

Wings 'n' Things

Blue faced Parrot Finch

Erythrura Trichroa

Blue faced Parrot finches were first described in 1835 by Kittlitz. They have a wide geographic distribution as far South as the North East tip of Australia to the Caroline Islands at their Northerly extent. Also from East on Vanuatu Westerly to Celebes. They are also found in a wide variety of habitats from Mangrove and Eucalypt forests and clearings, rain forest, scrub and undergrowth, grassland and open areas such as airfields and often near gardens and plantations. There are 10 sub-species and these vary from very little to noticeable differences in size and colouring. There can be confusion with the Papuan Parrot Finch which occurs in the same area but Papuans are very much larger and also at a glance can be confused with the Katanglad which has at closer inspection slightly longer legs and a bright red collar.

Length: 4½ to 5 inches (110 to 125 mm).

Male: The forehead and face are a deep violet blue. The rest of the bird is bright green except the tail which is red. The eyes are black and the beak is black. The legs and feet are brown. There are normal pied and lutino mutations known.

Female: The female is a paler form of the male. Although some females I have kept are very bright in colour, resembling the males but the extent of the males blue mask extends further back.

Juvenile: Pale greenish-buff, green back and wings, tail dull reddish brown. Bill black with yellow edging. Hatchlings and very young chicks have four distinct iridescent spots, 1 on each corner of the lower and upper mandibles.

General Info: The Blue Faced is one of the more common Parrot Finches and is quite common in aviculture. They are quite robust and will easily look after themselves in a mixed aviary.

Avicultural notes: From their first importations these birds proved quite difficult to keep and were regarded as bad subjects for an aviary. Now thankfully they are regarded as one of the easier species to maintain and breed. They do really well in planted flights and large cages, but in smaller cages they will become overweight very rapidly. Of all the Parrot Finches we have ever kept these are one of the easiest to breed and are fairly robust. I never keep these or any tropical birds without access to heated quarters in the colder months. I have kept and bred these birds in both aviaries and cages, with the same degree of success. Although when kept in cages the food intake has to be monitored and restricted and care has to be taken with the males as they will sometimes drive the hen to breed almost to exhaustion, incidentally as with other Parrot finches this 'driving' the hen (chasing her) is essential to bring the hen into breeding condition and is part of the normal courtship behaviour. They are fairly simple and easy to keep.

Feeding: A basic maintenance diet would consist of a good quality foreign finch mix. This can be supplemented with grass and herb seeds. They adore pear and I always offer pear and sometimes apple. 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 but as previously said Forbes Parrot Finches, in particular the cocks have a real tendency to get fat, so one has to be careful not to overfeed. 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: Blue Faced Parrot Finches mix well with other birds of similar size and are normally inoffensive birds. Some pairs can be slightly more aggressive during the breeding period but this is usually only confined around the immediate nesting area and is not normally serious. When housed

with other Parrot finches care must be taken to avoid cross breeding, in particular Blue Faced cocks will chase any Parrot Finch hens trying to mate with them.

Breeding: Blue Faced are 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. As with all Parrot finches they use copious amounts of nesting material and they will lay 3 – 5 pure white eggs which are incubated for 13 – 14 days. If foster parents are used such as Bengalese the young are reared without problems. But if parent reared it must be noted that most parrot finches stop brooding their chicks well before they are fully feathered so if bred in un-heated outside quarters then there is a real danger of losing the chicks to the cold. For reasons of the adult's health only 2-3 broods are recommended per breeding period. Fledging occurs at around 17-19 days and are weaned at around a further 2-3 weeks, adult plumage is achieved between 3 and 5 months. Care should be taken that the breeding does not take too much out of the hens.

