head up and down three times, similar to the greeting sign of the parson finch. No sound was made which leads me to believe that this display is a visual sign to his hen to alight some 150mm from him on the same branch. He then dropped the piece of grass and crouching low on the branch, inclined his body forwards and down until his head was well below the perch and the angle of his body from beak to raised tail was roughly 60°. The tail was fanned displaying the vivid red rump and the wings lowered and slightly opened, no doubt also to display the vivid scarlet colour of the rump. He then inclined his head toward the

hen and whilst singing with beak open, bobbed up and down. This was body movement only unlike the diamond firetail, at no stage with the legs visible. The song was a 'caw', 'caw', 'caw'. It reminded me of the nightly song of the cricket, not the loud chirp but the muted song. The head bobs, the actual body movement, and the song phrases all occurred on occasions of three, whilst the cock and the hen hopped rapidly closer. In the cock with tail towards him, but with no quiver as with other species. At the approach of the hen the pair flew rapidly to ground cover and because of this I couldn't observe copulation.

Having once observed this display I was to hear the courting song many times, but as no bird was in sight. I assume it occurred at ground level and believe this is the reason why it has never before been observed in the field. **This discovery was one of my most rewarding.**

The courting display is not restricted to the breeding season. Like the diamond firetail, courting can take place at any time of the year but it is only directed to the true hen of the cock bird. If another hen, and in most cases this proves to be a young unmated one, approaches she is driven off unmercifully by the cock bird's true partner.

The actual bobs of the cock beautiful in display are totally different to all other Australian finches: it is more accentuated. At the crescent of the bob the bird appears to arch his body and the bobs appear as if conducted in slow motion and are always conducted in a series of three: as are most phases of the whole display.

## THE NUPTIAL CHANGE OF PLUMAGE

When considering the close relationship between the red-eared and beautiful firetails, and that nuptial change with the red-eared was well known, it should come as no surprise that the beautiful also undergoes a plumage change in the breeding season, yet many professionals seem sceptical.

The change in plumage only affects the cock bird. Overall the bird appears to darken in colour and when seen alongside the hen the change is quite evident. The eye ring becomes a lot bluer and the extremities of the wing primaries lighten to appear almost white. This was conveyed with colour slides to aviculturists at the 2nd National Avicultural Convention in Brisbane, Queensland (1-5-1983), also in my aviaries to Barry Hutchins, the noted South Australian aviculturist. When this change occurs is hard to pin down, but it occurs more after the annual moult and so I think it must be hormonal.

In addition to these changes, the black belly patch of the cock darkens and extends to a line just to the rear of the legs. Out of the nuptial plumage the birds are extremely difficult to sex and the cock appears to lighten greatly in colour, the eye ring becomes less intense and the conspicuous belly patch fades to become a mere smudge. Within the confines of an aviary this is clearly visible in contrast to the abdomen of the hen. It seems that Gould's description of the species was taken well out of breeding colour as he describes them as sexually similar in external appearance. Further aviary studies will greatly add to such knowledge.

In addition, the underside of the tail also undergoes a discernable colour change. This darkens considerably and in contrast to the hen is as evident as the changes of head colour between sexes in both the parson and longtail finches. This is virtually impossible to observe in the field due to its failure to posture itself in plain view, or at height. It was discernible in the aviary and highlighted the desirability of being able to observe the birds under such controlled conditions.

John Gould, in his *Handbook to Australian Birds* (1865) stated *'There appears to be no external difference between the sexes'*. We must assume that if two specimens were examined in the hand then they both were cock birds.

## NESTING

The beautiful firetail is difficult to study under field conditions. This became apparent when compiling the nesting information. It's insistence in withdrawing to the most inaccessible areas of a difficult habitat made documentation hard. In contending with mosquitoes, leeches, plus the possibility of snakes, there was always the ever-present danger (in one area) of becoming hopelessly lost! As a result documentation falls short if compared to my field study of the diamond firetail (O'Gorman 1981). However, it is far more detailed and complete than what is in current literature.

### Gathering of Material

Most material is gathered in open country and brought to the nest site by both birds and often they travel considerable distances along the ground dragging long pieces of material behind them. I have also observed this with my own aviary birds but can advance no reason for it. Whilst building the birds are extremely aggressive. This is directed to any bird (regardless of species) who approaches too close, to either the birds or the site. Both birds will combine to chase intruders away.

When brooding commences, only the cock bird leaves the immediate area to feed and at all other times rarely is found far away although his presence is not always evident. At first light, the hen emerges first to feed. She returns in about 30-40 minutes, thereafter the changeovers occur about 1½-2 hour intervals (with slightly longer periods in cooler weather). Once brooding commences the nest is *always occupied*, this is in contrast to other Australian species who vacate the clutch if the day is really hot. Also it reinforces my view that it is preoccupied with predation of its nest. Although the grass for the nest chamber is invariably gathered from adjacent grasslands or pool fringes the dry material for the front portion of the nest is gathered from nearby and is being constantly added to - right up to the time the young fledge.

### Construction

In constructing the breeding and roosting nest the beautiful firetail differs from all other Australian finches as both birds are involved in the construction process. Both gather the material and actually weave the nest. It's only when the true nesting chamber is constructed, about day 5, that the hen remains inside and tidies up, whilst the cock is solely responsible for the outer construction. On brooding changeover, relieving birds return with extra material. Usually this is used on the false front of the nest but occasionally a piece of fine grass will be added to the nesting chamber.

### Roosting Nests

Like many Australian finches the beautiful firetail constructs a roosting nest. It is ball shaped, with a diameter of approximately 120mm. The entrance is small, with no tunnel or funnel, it is comprised entirely of green grass and constantly relined or added to with this same material throughout its usage. The roosting nest is only occupied for about two months, then a new one is built close by in the immediate area. This area is then abandoned and the new area may well be 800 metres away. Roosting nests are occupied for periods every day with longer day time occupancy in the inclement weather.

It is usually built in dense growth towards the centre of the bush, is hard to find but is not concealed. The height is much lower than breeding nests. 100-130mm could be termed as average height. Many nests were found to have several feathers in the lining but this is the exception — not the rule.

Material is somewhat shorter in length 100-130mm than used in the breeding nest and the components are finer. Shape is ball-like with a diameter of about 130-150mm. The nest is better constructed than most other species, being well-woven and not as flimsy. Some 300 separate pieces of fine green grass are used with over

200 of those used in the walls and roof. The roof is of special significance, being much bigger than other species. The high rainfall of the habitat areas is probably the reason.

To highlight the rarity of this species: both the roosting and breeding nest that I displayed at the 2nd National Avicultural Convention in Queensland were donated to the Macleay Museum in Sydney, and they are the **only two** nests of this species in their possession.

**Breeding Nest**

Without doubt, the breeding nest of the beautiful firetail is, together with that of the red-eared firetail, the largest nest of all our finches. In both size and the number of components it is virtually twice as big as the next species — the diamond firetail.

In measurement, the nest varies in length from 250-455mm, comprising 1400 to 1800 separate pieces of material. I use the word material, for grass is not the only item used. I have substantiated this both with nests and photographic evidence. The average length of the grass components was 200-330mm long, one piece being 455mm long. The height of the nest is 150-200mm, width is similar.

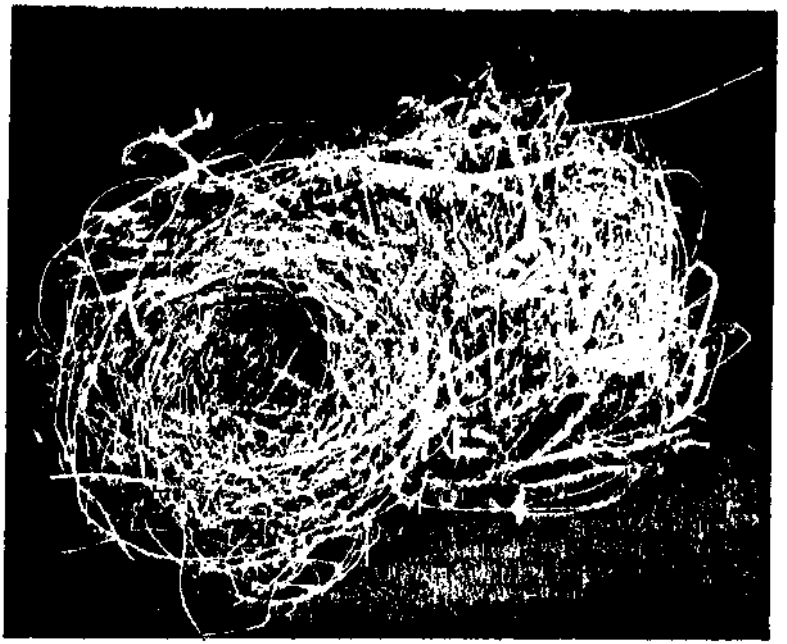
About 150mm inside the entrance is a small cup-shaped nest then a tunnel which leads to the nest chamber itself. Examination of nests with clutches being incubated revealed the cup-shaped nest to be extensively covered in droppings so it is obviously a roosting nest for the cock bird either by day or night, or both. My suggestion is that it is to indicate the nest is abandoned, hence the dead material of the front portion and wide entrance which gives the appearance of an old nest starting to fall apart. The apparently abandoned cup-shaped nest which could pass for an old egg chamber further adds to this possibility. It is difficult to make the breeding bird leave the nest, the brooding changeover or leaving bird always calls from the front and waits for a reply before entering.

Specimens from the nest tunnel are: the twine is *Cassytha glabella* commonly called dodder laurel; the other one is *Dianella* species known as flax lily. Lining is mainly fine grasses plus a few feathers. These were mostly from honeyeaters and a few rosella and bluswing parrots, plus the occasional emu or bronze-wing pigeon feather.

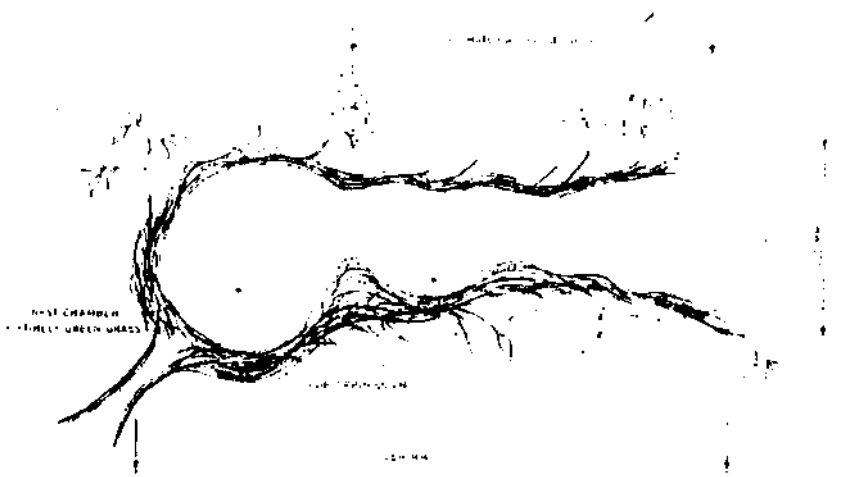
The nest chamber is oval shaped with entry gained by a narrow tunnel sloping slightly downwards which is about 50mm. The nest chamber is built entirely of green grass and is basically no different (only slightly) from the roosting nest. Once this is constructed the front portion of the nest is added. Materials for this section show great variation and invariably are of a dryer and wooden nature, even small twigs of tea-tree. The actual walls on either side of the cup shaped nest are quite thin, but increase in thickness, both fore and aft of this cup. The entrance to the outer section is wide-mouthed being 100-130mm wide. This wide tunnel is built by twining material or else long lengths of dead or dying grass, similar to straw, but shaped to give a circular shape. The main item for this was a low growing twining creeper. It is parasitic, found in damp areas, ground hugging and supports itself on tufts of grass which in time it envelops. The diameter is roughly that of onion weed, colour is lime to yellowish green, and its growth is tendril like. In the growing stage it's quite soft, but soon dries in warm temperatures, especially exposed as it is. Pieces were roughly 150-180mm in length and is gathered right at nest sites. The colour plate shows it in detail. Other woody components were woven in, but where straw type grass was used, it was always dead. The funnel is about 100mm and decreases in substance for the last 50mm.

It always goes out of its way to build its breeding nest in plain sight, a feature it doesn't duplicate or adopt with the less important roosting nest.

When feeding young the beautiful firetail rarely alights before entering the nest, as other finches do, instead is flies straight inside — through the wide opening.



**Breeding nest of the beautiful firetail finch.**
Photo by L. Turton, courtesy of The Macleay Museum, The University of Sydney.



**Cutaway of breeding nest of the beautiful firetail finch.**
Drawn J.E. Buchan

Tha construction tima differs. with the distance from grassland probably being the main factor. 10-13 days is the average period and it's this factor. probably why only a single brood is raised in the season. The roof of the nesting chamber is quite substantial and is about 125mm. Tha floor consequently is a lot thinnar. This is probably an insurance against inclement weather, for being a coastal species rainfall is regular. Some breeding nests were found with an additional exit hole in the rear. this exit was positioned between the cup-shaped nest and the inner or breeding chamber. The cock bird will continue to add to the breeding nest. Although this is the practice of other finches. these species usually confine their additions just to the nest chamber. The use of twigs. and even small branches, under the nest confirms my belief that its aim is to give the nest an "abandoned profile".

## CLUTCH SIZE

The average clutch size is 4 to 6 eggs. In size they resemble diamond firefsii eggs, but are rounder. The usual flying young are 3 to 4 but on two occasions I have seen 5. In my own two aviaries I fledged 4 from a clutch of 5 and 3 from 3. Several clutches were only of 2 or 3 eggs and on two occasions I was able to establish. without doubt. that they were the initial clutches of first breeders. So in all probability the initial clutch is small. being similar in behaviour to diamond firefalls.

## BREEDING NEST SITES

Height rarely exceeds 2 metres from ground level. Tea-tree appears the favourite tree for breeding nests but odd nests occur in swamp banksia. Breeding nests tend to be solitary affairs with no mean average between them. some 150, some 600 metres apart. and even further. Where nests were found in close proximity. it was always in areas of surface water. Tha nesting tree stood in water. these were the only sites in which breeding nests could be found reasonably close. the minimum distance was about 50 metres. Usually it is built in a lateral fork of two branches with the opening facing the outside perimeter of the territory. All nests were in easy distance of surface water. It could be that the prevalent livefood in such areas explains the closeness of nests in those sites.

## THE YOUNG

Tha young hatch between the 20th and 22nd day. fledging about 23 days later. no doubt weather is a controlling factor. Up until the last week feeding calls are hard to hear and they resemble that of *Emblema picta*. When they fledge they travel only a short distance from the nesting tree. perching both close together and close to the ground. The cock bird is very paternal and gathers them all in as night starts to fall. The breeding nest is abandoned on the 3rd or 4th day and the last used roosting nest is then re-occupied until a new one is constructed. Tha young remain in this nest until independent. Losses occur in broods during this period and I've been able to verify that considerable losses occur. Foxes and hawks. together with lack of experience. appear the reasons. When first fledged they don't resemble their parents. Basically they are a dusky-brownish colour with the head even darker. the beak and feet are black. Only a smudge represents the black bar around the eyes, base of the forehead and the fine barring is only visible at close range. The rump colour is only slightly red. nothing like the brilliant scarlet of the parents. The gape is not as evident as that of young diamond firetails. Likewise a clutch of young beautifuls is nowhere near as vocal as diamond firefalls. The young are capable of feeding themselves after the first week but remain with their parents for a further 3-4 weeks before being evicted from tha area.

For the first 7-9 days after fledging. the young are fed in cover and close to whatever nest has been occupied at the time. For two days feeding near tha breeding nest. and a further 5-7 days in close proximity to a roosting nest. The young perch close together. no more than 0.5m from the ground. From 7-9 days. they leave the cover to travel to nearby grassland. The cock bird is very aggressive

up until the following week. I once observed a cock physically harass a bronzewing pigeon that ventured too close to his three offspring.

For the next week after leaving cover the young always stay close to both parents but, from then on, young birds of various ages intermingle in groups of 12 to 15 young birds. The close family bond that existed is now broken.

## CARE OF YOUNG

Much time was given to observing breeding nests over several seasons but not once did I observe either parent leave the nest to deposit droppings of young, as occurs with the other Australian grassfinches. Subsequent examination of empty breeding nests revealed nesting chambers remarkably clean. I assume these dropping formed a deposit in the front portion of the false nest or else the cup shaped structure. Another interesting observation was that only the cock bird disposed of hatched eggshell fragments, these being carried well into the centre of the habitat cover and not to the outside perimeter.

## BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG

The young are able to feed themselves a week after fledging but are occasionally fed by the parents for a period of two weeks. From the second week they are capable of strong flight and tend to mix with other young birds of similar age and form small groups of about a dozen birds. These groups remain companions right up until the next season's breeding. From the fourth week only the young utilise the roosting nest. The parents then drive the young out of the area. The young pairs construct their own roosting nest at about five weeks, already signs of adult colouring are evident but is not fully attained until the first six months elapse.

The beak colour is the first attained and then the fine barring and dark forehead strip, the eye ring is the last to fully emerge. When driven from the area the cock bird is the main "driver" and he usually singles out a certain bird, or two, in the first instance. Because the birds are uncoloured it's hard to be sure, but because of the species aggressiveness (particularly amongst the cock birds) it's likely the young cocks are the ones. Few of these young birds (i.e. the total young population) are permitted to remain in the immediate area. Hostility is not only confined to the actual parents, all older birds resent the younger birds so that although the season starts with a certain population, in a given area, it peaks some 9 to 10 weeks later at a figure some three times greater. At the start of the next season the total population is back to what it was at the start of the preceding season.

Once evicted most young retire to the outer allowed perimeter of the parents' territory. This territory size varies with individual cock birds, sometimes 50m, in others, over 200m. The largest proportion of young then utilise an old roosting nest. Utilisation of this nest is of short duration. They establish pair bonds and build their own roosting nest. In the study period, only 10% of the preceding young remained in the 2830 hectare study area by the time the next season arrived. Methods for establishing these figures were devised but are not relevant to this article.

The small percentage of young birds allowed, or seeking to remain in the study area, were always harrassed from the centre of the habitat, the area most preferred by established pairs and took up territory much closer to the outside perimeters. When these perimeter breeding nests were examined they proved by clutch size to be of initial breeding birds, and not always of young born in that particular area. This might be nature's way of increasing the gene-pool for stationary species. More study will be devoted to this in season 1983-1984.

## BREEDING SEASON

The beautiful firetail rarely breeds before late November – early December. This is puzzling as its habitat invariably occurs in areas of high rainfall. Early spring rains and grass and herbage are prolific, so this late nesting has little to do with food

simply. I can only assume the warmer temperatures in the latter months help to dry out the nesting material, giving it a run-down aged appearance. I have mentioned this theory to scientists. It may not be the reason but it certainly highlights our lack of knowledge of the species.

## THEORIES

I have advanced several theories in an effort to explain certain modes of behaviour and this is something I've always been guilty of in field work. Once I establish a mode of behaviour that is "unusual" I try to explain it.

Comparing the behaviour of the red-eared with the beautiful firetail we have been able to record similar trends of behaviour between these closely related species. For over two years I have corresponded with Alwyn Pepper, of Scarborough, Western Australia who is the only Australian to successfully breed the red-eared firetail in captivity. I've been able to confirm that my deductions are factual.

The courting display of the beautiful and red-eared firetails, although entirely different, are both conducted in a series of three. Likewise in nest construction, both species incorporate a cup-shaped nest. However basic differences do occur with the breeding nest, which in the case of the red-eared firetail is more robustly constructed with more of a tunnel rather than a funnel entrence. Immelmann suggests that when built at higher levels a more robust structure is necessary whereas I think the main reason for the frailty of the front portion of the nest is a deliberate attempt to create an *ancient* structure. The actual nesting chamber is well constructed and is equal to the red-eared firetail's. The constant abandonment of the roosting nest might be an attempt to, in effect, hide the purest among the trees. With so many nests in a given area finding the one currently in use would be difficult to locate.

## BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

It could appear that I have belittled authors who have written what little information is available on this species. Nothing can be further from the truth! I, perhaps more than most others, appreciate the "degree of difficulty" encountered in studying this species in the field! This particular study took over four years. Denseness of habitat and the extremely low profile that the species maintained within its habitat virtually eliminates casual study. Days go by without a single sighting and it's this factor (time) that has deterred most professionals from attempting it. The fact that most of them do not have access to aviary birds would be a handicap in establishing natural behaviour. Where I have advanced further information I have done so simply to put the record straight.

## THE COLOUR PLATES

Because of all the various factors discussed, it is not surprising that photos of the beautiful firetail are few and far between. The aviary photos accompanying this article must be regarded as rare. Being the only ones in existence both are included to illustrate the various points made. The one of the hen at the nest illustrates the outer or false front of the nest and the wide tunnel mouth -- plus the "dead" nature of the material used for this part of the nest construction. The other records a cock bird of breeding colour, illustrating the lack of intensity, both of the eye-ring and the smudgy appearances in the abdomen colour. In breeding condition this eye-ring is a deep bluish-violet and the abdomen is jet-black.

## CONCLUSION

Although extremely demanding, this field study has given me great personal satisfaction and, if it represents my only contribution to aviculture and ornithology in Australia, I'm content!

Finally, I believe that the doorway through which we gain entry to knowledge and understanding of our birds' daily lifestyles — in the case of the beautiful firetail, a door which has, in effect, remained firmly closed for over 180 years -- will never be fully opened. Having said that, I am hopeful that my past, present and future studies of this most delightful and puzzling species, will assist in easing open that same door — just a little further!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely believe that this field study of the beautiful firetail is the most comprehensive ever done on a single Australian finch species by a non-professional. In compiling it I was assisted by many people, far too many to acknowledge here. However, I believe that the following should be mentioned:

- My wife Margaret, who frequently drove me many, many kilometres from home, often at "ungodly hours", and left me in places that, to her, must have seemed like the end of the earth!
- The South Australian field naturalist who prefers to remain anonymous, who took me even further in a 4-wheel drive vehicle -- as well as rendering other valuable assistance.
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- Graeme Phipps, Curator of Birds, Macleay Museum, The University of Sydney, who I am pleased to have as both friend and colleague.
- John Buchan for the drawings of the map, graph and nest.
- John Clement for the drawing of the bird.
- The committee of the society for agreeing to publish the colour plates -- and an article of the length that this is.
- Graeme Hyde, editor of *Australian Aviculture*, who when I commenced my field work with the diamond firetail was but a name — now he is a friend who is always encouraging me.

**To each of these persons I simply say -- thank you very much!**

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EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE:

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