

Red Headed Parrot Finch

Erythrura Psittacea

Red Headed Parrot finches, have been documented in aviculture as far back as the late 1800's. In the wild they are found on the island of New Caledonia, where it is reported to be doing well in gardens and plantations. They are found in pairs or small flocks which forage amongst bushes and shrubs for seeds and insects. There are no sub-species.

Length: 4.75 inches (120 mm).

Male: The head and face are bright red. The rest of the bird is bright green except the tail which is red. The eyes are black and the beak is black. The legs and feet are brown. There are normal pied, seagreen and pied seagreen mutations known.

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

Juvenile: Pale greenish-buff, 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: The Red Headed is one of the more common Parrot Finches in aviculture. They are quite robust and will easily look after themselves in a mixed aviary.

Avicultural notes: I have found these Parrot Finches fantastic avicultural subjects. Easy to care for and breed. They do really well in planted flights and large cages, but in smaller cages they will become overweight very rapidly. I find it essential to give the breeding pairs a rest after 2-3 clutches of eggs as the males courtship is very rough and it looks as if he is attacking the hen but this 'driving' of the hen is an important part of the cycle to bring the hen into breeding condition. Sometimes the hen can be plucked quite bald. If not rested and allowed to moult out the birds never recover and are always sickly. 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, but not with the same degree of breeding success, in cages there are few problems but in aviaries disturbance by other birds seemed to upset the breeding and nesting, maybe a single species aviary would be the answer but as I only keep mixed aviaries I have never tried this. When kept in cages the food intake has to be monitored and restricted, but I must say that I have found these the least likely to become overweight of all the parrot finches. As described above care has to be taken with the males as they will sometimes drive the hen to breed almost to exhaustion.

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. 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: Red Headed 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 any Parrot Finch hens trying to mate with them.

Breeding: Red headed 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. 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 are 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.



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