

Masked Grassfinch

Poephila personata

Masked Grassfinches, In the wild they are found in Northern Australia, in the Kimberlies through to the Northern territories. Where it is found in wooded Grasslands, savannas and roadsides often near water and often with other Grassfinches such as Parson Finches and Longtailed Grassfinches.

Length: 4.75-5 inches (125-135 mm).

Male: The head and nape are a warm brown colour, back and wings also brown. Tail is Black fairly long and tapered, rump white. The face has a diamond shaped black 'mask' and beak is bright yellow. There is a fairly large black marking on the flanks tapering from the wings to the top of the leg area. The legs and feet are orange-red.

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

Juvenile: duller brown version of the adult without the black face mask and with a shorter tail and a blacker beak with a pale lemon yellowish base.

General Info: The Masked for me is the most attractive of all the Grassfinches both in appearance, habits and disposition. Slightly more difficult to breed than the Hecks or Parson. across Europe. They are quite robust and will easily look after themselves in a mixed aviary.

Avicultural notes: I have found the Masked Grassfinch a fantastic avicultural subject. Easy to care for and breed once you have got them going. 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 documentation that these Grassfinches will fight with other closely related species such as Parson Finches or Longtails/Hecks 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 very inoffensive birds and I have never seen any showing aggression to each other or other species. They spend a great deal of time on the floor when housed in aviaries.

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: Masked Grassfinches as mentioned mix well with other birds of similar size and are inoffensive birds. When housed with other grassfinches care must be taken to avoid cross breeding, in particular Parson Finches and Hecks.

Breeding: Masked Grassfinches are prolific once they start breeding, 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.

