

Wings 'n' Things

Hecks Grassfinch

Poephila acuticauda hecki

Hecks Grassfinches, In the wild they are found in North West Australia. Where it is found in Eucalyptus savannas and open forests, usually near water courses. It is classed as a sub-species of the Longtail Grassfinch and can be distinguished from them by having a red beak as opposed to the longtails yellow beak. The Hecks seem to be more common in aviculture in the UK than the Longtail. They are found in flocks almost all of the time but the pair bond is strong and pairs are never far from each other.

Length: 6.75 inches (170 mm).

Male: The head and face are bluish- grey with black lores. Beak a coral red, there is a black bib that extends over the throat. The Back is a brownish buff, flight feathers dark brown. Rump is white tail is black with 2 long thin central tail feathers. There is a black marking on the flanks tapering from the wings to the top of the leg area. The legs and feet are orange-red. There are various mutations known such as cream, fawn and pied.

Female: The female is a slightly paler form of the male with smaller black bib and leg stripe, also the tail is a little shorter and the beak a slightly paler red.

Juvenile: Paler reddish buff version of the adult with short tail and a blacker beak with a orange-red base..

General Info: The Hecks is one of the more common Australian finches in aviaries across Europe. They are quite robust and will easily look after themselves in a mixed aviary.

Avicultural notes: I have found these Grassfinches fantastic avicultural subjects. Easy to care for and breed. They do really well in planted flights and large cages, and will breed well in both situations. The pair bond is extremely strong in this species and I have found they will call constantly and pine if pairs are split up into different cages or aviaries. It has been documented that these Grassfinches will fight with other closely related species such as Parson Finches or Masked Grassfinches, but I have mixed all three in an aviary with no aggression from any of the species mentioned. 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 absolutely fantastic as a small flock in an aviary and so interesting to watch with their social interactions.

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: Hecks Grassfinches 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 grassfinches care must be taken to avoid cross breeding, in particular Parson Finches, and Hecks should not be crossed with the Longtail as this will be bad for both as the beak colour will be diluted in the Hecks and darkened in The longtail so the sub-species should be kept separate.

Breeding: Hecks Grassfinches 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. They lay 4-6 eggs 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 are weaned at around a further 2-3 weeks, adult plumage is achieved between 3 and 5 months.



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