

Bicheno

Poephila bichenovii

Bicheno's, Also often called Owl Finches or Double barred finches are found in North and East Australia. They can be found in Parks, gardens and the edges of cultivated areas as well as semi arid areas with scattered woodland. There is a sub-species which has a black rump as opposed to the white of the nominate race. Bicheno's are found in small parties and flocks, outside the breeding season these can be quite large.

Length: 4 inches (100 mm).

Male: The face is white bordered with a black band giving an owl like appearance. There is another black band on the breast with a white belly and underparts. Brownish grey forehead, grey on the nape and finely marked with grey/ black barring on the back. Wings black with white speckled markings. Beak is silver / grey as are the legs. Rump white and the tail is black. There is a fawn mutation and a white.

Female: The female is very similar to the male but the white face is slightly greyer.

Juvenile: A greyer version of the adult with darker face mask and a blacker beak.

General Info: The Bicheno is one of the all time favourites for aviculturalists, their charming nature, beautiful markings, free breeding and ease of keeping will always rank these amongst the most popular of all finches.

Avicultural notes: I have found these birds great avicultural subjects. Easy to care for and breed, so ideal for the newcomer. They do really well in planted flights and large cages, and will breed well in both situations. They are quiet natured and mix very well with other birds in community aviaries. I never keep these or any tropical birds without access to heated quarters in the colder months, although some will still roost outside in the harshest of winters with no adverse problems. They are fascinating as a small flock in an aviary and so interesting to watch with their social interactions. They spend a lot of time foraging on the floor.

Feeding: A basic maintenance diet would consist of a good quality foreign finch mix. Basically this is all that is needed, but this can be supplemented which I always do with grass and herb seeds. Green food in the form of chicory, lettuce, dandelion leaves, Spinach or chickweed can be offered but make sure they are free from pesticides and chemicals. A good soft food such as EMP and live foods such as mini-mealworms and ants eggs can also be given once or twice a week but only a very small amount of egg food and 1 or 2 mini-mealworms each bird. During breeding periods protein levels need to be increased so I feed soaked, sprouted seed and egg food mixed together when breeding. Grit and crushed oyster shell is essential as to, is a calcium supplement. Fresh water should be given everyday with vitamin supplements added periodically.

Compatibility: As already mentioned Bichenos mix well with other birds of similar size and are normally inoffensive birds.

Breeding: Bichenos can be extremely prolific and easy to breed, either in a large cage or aviary they will use a standard box in a cage or a basket, or make their own nest in an aviary. They lay 4-6 eggs, sometimes more! which are incubated for 13 – 14 days. For reasons of the adult's health only 2-3 broods are recommended per breeding period. Fledging occurs at around 17-19 days and chicks are weaned at around a further 2-3 weeks, adult plumage is achieved between 3 and 5 months.



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