

Wings 'n' Things

Forbes Parrot Finch

Erythrura Tricolor

Forbes Parrot finches were first discovered in 1817 by Vieillot on the island of Timor, Forbes are also called Blue Breasted Parrot finches, Tanimbar Parrot Finches, Timor Parrot finches and Tri-Coloured Parrot finches. They are found on the small islands of Tanimbar, Timor, Wetar, Babar, Damar, and Romang. They are found Forested edges, grasslands and bamboo thickets, also seen in cultivated areas close to forest edges. From sea level up to 1400 meters. Very little known of their behaviour, they breed in the tops of Coconut palms. They are found in pairs or small family groups. No sub-species are known as yet.

Length: 3½ to 4 inches (89 to 101 mm).

Male: The forehead, face, throat and breast is a deep cobalt blue, becoming lighter and suffused with the green on the belly and under tail coverts. The upper parts from rear crown are a mild-green. Tail coverts and tail are red. The eyes are brown and the beak is black. The legs and feet are light flesh colored. There are sea green, pied, lutino and yellow rumped mutations known.

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

Juvenile: Pale greenish-buff breast and belly washed with blue, 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: There is not a lot known about this Parrot finch in the wild, and until quite recently was unknown to aviculture. It is believed that Forbes appeared on the continent in 1981 after being smuggled out of their natural habitat and imported with the mistaken Latin name of *Erythrura Trichora* as opposed to their proper but similar name of *Erythrura Tricolor*. They were extraordinarily expensive, and at one point were regarded as the most expensive finch in the world, fetching in excess of £5000 a pair.

Avicultural notes: From their first importations these birds proved very prolific breeders. Subsequently their price rapidly came down. 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 the most prone to obesity. Particularly the males! 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 Parrot finches 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: Forbes 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 Forbes hens trying to mate with them. Also one point worth noting, I have found with this species they have a real tendency to pull the feathers from the back of each other's head. Leaving them bald and sometimes the feathers never grow back.

Breeding: Forbes 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, box 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 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 as I have found that laying eggs and the 'driving' of the males exhausts the hens of this species more so than other Parrot finches I have kept.

S. Pellow.

