

THE WAXBILL

The Official Magazine of the Waxbill Finch Society

Spring 2019



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THE WAXBILL

Magazine of the Waxbill Finch Society

Spring 2019

The Waxbill Finch Society was formed in June 1991 and is managed by an elected committee which is appointed every year at the AGM.

THE AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

To share information about proven breeding and feeding methods.

To encourage the breeding of African and Asiatic Estrildid Finches
(Waxbills, Munias etc).

To help members locate, exchange, purchase or sell birds.

To build up stocks of captive-bred birds.

To assist members to contact one another
at meetings or by telephone.

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A Magazine "The Waxbill" is issued quarterly to all members.

Members are encouraged to submit reports of successful breedings
and those who do receive Breeding certificates.

Special Awards are made for exceptionally good breeding results.

WFS Web Site: www.waxbillfinchsociety.org.uk

WFS on Facebook:

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Cover picture:

St Helena Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* © Howard Robinson

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Editor's Note

Mick Hart

Snow use worrying, we know it's coming at this time of year. Just make sure that the birdroom heating is working and that the water hasn't frozen up – it will all be over in a couple of weeks and the birds will be carrying on regardless! Fingers crossed. Soon be more worried about the birdroom getting too hot!

Definitely plenty of signs of the green shoots of Spring around anyway. It seems a long time since I was at the South-eastern Branch Sales Day, though it was only in November. The event was well attended and it was lovely to bump into some old acquaintances I haven't seen for a while; especially Colin Mitchelson, among those who made their way down from the Midlands.

There were a good many birds on view, from the plain to the exotic – plenty of waxbills and Aussies, and some splendid looking softbills. It's good to see some of the scarcer waxbill species appearing at these events, and nice to know that they are being made available to members.

Of course, it's the branch organisers and their helpers that give their time to make it all possible so here's a vote of thanks to them. And also of course, to the avicultural supplies firms who bring their products and sponsor our meetings; I seem to remember Feathers and Things, Planet Aviary and Softbills.co.uk were at Great Hallingbury – apologies if I have left anybody out!

I have to admit that I've struggled to find new material to include in this edition of the magazine, so there are a couple of articles from 'the archives', one from 2005 and the other 2011 – hopefully far enough back for most people to have forgotten reading them! One of the articles is on hand-rearing which admittedly doesn't happen too often, but it's nice to have a 'how to' guide just in case. The other is an article by the late Ian Hinze and his writings are always worth a read.

The 'Bird in Brief' page in the colour section is an attempt by me to get creative and provide an 'at a glance' profile of a species, giving some basic information on it and making use of some of Neil Bickell's extensive breeding data. Any feedback is welcomed, and of course if anyone would like to see the series continued and has a suggestion for a species to include just let me know.

Your photos of waxbills, nests, set-ups, etc are of course always welcome and would be specially useful to accompany any requests for a species to be profiled.

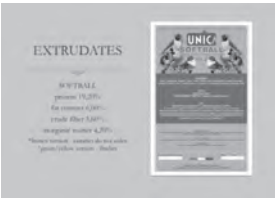
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Hand-rearing waxbills

Marcus Reeves

(reprinted from *The Waxbill*, Autumn 2005)

During the breeding season the situation sometimes arises when hand-rearing becomes the only option in an attempt to save chicks, for example due to death or injury of a parent or a nest being abandoned.

It would be a good idea to obtain the necessary equipment before such an emergency occurs. A suitable shopping list would include a small adjustable desk lamp, some 60 watt “fire glow” bulbs to fit, a small plastic rectangular lidded sandwich box, kitchen paper, cotton buds and a few very fine artists’ brushes. The latter should be made from bristles as acrylic fibres tend to be too stiff. Finally, a supply of hand-rearing formula typically sold for parrots.

Do not be tempted to create your own recipe, as the formula contains the exact proportions of protein and carbohydrate etc. for normal growth, as well as important probiotics and electrolytes.

Finally you must have a great deal of patience and a good alarm clock for that 2am feed!

Let us assume that you have just rescued a chick. Sometimes, signs of life are not obvious, but don’t give up. Place the chick in the sandwich box lined with kitchen paper and angle the lamp at about 12cm above. Make sure the lamp is secure in its position. After about 20 minutes, if the chick is alive it will have recovered its normal body temperature and feel warm to the touch. The “fire glow” bulb emits infra-red so a thermometer placed in the box will not give an accurate reading. If the chick starts to pant, raise the lamp a little to relieve the situation.

The first attempt to administer food is often the most frustrating, particularly if the chick refuses to “beg”. Generally, a light tap on the side of the beak with the paintbrush bearing a little food will produce the desired effect.

Because the quantities of hand-rearing formula are so small for such tiny birds, weighing and measuring are virtually impossible when mixing. For newly-hatched chicks still showing their yolk sacs, and chicks up to 48 hours old, the formula is required only as a virtual liquid. This can be tricky to feed using a brush, but a crop needle/catheter attached to a syringe can easily damage a baby bird's mouth and you will find it difficult to pass even the thinnest formula through such a needle. One tiny drop is all that is required at this stage of the bird's life, given two-hourly.

After two days old, the formula should be fed as a thick porridge: too watery and it will not adhere to the brush, too thick and it will stick. You must mix a fresh portion of formula for each meal, using hot but not boiling water and allowing it to thoroughly cool. Chicks that refuse to oblige and open their beaks generally only do this at the first attempt to feed them, unless they are ill or injured in some way, in which case they will not feed at all.

In the event of reluctance to accept food, gently hold the chick's head with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, and using a blunted wooden cocktail stick or toothpick tease open the beak using the other. Holding the beak in an open position, dab a small quantity of food in the mouth. Use a moistened cotton bud to delicately clean the head if your aim isn't too good! Hopefully, the swallowing reflex will occur and you will see the food pass into the crop.

How much to feed depends on the age of the developing bird. Often the crop appears bloated but you may find this is simply the presence of air. Do not attempt to release the air; the crop will soon deflate on its own. Just remember you are not stuffing the Christmas turkey and most chicks cease begging when they have had enough. After a few minutes following its first successful feed, the chick will probably defecate. Do not worry if the droppings appear a bit odd-looking at this stage.

I feed the chicks every two hours during the daytime and once at night, so that four hours is the maximum between meals. You can cease the night feed when they are feathered up at about 12 days old and enjoy a good night's sleep. You can dispense with the lamp during the daylight also at this time, if the room temperature is not cold.

Change the kitchen paper twice daily, crumpling it a little so that splayed legs are avoided. It is much easier to raise the chicks on a table than ground level and be sure to keep other pets away.

Make sure you wash your hands before and after handling the chicks or rearing equipment and wash the formula mixing pot and brush, avoiding detergents, and allow to dry naturally.

Once the chicks are feathered, it is sensible to cover the sandwich box with mesh to prevent any early wanderings. A small laundry-type plastic basket, such as those used for storing vegetables, lined with kitchen paper and with a thin perch inserted will be the chick's home for a short period until transferring them to a box cage. At this stage, it is necessary to feed them through the bars, though it may take a few attempts to get them (and you) used to the new routine.

Luckily, weaning is considered developmental and not learned. Scatter some seed that has been whizzed for a few seconds in a clean coffee grinder on the cage floor and provide a small pot of water. Mix a pinch of fine seed that requires no husking, such as fonio paddy or blue maw, with the formula at every feed once the chicks are feathered. The chicks will soon learn to feed themselves but individuals do vary in this respect. When the chicks cease to beg and instead bite at the brush then independence is not too far off.

Hand-rearing is a rewarding but sometimes demanding experience and you must occasionally accept disappointment. Providing you do not handle the baby birds more than necessary, their behaviour as adults is indistinguishable from parent-reared offspring. Don't attempt to make a "pet" of the bird or you may inadvertently cause an identity crisis. Just think of parrots.

Looking for birds, or have spare stock to sell?

Don't forget that you can advertise on the website as well as in the magazine. What's more, you don't have to wait three months between times!

Contact the Webmaster: Darren Smith
01634 290544 birds@waxbillfinchsociety.org.uk

Visit www.waxbillfinchsociety.org.uk

Branch Meetings

NORTHERN BRANCH

Venue Bramley Village Hall, S Yorks S66 2SA
(5mins from M18 Jnct 1)
Hall open 11am
2019 Meeting Dates 10th February
Guest speaker Paul Bancroft on waxbills and Gouldians
Contact Matthew Guest Tel: 07765 490227
mattsbirds@aol.com

SOUTH-EAST BRANCH

Venue Great Hallingbury Village Hall, Church Road, Great Hallingbury, Essex CM22 7TY (5mins from M11 Jnct 8)
Hall open 11am
2019 Meeting Dates 28th July
Guest speaker Dr. Gary Fitt, from Australia
Contact Mark Eaton Tel: 07712 257616
eaton217@btinternet.com
Neil Bickell Tel: 07921 464499
bickellsbirds@goolemail.com

MIDLANDS BRANCH, SOUTH-WEST BRANCH and WESTERN BRANCH are currently awaiting organisers. Anybody interested in offering their services for any of these positions please contact the Chairman, Vice-chairman or Secretary, contact details on page 2.



Letter to the Editor

Breeding Returns

Thank you to all of you who took the time to fill out the Returns form or to email/message me direct. It is great to have your support. I now have the task of putting this into order ready for the committee to have a vote.

Thanks again.

Neil Bickell
Aylesbury

Meet the Members:

Earl Dancer

In this edition our roving reporter MATTHEW GUEST speaks to Earl Dancer, having featured his father, Mark in the last edition. It would seem that great birdkeeping runs in the family.

🦅 How many years have you been a member of our Society?

I was a member back when I was in my teens as this was when I started keeping waxbills. But I left birdkeeping for 10-12 years (while I grew up a little) so it's only within the last five years that I took the hobby back up.

🦅 What are your current main species of interest?

Violet-ears, Blue-billed Firefinches, Crimson Finches, and Bamboo Parrot Finches.

🦅 What are your top tips for breeding them?

In captivity I believe birds are overfed. Don't overfeed your birds, keep them trim and sleek and their fertility will go up. This is based on my experience. And I breed in cages not flights, in flights the diet can probably be less restricted as the birds will use more energy flying around in a larger area.

🦅 What design set-up have you found to be most successful?

I have all cages in my birdroom, large flight cages though as I believe in giving the birds as much space as I can offer. Even my Bengies have decent sized cages.

🦅 Do you foster much?

Because it's mainly Violet-ears I breed I do use Bengalese heavily, due to the nature of how hard Violet-ears are to parent-rear.

🦅 What does your conditioning/rearing mix consist of?

My rearing mix is my own blend of ingredients but it's based around Cede Tropical. To this I add cooked eggs, couscous, vitamins and frozen insects.

For conditioning I find that the absence of feeding is better than feeding the birds a rich diet – contradicting what I always previously believed.

☞ **What would you consider to be your greatest waxbill achievement and why?**

Breeding 66 Violet-ears in a season (2018), something I never thought was possible.

☞ **And finally, what is your top tip for someone that is starting out with waxbills?**

Buy good quality birds from breeders where possible. If you buy good quality stock in the first place you stand a much better chance of success in breeding.

Thank you for your time Earl.

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The Care and Breeding of the Dybowski's Twinspot

Ian Hinze

The Dybowski's Twinspot *Euschistospiza dybowskii* (named after Jan Dybowski [1856-1928], a Polish traveller in tropical Africa in 1892), is one of the most frequently available of all the twinspots and is a species that, if its needs are carefully catered for, soon settles down to breed.

The species measures 4¾in (12cm) in length and the sexes differ slightly. The male's head, neck, hind neck and breast are dark grey and his wings are dark greyish olive-brown, often with some small white spots on the median and secondary coverts. From his mantle down to his rump is a deep lustrous crimson red, contrasting with a dark black tail. His underparts from the lower breast are also black, with the flanks conspicuously and boldly spotted with white. The eyes are reddish brown and the narrow eye-rims are reddish pink, although they can also appear greyish, and the beak is black. The legs and feet are dark greyish brown to brownish black.

The female is slightly smaller than her mate and the red on her back and rump, when viewed in good light, appears duller. Her flanks are similar to that of the male's but, particularly during the breeding season, less striking and her lower breast and belly are grey, not black. The eyes and eye-rims are like the male's.

Almost-ready-to-fledge nestlings I viewed in the nest had a clearly visible small patch of crimson on their backs, which was again evident when I caught a youngster up for examination four days after fledging. The eyes are dark reddish or brownish and the youngsters have completely black bills with a whitish gape. The legs and feet are light grey. Interestingly, the first areas of the body to show any spotting were around the shoulder regions.

Note: A number of field guides containing illustrations of this species depict the female as having grey flanks and with more profuse spotting than the male. There is a suspicion that black-

flanked females may all be from the Upper Guinea population west of Ghana, which is separated from the Lower Guinea one by >1,500km. In that event the two populations may prove to be taxonomically separable.

The calls of Dybowski's Twinspots are very interesting. The alarm call is a loud tset-tset-tset or tsit-tsit-tsit and the close contact call is a softer, thin, run-together tsit-tsit or tsee-tsee. The male's song is extremely variable and complex but not particularly loud; nor is the song as long-lasting or as beautiful as one might come to expect after reading various descriptions by various authors (which probably emanate from one original source). The song is given when alone, most often when perched or resting on the ground under cover, and is also uttered during display. The female also sings, especially if unpaired and alone. Her song is generally softer than, but otherwise like, the male's.

Dybowski's Twinspots have a large range and are found in Sierra Leone and Guinea, and from Mambilla and the Jos plateaux in Nigeria, east to Cameroon, the Central African Republic, northern Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Zande district of Southern Sudan. It has also been recorded in two different locations in extreme south-eastern Senegal.

This most attractive species inhabits grass-grown rocky places, cultivation at the bases of granite hills, the edges of gallery forest and grassy plateaux on high mountains and also river banks and the edges of riverside forests in savannahs. The bird is known to seek food on the ground, amongst dense bushes, which consists mainly of grass seeds and small insects and, while otherwise very little is known of its habits in the wild, captive birds have been seen habitually digging for food, flicking the substrate to either side with their bills.

At breeding time the Dybowski's Twinspot's courtship display is said to usually take place on the ground, which I have seen, but I have most frequently witnessed it being performed on a perch. The male, while holding a stem, feather or other nesting material, such as a leaf, in his bill, sometimes by one end and at other times in the middle, may, but not always (see below), hop up to the female to be directly in front of, or alongside, her with his head held up at a steep angle, the belly feathers erect and the tail partly spread. He

bobs up and down, his feet never leaving the ground, and occasionally his head may be moved slightly to one side and then the other. The song or a series of softer notes is uttered during this display. If the female is receptive she will crouch down and quiver her tail. The male usually drops the nesting symbol while mounting the female and copulation ensues. After copulation the male utters a few notes while still alongside the female. If the male fails to perform the display fully, such as by stopping through accidentally dropping the nesting symbol, the female may perform the display to entice copulation.

Most frequently, I have witnessed the male alone on a perch, nesting symbol in bill, and then his starting to perform the display. This immediately attracted the female who would fly up to be alongside. Most times the display was unsuccessful, the female suddenly seeming to lack interest and to, usually, hop down to the seed dishes to begin feeding.

On a number of occasions I have seen the female take the initiative and perform the courtship display as good as any male. Her display attracted her mate, whereupon he would perch alongside and watch, with or without nesting material in his bill. I never once saw copulation follow the female's display.

NESTING

I can find no information on nests in the wild, but my captive studies revealed the nest to be an untidy roundish affair built entirely by the male out of, mainly, coconut fibres and a few pieces of dried grass. The male of one pair also tore off strips of the newspaper which I used to line the metal trays at the bottom of the cage, placed them amongst the coconut fibres, and positioned one large piece very close to the circular entrance hole. All nests were constructed in bushy Boston ferns, with nest-boxes, which were placed on the ground, being completely ignored. However, Roddy Hay, a dear friend from Scotland, who never provided pot-plants, related how his birds always used wooden half-open-fronted nest-boxes that were positioned high up in their cages, concealed behind tacked up pieces of heather.

I took advantage of a nest abandoned by one of my pairs to measure the seven eggs it contained. Interestingly, the top of the

nest was open, but this could have been due to a lack of nesting material or the fact that the bushy leaves of the Boston fern offered sufficient cover. Three of the eggs were 18mm long x 8mm wide at their broadest point; one was 18mm x 7mm; one was 17mm x 8mm; one was 17mm x 7mm; and the last one measured 16mm x 6mm. Further abandoned nests, one containing 12 eggs, which could have consisted of a second clutch being laid after the first failed to hatch, were also examined and their eggs measured. In all I measured 35 eggs. The average size was 17 x 7mm. The largest egg was 18 x 8mm and the smallest, but not the narrowest, was 15 x 7mm. The narrowest egg was only 6mm wide (16mm long).

Of the eggs measured, five came from the third nest of a pair who had previously successfully hatched and reared four young from their two previous nests, two in each nest. On each of the two occasions that young were successfully reared the female laid five eggs, with three failing to hatch both times. During the first successful nesting, one of the eggs contained a dead in shell.

The other 30 eggs came from two pairs which regularly copulated and incubated their eggs. These 30 eggs were, on average, larger than the five eggs abandoned by the previously successful pair, i.e. 17 x 7mm against 16 x 6mm. As I didn't measure the six unhatched eggs from the successful pair I have no way of knowing if this latter measurement was normal for them, or was abnormal through a lack of calcium and/or other minerals due to the female already having laid two previous clutches.

During the early days of incubation, whenever a bird arrived to relieve its mate off the nest it always carried a piece or pieces of nesting material in its bill. This behaviour appeared to cease once nestlings hatched, or at least once they were of a certain size.

I knew immediately when nestlings were in the nest as the bloodworm (see below) started to be taken in ever increasing quantities by the parents. Also, prior to entering the nest to feed the young, occasionally the parent would alight on a perch close to the nest and, in its haste to feed its offspring, accidentally regurgitate food onto the perch, which would then be reconsumed before the parent carried on into the nest. Interestingly, the parents always arrived near the nest making the alarm noise. This seems rather



Dybowski's Twinspots and youngsters in Ian Hinze's birdroom in 2000, when WFS Breeding Returns showed 19 of the species were raised. On 2010's Returns only four were recorded, but in 2017 the total was back up at 18.

BIRD IN BRIEF

1 – St Helena Waxbill (or Common Waxbill) *Estrilda astrild*

photo © Pieter van den Hooven



Recorded WFS Breedings

2017:	74
2016:	49
2015:	39
2014:	4
2013:	11
2012:	24
2011:	53
2010:	45
2009:	33
2000-2008 inclusive:	91
1992-1999 inclusive:	86



A small waxbill (11-13 cm), very widespread and common in Africa, south of the Sahara.

Has been introduced successfully to other countries, including Portugal and The Seychelles.

Favoured habitat is long grass or savanna, as well as marshes, reeds and abandoned cultivated areas.

In the wild, generally feeds on grass seeds and occasionally small insects.

This species is generally fairly hardy in aviculture. The majority of breeders suggest keeping individual pairs in a good-sized cage for best results. They usually lay four to six eggs in a largish well-constructed nest that often includes an entrance tube and has a cock's nest on top.

Sources: *Finches and Sparrows*, Peter Clement, Helm Publishers, 1999. *Estrildid Finches of the World*, Derek Goodwin, British Museum and Oxford University Press, 1982. *Waxbill* magazine contributors.



Lagonosticta umbrinodorsalis (Chad Firefinch, Reichenow Firefinch) as discussed in Tony Jochem's article, pp. 30-32, photos © Pieter van den Hooven



SOUTH-EAST BRANCH MEETING

28th July 2019

**Great Hallingbury Village Hall
Church Road, Bishops Stortford CM22 7TZ**

Guest Speaker: Dr. GARY FITT



Gary is an Australian scientist and bird enthusiast who lives in Brisbane Australia with his partner Cheryl, who is also a bird enthusiast and a great photographer. Gary and Cheryl keep many different species of finches at their home and are the manufacturers of the Naturally for Birds supplements, which have been formulated by the Save the Gouldian Fund team of scientists (a charity that Gary and Cheryl are both involved with) to help further the scientific research and study of wild birds. Gary has a wealth of knowledge and experience in birdkeeping which he happily shares through his society talks and his work with Save the Gouldian Fund and Naturally for Birds.

Doors open 11am

For more information contact
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REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE

strange because one would assume that, in the wild, such calls would attract the attention of predators.

Koepff, author of *The New Finch Handbook* (1984) recommends housing Dybowski's Twinspots in well-planted aviaries as, she says, it has been known to be easily frightened and to react violently if kept in cages – but I have never experienced this with my own birds, which settled down extremely well in cages containing Boston fern plants, so much so that I could replenish their food and water dishes while they sat and watched. In a planted flight, however, it tends to react more in the way it would in the wild as, at the first sign of danger, it disappears into the densest thickets.

Food should consist of a typical waxbill mixture to which has been added extra Japanese millet. Some breeders recommend the addition of small seeds such as maw, lettuce and niger and those found in so-called tonic mixtures, but my own experience proved such to be superfluous. Wild ripe and half-ripe seeds are also sometimes eaten, as is eggfood. Livefood, especially during the breeding season, is vital. My birds refused to take even the smallest mealworms but eagerly devoured bloodworm, both fresh and defrosted, and whiteworm. Other foods to try could consist of the likes of small waxworms, spiders, fruit-flies and their larvae and defrosted pinkies.

Males are extremely aggressive towards other males at breeding time and will also attack other species that have red masks. Also, getting a potential breeding pair together is by no means easy and must be done carefully and gradually. It is best if the sexes can be partitioned by an all-wire door or panel and allowed to get to know each other through this. After about 7-14 days, and providing the male has not been trying to attack the female through the partition, it can be pulled back and the pair allowed to become more intimate. A close watch must be kept on proceedings at all times and it may be necessary to separate the pair after 20 minutes or so by putting the partition back and then repeating the process over a number of days. The amount of time the birds can be allowed to stay together can be increased daily until one is absolutely sure that a bonding has occurred. This usually comes about after the male has occasionally pursued the female into the undergrowth, as well as singing and displaying to her over a few days. It is important to have

plenty of cover for the female to retreat into in case the male becomes overly amorous and she isn't feeling receptive.

If all goes according to plan, a nest may be built, usually on or very near ground level, out of grass, moss, leaves and similar fibres, as well as using feathers for a lining. Nests constructed on the ground have been known to have an entrance tube 7-9 cm long, while those built above ground had none. An average clutch of eggs numbers three to four, which hatch after about 13 days. Both sexes share in the incubation and brooding of the young during the day, but the hen alone at night. Koepff reports that the parents are quite nervous during brooding and often leave the nest if it is disturbed. However, I have found that they only leave at the very last moment.

Feeding of the young, which appears to consist solely of livefood for the first few days, is also undertaken by both parents and when they come to feed well-grown young the parents usually utter the alarm call. Broods of three or more young are brooded for seven to nine days, but if there is only a single nestling the female will brood at night till it is 14 or 15 days old. The young beg in the typical estrildid manner but fledglings may simply stretch their heads straight towards the adult. Fledging occurs at 18-20 days and independence is achieved at 29-31 days.

This species is definitely not for beginners, but requires considerable care and attention that only experienced aviculturists can provide. Certainly, it offers excellent breeding potential in capable hands, especially if a temperature of 70° Fahrenheit (22° Celsius) can be maintained.

This is the last of the articles submitted by Ian Hinze prior to his untimely death in December 2008. His previous article on this species 'Dybowski's Twinspot Puzzle' appeared in *The Waxbill* published in Winter 2009. It covered the part Ian played in establishing that Dybowski's could be divided into two sub-species.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS IN *THE WAXBILL*

Contributions to this magazine are welcomed and may be sent to the Editor at the address below.

Mick Hart, 23 Oakfield Avenue, Hitchin, Herts SG4 9JB
michael.hart73@ntlworld.com

Aviaries

from the book *Bird Keeping*

by C. E. Dyson

published by Frederick Warne and Co., 1878

I feel some hesitation in writing on this subject, because I have no personal experience of any of the plans proposed for aviaries; and so many of the ornamental buildings for which designs are given are constructed after a fashion which is extremely picturesque, but not in the least adapted to the wants and comforts of the birds within them.

Making the latter the chief consideration, I should suggest that an outdoor aviary built of wood must necessarily be hot in summer and cold in winter, and that it would be preferable built of brick, stone, or rubble, and with an open roof thatched; in fact, a little thatched cottage, whitewashed within and painted or plastered without. This might be either circular, with the front wired and glazed, about 14 feet in diameter; or a more perfect one might be obtained by making the building 18 feet by 12, and 12 feet high, with a bay window occupying the front, looking south, the panes of which should be made to open outwards, to allow of the galvanised iron wire netting with which the glass must be lined throughout.

Either concrete, brick, or tile flooring would be needed to keep out vermin, and this should be covered three or four inches thick with sand and gravel, mixed with a little old mortar. The roof should be thickly thatched, and the open rafters will form most comfortable roosting places for the birds. On one side of the aviary should be a deep porch with a double door, the outer one of wood and the inner one of wire. If this porch were furnished with seats, the birds could be observed with the utmost ease.

A fountain playing in the centre of the aviary, with a shallow basin round it for the birds to drink at and bathe in, would add to the beauty of the scene and to the birds' pleasure. If plants were not

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admitted into it, there must be upright poles with perches nailed onto them in the four corners of the room; but a better plan would be to have evergreens in pots all round the room, which should be removed and replaced by others when defaced by the birds. A couple of orange and myrtle trees in tubs, placed in it during the summer would delight them; fir trees are the best evergreens. Any shrubs that would be injurious to them must of course be avoided. Boxes of mignonette, chickweed, and groundsel, placed on the window-sill, would be a great acquisition to the birds; but a constant succession of these plants would be necessary, as they very soon strip them of every flower and leaf.

Seed-hoppers and pans for food and glasses for water should be hung up round the room, and hanging baskets and swings might be introduced. The windows should be furnished with blinds and shutters, to be drawn down and put up as the weather demanded. If this aviary could be warmed during the winter, the warblers and other delicate birds might be its inmates throughout the year; if not, only the hardy seed-eating birds could remain in it; the others must be removed to a winter cage or aviary in the house, kept at a certain temperature. Stoves placed in the aviary would be injurious to the birds; the heated pipes give out so much carbon as to affect their delicate lungs; but it might perhaps be warmed by the apparatus used for conservatories.

A conservatory devoted to birds would be a very delightful abode for them; but of course it must be wired within the glass, and means must be taken to shade the birds from the fierce summer sunshine. A portion of a conservatory opening into the house is sometimes wired off, and this forms a very pretty aviary, and the birds look exceedingly well with flowers all about them. I have seen a small room between two well-warmed sitting rooms used as an indoor aviary; this was only about 12 feet by eight, with a French window, or rather door, opening outwards, and a wire grating within it, a fountain in the centre, and the walls were boarded and furnished with shelves one above the other, on which were placed the seed and water glasses, and boxes for nests. There were double doors to this room; I think one was of wire and the other glass, so that the birds could be seen in passing from room to room. The fires in each of these sufficiently warmed this aviary in winter.

Very few young birds were reared in it, and breeding in aviaries is always very doubtful. The idle birds are apt to pull the nests of the industrious birds to pieces, and to eat their eggs and peck the young ones. Then there arise jealousies between the cocks and hens, and a good deal of quarrelling and fighting go on, so that it is by no means a happy family: the only chance of success is by putting the several couples in separate cages till they are ready to build, and then turning them into the aviary, putting no single birds in at the same time to interrupt the proceedings. However, some of these couples may be faithless, and the hens are apt to quarrel over the nesting places, so that it is not a plan to be recommended, and it would be best to keep no hens in the aviary. Experience proves that when there are no ladies to excite jealousies amongst the gentlemen, matters are conducted much more harmoniously; they might be safely admitted during the winter, perhaps, but as early as February they must be taken away.

Most birds like breadcrumbs, egg, mealworms, ants' eggs, oats, barley-meal, fruit and berries and green food occasionally. Various recipes are given for universal pastes, which are to afford food equally to granivorous and insectivorous birds' but it is just as easy to give the food that suits the hard-billed and soft-billed birds respectively, as to make them all eat of the same dish; a plan which, of course, involves a great deal of fighting over the food and is very likely to cause the starvation of the more timid inmates of the aviary.

In selecting the birds that are to be placed together, their several dispositions and natural habits should be well considered, and none likely to tyrannise over the others should be admitted. As a rule, birds of the same size and class should be placed together; a great deal of suffering would be caused by confining combative birds in a small space, and by giving them opportunities of worrying and tormenting their weakly and delicate companions.

For myself, I should not care to keep English birds in an aviary. I infinitely prefer putting baskets and warm nesting-places into a sheltered outhouse, where the birds may find food during the frost and snow of winter, and can enjoy their liberty at the same time, allowing them to come and go at their pleasure.

It is a mistake to expect any birds to live happily in a very open aviary, unsheltered from the extreme heat of summer and cold of winter. When at liberty, they can find protection from both in their native coverts, and although they may possibly exist through the winter exposed to a chilling east wind, they suffer extremely from it, and will often mope in corners, ruffle up their feathers, and refuse to sing till a gleam of sunshine comes to revive them. The glare of a noontide sun, too, in the height of summer, is exceedingly painful to birds which are exposed to its fierce rays, without the means of finding shade. Many of the tropical birds sleep during the extreme heat of midday, and continue the custom for some time after they are brought to England: doubtless they resort to the deep recesses of their magnificent forests, and find shelter in their luxuriant foliage, when the sun is at its meridian in their native lands.

An aviary constructed of two compartments, one within a warmed room and one without, communicating by a sliding panel or swing door, might answer well for semi-hardy birds, and give them fresh air, sunshine and warmth; but of course the outdoor compartment must be protected by shutters in winter and at night.

An unused attic, with wired windows, and a loose net before the door, to enable the floor to be swept out, and the room to be entered without allowing the birds to escape, would be the simplest and most inexpensive aviary; but under a slated or tiled roof the room would probably be very hot in summer and cold in winter. A thatched roof would not be open to the same objection. An oilcloth flooring kept constantly washed and sanded would answer well for this birdroom.

Care must always be taken to keep the aviary clean and carefully swept out, and sanded afresh either every day or every other day, according to the number of birds confined in it, and as little dust should be raised in this process as possible – it will sometimes affect the lungs of the delicate birds injuriously. Fresh air, sunshine in moderation, warmth, and cleanliness are indispensable for all birds kept in captivity.

Of late years a great many outdoor and indoor aviaries have been devoted to the breeding of foreign birds. Some birds build in preference in branches of trees or bushes, and if the smaller foreigners are admitted, they must have cocoa-nuts, baskets, and

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boxes of all shapes and sizes. Dr. Russ recommends as excellent nesting-places the small travelling cages made of bars of wood, with one or two bars pulled out: in these, if necessary, open baskets can be put, and they make good hiding-places for the little birds, into which the larger birds cannot follow them.

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PUBLICATION DATES OF *THE WAXBILL*

The following list gives the intended publication dates of the WFS magazine. These dates can usually be relied upon as accurate, but circumstances may occasionally dictate a deviation from them!

Spring	mid-February	Autumn	mid-September
Summer	mid-May	Winter	mid-November

If you have an item you would like included in the magazine, please ensure that it reaches the Editor (23 Oakfield Avenue, Hitchin, Herts SG4 9JB or michael.hart73@ntlworld.com) by the middle of the month before publication if at all possible.

Lagonosticta umbrinodorsalis

by Tony Jochem

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the thirteenth in a series of contributions from Tony Jochem based partly but not entirely on his excellent book *Estrildid Finches in the Picture*. There are accompanying photographs by Pieter van den Hooven and I have the kind permission of the photographer to use them in the *Waxbill* magazine, the photos for this article appear in the centre pages.

GB: Chad Firefinch (Reichenow Firefinch). D: Tschad Amarant.
F: Amarante de Reichenow. DK: Chadamarant. E: Pinzón Candela de Reichenow. CZ: Amarant nigerijský. NL: Tsjaadamarant.

IDENTIFICATION

Length: 10-11cm (4.0-4.4in)

Lagonosticta umbrinodorsalis

Origin

South Chad, North Cameroon, Central African Republic.

Description

Forehead, crown, sides of throat and nape are grey. Face, chin, throat, breast, upper part of belly and flanks crimson. The colour of the vent gradually changes from greyish-brown to black, moving towards the undertail coverts. The birds have a few white dots on the flanks.

Nape, mantle and back are reddish-brown to chestnut brown. Wing coverts and flight feathers are dark olive-brown. Uppertail coverts intense red, tail feathers black. The bill is steel blue with a black tip. Eyes are brown with narrow pink eye-rings. The legs are grey-brown.

The female is less intensely coloured. Head, nape and the sides of the throat are clearly grey, without any red. The back and the wing coverts have just a trace of red. The belly and the undertail coverts are olive-coloured, shifting to dark grey. The bill is a light brown.

There are no subspecies. In fact, the Chad Firefinch itself was long considered to be a subspecies of *L. rhodopareia bruneli* (Jameson's Firefinch). The two species are very similar.

CHARACTERISTICS, BEHAVIOUR AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Voice

This bird's song is very similar to that of the African Firefinch and varies from loud rattling trills to a melodious, chirring song.

Social behaviour

Chad Firefinches are most peaceful birds and well suited to be kept in a society aviary together with other Estrildid finches. They find their food on the ground.

Habitat

The Chad Firefinch is found in a rather limited region comprising the savannahs north of the Adamawa Range and its northern foothills, covering parts of northern Cameroon and part of the Central African Republic.

Populations

These birds are reported to be a common sight within their restricted range.

Climate conditions

Temperatures vary from an average of 25°C during the night to 30°C during the day (77-86°F) in all seasons. Precipitation is zero in January and up to 20cm in July. The beginning of the breeding season is around the end of July.

Food

These birds forage on the ground, looking for grass seeds, seeds of herbs and other plants, and insects. When raising their young they take increased amounts of live food, in the form of little spiders, termites and the like.

Nesting

The dome-shaped nest is built near the ground, in thorny bushes overgrown with grass or other flora. The nest is built by the male out of leaves of grass and has a side entrance protected by a little roof. The interior is finished with soft materials like tiny feathers and tufts of grass.

Reproduction

In most cases there are four eggs in a clutch, that are hatched by the parents together. Normally it takes 12 days before the young come into the world, and after 16 days the nestlings leave the nest. After three months they have attained their mature colours.

Remarks

If you ever manage to lay your hands on some of these birds, make sure you keep them apart during the breeding period, as they will not tolerate any others of their kind coming close.

©Tony Jochem – www.avitoon.nl

Consulted literature: *Estrildid Finches in the Picture*, 3e version 2015

WFS SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Annual membership subscriptions are due on 1st July.

Current rates are:

£15 UK – Printed magazine

£8 UK or Overseas – Emailed magazine in pdf format

£17.50 UK Deluxe – Printed magazine and pdf version

Juniors (under 18) Free

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All applications are for the calendar year 1st December to 30th November.

All applications received after 30th October are treated as joining from the following 1st December.

The following is a list of forthcoming Australian Finch Society meetings which WFS members are invited to attend under a reciprocal arrangement with the AFS:

Norfolk & Suffolk Meetings Needham Market Community Centre, School Street, Needham Market, Suffolk, IP6 8BB From 11am till 3pm
2019 meetings: March 24th, April 14th, May 12th, July 14th Table Show, September 8th Chris Ward, October 27th Club Show.

For more information please contact Mick Baldry on 01473 622983

South West Branch Village Hall, Botus Fleming, Saltash, Cornwall.
Doors open 2pm, Meetings start 2.30pm.
2019 meetings: tba

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Please inform Advisors if you are keeping their species and if you need stock or have stock for disposal. They are then able to help members find the birds they require.

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