

### **My thoughts on Parrot Finches.**

I have always been fascinated with Parrot Finches for over 20 years now and have been keeping and breeding them for as long. Species I have kept are Blue Faced, Red Headed, Forbes, Peales, Pintails and the Bamboo and have successfully bred all of these species. I have never kept Katanglads because of two reasons, 1 I have never seen any top quality un-related young birds for sale and 2, they have never really taken my interest at all.

As a group of finches Parrotfinches really captivate me, each species has its different ways and habits and I thought I would share some of my problems, observations and thoughts of the species I have kept. Plenty has been written of where they come from, what they eat and so on, so I thought I would share some of the problems I have encountered and how I have tried to overcome them.

Firstly one of the easiest to keep and breed I have found was the BlueFaced, they will breed on a basic finch mix and little else. They stay in good condition and become fairly tame in average sized cages, my father used to feed them from hand with mealworms. The only problems I have encountered with these is sometimes a Cock will drive the hen a bit hard when breeding and exhaust the hen, also the Cocks seem to prefer hen Forbes if kept in the same flight. But generally a great bird to keep and I always have room for these stunning birds.

Also very easy to breed but only once given the right diet and conditions is the Pintail, I found them extremely prolific, very beautiful but possibly the most stupid of all the parrotfinches. I do keep these at the present time but it is such a shame that more effort was not put into breeding these before the ban, and effort into making them a common species in our birdrooms, now we are seeing very high prices. But as I have mentioned they are very prolific given the right conditions as I have mentioned in a previous article, so the price should come down in time. I have found that if there is a daft thing to do in a flight or cage these will do it. I have a large outdoor flight which has a pond which is fed from a small stream that starts as a small waterfall, this is where the Pintails decided to bathe and drown to such an extent I had to remove all Pintails from the aviary, all other birds were fine to this day I have never lost another to drowning this way. I also found 1 drowned in the Jam jar water feeder with its head stuck under the glass lip of the jar!

Breeding was easy so long as there were other pintails within sight and or hearing range. So more than 1 pair is the trick, as it is with the Bamboo, I bred these in cages alongside each other so they could not see one another but could hear each other, another factor I believe was young birds. I bought them mostly un-coloured. Of all the species this one is the one I will regret most for selling my breeding pairs and their offspring when I changed direction slightly into large parrots.

One of the trickiest to keep in top condition and successfully breed long term is for me has got to be the Forbes. The reason I say this is the tendency to become out of condition and fat, particularly the cock. But on the flipside personally I find these very prolific given the right diet and conditions; in fact I breed more of these than any other I keep. If kept in a flight the cocks stay in condition fairly well but I like to control my breeding so prefer cages. But here is where a problem lies, you may think a large cage then, well I have still had problems with the males getting fat. The problem is they will sit in the nestbox and fly down to the food and back again, they will spend all day in the box. They are by far the laziest birds I know of. So no matter how large the cage you cannot make them fly and burn up their energy, so I limit their dry seed intake and soft food and fruit make the bulk of their diet and this is limited, this seems to keep the problem at bay. Seems you can take a Forbes to a cage but you can't make

it fly! Although they are not so bad when in a cage without a nest box, they seem to flit about a bit more, but I still limit their food. One other problem I encounter with these was plucking around the heads of my young birds in my colouring up flight cages. First I thought it was the young Blue Faced so I separated them, it continued, I then split the cocks from hens as soon as I saw any dark blue feathers on the cocks or powder blue of the hens coming through.

Then one day I caught one of the young hens pulling beak full's of feathers out of another young uncoloured hen. Why they do this I don't know, I don't even have a guess, If it was a male it could be young adolescent males just practicing their breeding and courtship displays, but why the hens? Another problem easily avoided is when the hens breed it can sometimes take so much out of them producing eggs that their legs and toes splay sometimes really badly. This is due to the production of eggs taking too much calcium out of the hens bones to compensate lack of surplus calcium needed for egg production. To stop this I use Calcilux added to the water periodically and also a vitamin supplement that has vitamin D3 as this is needed for the absorption of calcium, D3 is also found in unfiltered sun light, but there is not alot of that in our birdrooms. When resting from breeding I place the cocks of all my species in my main flight which is around 16feet long, 9 feet wide and 9 feet high, after a short while they are busting to breed again in tip top condition. The hens I keep separate in either a small flight or flight cages.

Peales are one of my favourites, I find them tame, inquisitive and seemingly one of the most intelligent of the Parrotfinches, they breed well I have found if given fruit, sprouted seeds and they adore fig seeds. They are charming little birds always watching you with great interest in the bird room. The only problem with these I have encountered is a seemingly dry flight feathers on their wings, the feathers don't seem to knit together. The affected birds do bathe, and preen. I first thought that there was no oils preened through their feathers but if sprayed with a plant mister the water just runs off the surface of the feathers and it is plain to see there are oils there. One thought I have had is that they may just be worn out, when they moult the birds moult all their other feathers except the flight feathers on the wings so not replacing these they just get worn out. Another thought was as I feed a lot of fruit the sugars of the fruits being sticky were being preened through the feathers and ruining them. But it only affects the flight feathers and not any others, and they do also bath so I ruled this out as well. It would be interesting to hear of anyone with an answer to this. Incidentally it does not affect all the birds and never in an outdoor flight.

Red Headed parrotfinches are always to me very skittish and seem always to be on the go and remain nervous, They are fairly easy to maintain in good condition, but again here the cocks can sometimes drive the hen and pluck her almost bald. I always give these a large cage and remove the cock if he chases the hen excessively. Otherwise a great bird to keep and breed. When colouring young up I feed the same diet as I feed the adults I want to bring into breeding condition. First I didn't do this; I fed the 'maintenance diet' as soon as I took the young away from the parents. But had a few fatalities particularly with Peales, but I then thought, in the wild the birds will only breed when there must be enough foods available for them to bring the chicks up and possibly a second or even a third brood and for the chicks to get enough to eat when they are weaned to see them through their juvenile period until the season ends when food is a little less available or nutritious. This will include a first moult which for a young bird to change all of its juvenile feathers to their adult plumage takes a lot of energy and resources from their bodies. By feeding the same as the breeding adults I stopped losing any colouring up youngsters. I also feed all youngsters regularly fruits and a herb salad mix bought from a supermarket, they eat every scrap of these with exception of the purple coloured lettuce. I believe this benefits them immensely.

There are supposed to be 12 species of Parrotfinches, over the range they are found I often wonder with all the small islands and vast areas of un-inhabited and un explored areas of

rainforest that are found within this geographical area, is there any more species still to be discovered? I really hope so! Being so small surely some isolated islands or areas have been unexplored, overlooked or the sightings have been missed or miss-identified as most small finches are difficult to identify in a fleeting glimpse or when they are silhouetted. There may be small populations that differ from others so much they can be regarded as separate species, after all The Katanglad was only recently discovered and only in a small geographical area. Surely there must be another out there.



*S. Fellow*