

## Breeding Pintail ParrotFinches.

I have kept Pintail Parrot finches on and off for over 20 years as well as most of the other species of parrot finch available to us here in the UK. I eventually decided to breed this species seriously so purchased 6 pairs of Pintail Parrot Finches 2 pairs of yellow bellied, 2 pairs of normal red bellied, 2 red bellied cocks and 2 yellow bellied hens from Dave Campbell. These were added to 2 pairs of red bellied and an odd cock I already had so giving me a total of 8 ½ pairs.

One thing worth noting is all the birds were fresh imports and definitely young birds, the hens were carefully chosen by me. Pintails when very young and before their first moult are said to resemble the hen, i.e. they are mainly green. Whilst this is true hens have a very pale blue face and very young birds have a totally green face so it is possible to distinguish them. So to be sure of a true hen, you must choose the ones with a very pale blue face, if they have a totally green face then you have a chance of either sex Yellow bellied hens are identified by a yellow rump as opposed to red.

Newly imported Birds must be wormed, I have had freshly imported Pintails with these parasites and it is essential to worm these straight away.

### Housing.

All the Pintails were placed in an inside flight 7 ft long, 3ft wide and 6ft high. The flight only had 1 solid wall at the back which was covered in white ceramic tiles, one side 7 ft long was next to a walkway and faced a bank of breeding cages. The opposite side was screened to half way by green coloured sheeting from the roof to half way down dividing the flight. This partitioned them off from a breeding pair of African Grey Parrots. The front of the flight was 3ft wide and this was where the door was and the feeding dishes were.

The floor was wood chippings and there were also potted plants placed all around the flight. These were mainly weeping figs and palms and were a height of around 3 – 4 ft. There were various nest boxes both half open and the Gouldian type box as well as wicker nest baskets. The temperature was never let to go lower than about 15°C and the bird room was air conditioned to stop the temperature rising too much during the summer months. Ample water for bathing was available to all birds at all times.

### Feeding.

The basic 'maintenance' diet consisted of a mixture of seeds as follows (measurements were all approximate). This mixture was available at all times.

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Plain Canary seed | 40% |
| Panicum Millet    | 20% |
| White Millet      | 15% |
| Japanese Millet   | 15% |
| Red Millet        | 5%  |
| Paddy Rice        | 5%  |

The 'maintenance' mix was supplemented daily with a soak seed and soft food mix which was fed everyday at late afternoon. The ingredients with the exception of EMP were not religiously adhered to but in the main contained the following,

Approximate measurements for 12 birds;

|                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| EMP eggfood,                | 3 heaped dessert spoons |
| Soaked and germinated seed* | 3 heaped dessert spoons |
| Orlux universal pate,       | 1 heaped dessert spoon  |
| Wild Weed seed**,           | 2 heaped dessert spoons |
| Pinhead Oats,               | 1 teaspoon.             |

This mixture is fed damp with moisture coming only from the washed and partly dried soak seed. If mixture was slightly dry then it is moistened with cranberry juice (just because that's what we had available).

\*Soak seed for my Pintails was the 'maintenance' mix as above with paddy rice added at a ratio of 2:1, this is soaked in warm water to start with which then is allowed to cool to the ambient temperature for 24 hours then drained washed thoroughly and left in a large sieve in a warm environment for a further day before washing again very thoroughly again and spread out on a surface to allow to dry a little. It is now ready for feeding. One very important note, any 'furry' foul smelling or mouldy seeds must be thrown away. These are extremely toxic and dangerous, for this reason soaking seed should only be done by those with experience.

\*\*Wild weed seed is a mixture made by Beyers and is a mixture of grass seeds, millets and various weed and herb seeds.

Also given daily was fruit in the form of a conference pair halved and scored, it has to be conference as other varieties seem too soft and mushy and are ignored by the birds.

Green food was given ad-lib, Grass, Dandelion, lettuce, chicory, spinach etc.

Mealworms were given and only sometimes taken by the birds.

Crushed oyster grit was always available as was mineral grit and baked and crushed eggshells.

Water always available with a vitamin supplements (Avigold) and once or twice a week Calcilux was also added.

General management After worming and quarantining the birds in cages all the Pintails were placed into the flight. Plenty of nesting material was supplied coconut fibre, dried grass and fresh grass. The first signs of breeding were two of the cocks displaying to hens and chasing them with tails held upright and vigorously shaking them to and fro whilst twittering what I can only describe as scratchy, grating excuse for a song. A huge nest then appeared on the floor about 1 ft long and around 6-8 inches high, it was a huge mass of grass and coconut fibre with an entrance hole near the bottom. Soon after 5 eggs were laid and then a second nest was built by another pair in a Gouldian style nest box which was fully exposed and around 5-6ft from the ground and 4 eggs laid in this one. Both sets of eggs were transferred to foster Bengalese and the eggs replaced with dummies. Both sets of eggs were extremely fertile and all 9 hatched but all chicks died between 2 and 11 days old. All chicks had full crops and were being brooded at the time. This went on for some time, I tried parent rearing with the same results and even once tried fostering to Blue Faced Parrot finches but these butchered the chicks on hatching! In total I lost 54 chicks! After some investigations which led me to talk with breeders from the continent I administered what the Belgians call 'Bengalese Medicine.' It is a sort of ant-biotic. This is administered to all foster Bengalese twice a year. And I also gave it to the Adult Pintails. The results were totally amazing; I never lost a chick after that – Not one! Either from parent rearing or fostering to Bengalese. During the breeding I moved a couple of pairs to a 4ft breeding cage that was facing the flight and the Pintails went straight to nest without problems. I was now cage breeding and flight breeding. My Pintails moulted after every second round of eggs, this moult was extensive and covered the birds in pin feathers. I found Pintails extremely prolific and had no problems rearing with foster Bengalese or parent rearing in cage or aviary. Eventually all the plants in the flight shed their leaves and died probably due to lack of watering so were removed. From this I would think that a planted flight is not essential to breeding. The majority I bred were yellow bellied, so from that I would deduce that the red bellied birds carried the yellow gene – in other words splits. From my 8 ½ pairs I bred 37 birds on the perch. I placed a dozen or so of my own bred birds in my outside flight which is 16 ft long, 9ft wide and 10ft high. It has a small pond with a stream and waterfall which is around 2-3ft high. I had to remove them after a short while as I had a number of drownings under the waterfall. All were male birds and I lost in total 5 birds, I don't think pintails are amongst the most intelligent of finches! All other birds in this flight have never had a problem, they included, Sunbirds, Peales Parrot Finches, Blue Faced, Java Sparrows, various waxbills and Zosterops. Pintails I found to be very prolific but needed to be either in a colony or in very close proximity to a colony to have any chance to breed these birds. Also I feel age is also important and the younger you acquire birds the better. Incidentally I also found this to be the case with Bamboo parrot finches and bred these, right after the birds first moult to their adult plumage from their juvenile plumage. In the

flight situation my Pintails only 2 pairs ever went to nest at any one time, whether this was due to the dominance of the 2 pairs or other pairs either starting, finishing or in mid moult I cannot say or whether 1 male courted more than one female, but when pairs were separated into cages, when not moulting they all bred. I found chicks very strong and healthy. (After administering the 'Bengalese' medicine to the foster parents or natural parents prior to hatching). The chicks weaned onto a dry seed mix with no problems either.

**Steve Pellow.**