

Breeding Bamboo Parrot Finches.

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I have been keeping Parrot finches for over 20 years, breeding and keeping Blue Faced, Red Headed, Forbes, Peales, Pintails and the Bamboo and have successfully bred all of these species. About 4 or 5 years ago or so I decided to concentrate and breed three main species seriously they were the Peales, Pintail and Bamboo, for this article I will concentrate on the Bamboo. As I mentioned in my article on the Pintail, I also fear the worse for this Parrot finch and believe we may have seen the last of this species in our aviaries.

To me Bamboos are one of the most beautiful finches I have ever seen, close up they are truly stunning and are amongst my favourite Parrot Finches. After a lot of hunting and months waiting I acquired 7 pairs of Bamboos from Bird Export, we believe that they were the *Brunneiventris* sub-species from what we were able to gather from field guides due to the blue-green wash on the flanks and talking to Peter White who is a great source of knowledge on various Parrot Finches and who incidentally is the only person I know who has actually observed Bamboos and Pintails in the wild. I also had 2 cocks and 1 hen of the *Intermedia* sub-species often called by the continentals the Lombok. Some of the birds were in juvenile plumage and some were just moulted into adult plumage, so I took a chance that I had actually 7 pairs, of course I did not I had 6 true pairs and 2 odd cocks in the end.

General management After worming and quarantining the birds as I do with all imported birds, I have learned the hard way to do this. The Bamboos were placed some in cages and some in a flight that contained Pintail Parrot Finches. The ones that were still in juvenile plumage were placed in an 8ft cage, 3 pairs were placed in 4ft long 18in high and 15in deep breeding cages, which faced the flight containing the Pintails and Bamboos, the Lomboks or Intermedias were in adjacent cages. On the floors of the cages which were divided into 2 one side wood chips were placed and on the other Oyster grit mixed with sand and mineral grit was placed, just enough to cover the bottom. On the side that contained the wood chippings is where I always put the food (fed as described below), on the other side with the grits I always put the drinking water and the bath. My reasons for doing so are as follows the seed and softfood get thrown or spilled from the dishes by the birds and eventually mixed in with the wood chippings as do mealworms and the birds spend time flicking through the chippings – which are fairly coarse, this helps keep the birds occupied as they sift through the chippings and find the odd mealworm etc. The other side which has the grits and sand is the only side of the cage that contains any water, this is because I don't want to have any water where there is foodstuffs to keep moulds and fungal problems to a minimum any water spilled just dampens the grits and soon evaporates whereas if water is spilled on the wood chippings they stay damp for a long time due to the absorbency and encourages moulds. Although this probably is not essential and probably a bit eccentric it works well for me and reduces the amount of times they need cleaning out from once every 3 days with news paper bottoms to once a week with this method. On the front of the cages in the top left hand corner is where the nest boxes were placed on the side of the gritted bottoms, I used both half open and Gouldian type boxes. Coconut fibre was placed on the floors of the breeding cages and the flight, although the birds in the flight carried some material around no real attempt was made to nest. But in the cages 2 of the 3 pairs built the typical Parrot Finch nest with a massive amount of fibre crammed into the nest box with a small hole and a over hanging fringe. Two eggs were laid in one box and 4 in the other, I then transferred them to Bengalese foster parents. The parents then went into a dramatic pin-moult where they look totally shabby. The third pair in the breeding cages then also built and laid 4 eggs these too were transferred to Bengalese. From the first round of eggs only 3 eggs were fertile and all 3 hatched after 2 weeks and the Bengalese reared them without problems. From the eggs of the third pair all 4 eggs turned and hatched the parents went straight to nest again and did not go into a pin-moult. I always clear the nest box right out and pull the nest apart and re-use the coconut fibre if it is clean. The pin-moult started with the birds looking very shabby then a mass of white quills appear on their head and neck, the whole process took around a month to finish. Then both pairs went to nest again, there were a few pin feathers left though. I don't fully know the reason behind the pin-moult so soon after their moult from juvenile plumage to adult plumage. Maybe the protein level was too high, or because I broke the cycle so they never had chicks to feed, it upset their hormone levels, I don't know. But the third pair nested again with no pin-moult? I bred these and various other Parrot Finches such as Peales, Pintails, Forbes, Red Headed and Blue Faced as well as lots of other Australian finches with varying degrees of success but I found the Bamboo more difficult and very much less prolific than all the other Parrot Finches. I eventually moved nearly all of my finches on and replaced them with large Parrots and Macaws, but recently have acquired a few pairs of Parrot Finches and that has rekindled my affection for them and am in the midst of building another annex to my bird room especially for Australian and Parrot Finches. Due to the recent import bans and the extraordinary price of Bamboos and Pintails at the moment I only wish I had kept the colonies that I had. Breeding these and other Parrot Finches my conclusions are the younger the better, as soon as they are sexually mature breed them! more than 1 pair is needed, preferably a loose colony, a good variety of food stuffs – don't be afraid to experiment. To use a saying I hate, but cannot think of a better one 'think outside the box'. I never bred the Intermedias but I never knew the age so they could have been too old.

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 to keep humidity up.

Feeding.

The basic 'maintenance' diet consisted of a mixture of seeds as follows (measurements were all approximate). This mixture was available at all times. I feed this to all my finches, when you have lots of different species it saves time and is cheaper to feed just one mix, some of the smaller waxbills and Australian will obviously not eat the Paddy rice but that's ok. Different species get their own individual needs in the soft foods.

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).

This mix and the soft foods were also given to my foster Bengalese.

*Soak seed for my Bamboos was the 'maintenance' mix as above. 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, I believe this is essential to these Parrot Finches.

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. I also fed Fig seeds, sometimes from fresh figs and other times from the packets of whitworths figs, which were cut up and washed under a tap in a sieve to remove the sticky flesh. I also fed the Peales Parrotfinches in this way and they were very much sought after by them.

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

Mealworms were given, both mini and standard.

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

Steve Pellow.