

August 2008

FINCH BIZZ





Finch Bizz

AUGUST 2008

Hawkesbury Branch of the Finch Society of Australia Committee Members



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www.hawkesburyfinchclub.com

Club meets the
4th Wednesday
of each month
(except
December) at
Castlereagh
Hall

Finch Bizz Contact Details

Next Meeting:

Wednesday
24th
September
2008

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Disclaimer

Official Name: Finch Society
of Australia, including
Hawkesbury Valley Branch

Editorial

It's become quite evident in the bird keeping fraternity that conservation of both wild species and aviary birds has become more of a focal point. Many clubs have been promoting these important activities in their club magazines and newsletters more than ever. Many finch clubs and individual breeders have supported organizations such as the Save the Gouldian Fund and the Australian Waterhole Count. Also, many bird clubs are promoting in house breeding programs where they select species of finches that need attention and promote a breeding program amongst their members to concentrate on breeding that species. I believe these types of club activities will become popular in the future. They promote an interesting, competitive and very worthwhile feeling.

Our numbers were down last month but considering the very cold weather on the night it was to be expected.

July Meeting

The evening entertainment was a power point slide presentation on the workings of the Save the Gould Fund. This presentation showed the landscape at the Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary in the Kimberly region of Western Australia. This property consists of 750, 000 acres. This property is fenced fully and recently all cattle have been removed. This stock removal will give the property every chance to slowly resort back to pristine natural bushland.

The slides showed the various finches found on the property: Pictorellas, Bloods, Longtails and Gouldians were shown on the slides. We also saw the various equipment bought such as an off road, all terrain vehicle and a fully equipped four wheel drive. These were bought from moneys donated by bird clubs, individual bird breeders and companies from all over the world.

The second part of the night was a very quick slide presentation on what the National Finch and Softbill Association is all about. One of the things that they are promoting is working towards future importation, from overseas, of Finches and Softbills. Let's hope that someday down the track they are successful, any new species or influx of new blood of already declining species is truly something to look forward to.

Raffle

Another great raffle with most prizes being donated. Thanks to all who support the club so much with their continued donation of prizes.

1st prize	Nick Susanjara	\$25 gift voucher (<i>donated by Ace Colony Birds</i>)
2nd prize	Michael Dukes	\$25 gift voucher (<i>donated by Ace Colony Birds</i>)
3rd prize	Kevin Westbury	20kg bag seed (<i>donated by Produce Direct and Pet Centre</i>)
4th prize	Sue Bailey	Gift voucher (<i>donated by Shane Sanger - Birds R US</i>)
5th prize	Kevin Westbury	1 pair Yellow Turquoise Parrots (<i>donated by Terry Whiteman</i>)
6th prize	Dennis	Gift voucher (<i>donated by Shane Sanger - Birds R Us</i>)
7th prize	Ces Hawkins	1 box Trill (<i>donated by Garswood Bird Shop</i>)
8th prize	Nick Susanjara	Gift Voucher (<i>donated by Shane Sanger</i>)

Elenbee Bird Supplies

Club members wishing to have seed or accessories delivered to meetings should place their orders by:

- phoning 02 96245129; or
- emailing elenbeebirdsupplies@aapt.net.au

Future deliveries:

- 26th November, 2008
- 25th February, 2009

Note: Most seed prices have come down, plain Canary still remains high eg. Finch mix now \$32.00 for 20kg bag.

Customs Media Release: Bird smuggler's wings clipped

Friday 8th August, 2008

Customs investigators have arrested and charged an international airline passenger for attempting to smuggle two live birds into Australia.

Customs officers working at Sydney International Airport questioned the passenger, a 37-year-old man, when he arrived on a flight from Singapore yesterday (7 August).

During a subsequent examination, officers located the two live birds in the baggage of the passenger.

Customs investigators arrested the passenger, a Singaporean citizen.

The man was charged under the terms of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 for the illegal importation of regulated live specimens.

He has been held in custody and will appear in Central Local Court today.

The maximum penalty for offences under this Act is imprisonment for 10 years or a fine of \$110,000, or both.

The birds have been tentatively identified as Asian finches and have been euthanized as they posed a potential quarantine risk.

Customs National Manager Investigations, Richard Janeczko, said Australia has strict laws governing the import of live animals.

"This is a cruel trade which has the potential to damage Australia's biodiversity, and Customs will investigate and prosecute offenders" he concluded.



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Predatory Birds - Culprits and Solutions by Nigel Wilby

Taken from Finch Breeders Review—Oct 1987

For some of us, predatory birds don't present a serious problem. People living in highly urbanised areas seldom have to worry about anything more worrying than a pushy pigeon, a menacing mynah bird or a psychotic sparrow. However, once we leave the shelter of the smog zone and red tile jungle, aviculturists' problems begin to worsen as far as feathered marauders are concerned.

People living near large parks, in the leafy-suburbs or on the rural urban fringe need to be constantly vigilant against avian attack.

When you build an aviary and stock it with birds, your activities are noticed by all sorts of creatures, especially other birds. Of course they are very curious and will pop over for a chat. I once came home from school, many years ago, and found the neighbours cat, two currawongs, the dog from across the road, and my young

brother all admiring my new aviary. The occupants, budgies, were not impressed, and expired shortly afterwards. When I could eventually sit down again, having been thrashed for using up 8½ of the neighbour's cat's nine lives, and for using my brother as a blunt instrument, I realised I had a problem. Sadly for many of us, we address the problem too late and losses of our birds occur.

To begin with, I believe that we as aviculturists need to be in harmony with the wild birds in our environment, and that includes the birds who like "Cordon Bleu Take Away". If this is a problem, then shoot the bastards. Seriously though, this is not a real solution and can get the perpetrator into serious problem with the N.P.W.S. and the police. What we have to do is make it difficult for the winged predators and to give our birds the shelter and protection they need whilst they are in our care.

Let's look at the bad-guys first, the birds who cause most of the problems. They can be divided into two categories:

(A) Louts, bullies and nuisances

(B) Homicidal maniacs

GROUP (A)

BULLIES

- 1) Currawongs - big crow like birds with big yellow eyes and nasty long beaks. Quite capable of killing small birds and swallowing them whole. Usual practice is to jump around on top of the aviary fixing your birds with a menacing gaze.

NUISANCES

- 2) Kookaburras - usual practice is to sit on top of the aviary waiting for something to happen. It usually does, with the inmates having heart failure.

LOUTS

- 3) Noisy Miners and Wattle Birds - largish aberrant honeyeaters which during their breeding season don't especially like intruders in their breeding territories and can give an Orange Breast a nervous breakdown.

GROUP (B)**HOMOCIDAL MANIACS**

- 1) Hawkes/Falcons - usually the Chicken Hawke, the Goshawk and the Peregrine Falcon, occasionally others.
- 2) Owls - usually Barn or Boobook owls.
- 3) Butcher Bird - a member of the Shrike-Thrush family, the nastiest of the lot

Now that we know the culprits, a little about their habits and lifestyles. Category (A) birds are just hanging around. Put a flea in the ears often enough and they'll find somebody else's turf to monster. After a while your birds will get used to them to a certain degree.

Category (B) birds; friendly old "Kookas" don't realise their impact but they have a home range which they'll be loathe to leave. Try to get your neighbours to feed them, then they'll realise your garden is a dead waste of time and their visits will eventually stop.

Category (C) birds; these birds have defined beats or flight paths crisscrossing a territory that may be several kilometres in extent. Your aviary is just one of a number of potential food sources that the raptors, the group name for taloned birds of prey, will investigate on a cyclic basis.

Owls usually have a haunt or roost that they hide in during the daytime. They'll come back at night after dark and cause a terrible amount of damage. However, one good scare is usually enough to cross you off their list of brasseries. I did this one night by sitting up till 3 am with an old fishing rod. When the owl stooped on top of the cage, I swatted it on the back (rather hard). I never saw that owl again but I did have a great bunch of barn owl feathers.

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Hawks will tend to visit once every couple of weeks. Obviously, they don't actually get anything so hunger forces them to move on. The trouble is that their dive bomb attacks and flushing stoops usually cause mass panic which results in many broken necks, fractured skulls and nest desertions. N.P.W.S. WILL allow you to trap a hawk that causes problems and they will relocate it many kilometres away. Besides which, hawks don't normally attack when they think people are about. Nine times out of ten you'll see the results, not the attack itself. I've seen two such attacks on my premises and it literally took my breath away. The Neophema parrots were still panic flying half an hour later. I chased the hawk away both times and I'm sure it was the same bird each time.

Butcher birds live in pairs throughout the year. The glorious song that they employ to mark their territory is actually in two parts, one sung by the male and the other by the female. The two parts are synchronized and sound as though they are uttered by one bird. This is called antiphonal singing (quite a few of the waxbills use this method of singing). The above is about all the nice things I have to say about Butcher birds.

Unlike the other bullies etc, Butcher birds are not motivated by hunger. They catch lizards,

mice, small birds etc, and impale them on spiky bushes. They are always well fed, so can afford to take their time. This is why they represent the biggest threat to our finches and small parrots. Their beak is a wicked device, long and thin enough to go through half inch mesh. On the end is a vicious notched hook. Once a Butcher bird grabs a bird there is no escape. Either it pulls the head through the wire and eventually off, or it rips such a big chunk out of the poor victim that it dies from shock or loss of blood. One bird isn't enough, so it will sit there nearly all day and I've had up to ten finches beheaded by one Butcher bird in two days.

The Butcher bird sits motionless making little clucking noises. He seems to mesmerize his intended victims. Closer and closer they come, clinging onto the wire, oblivious to their fate. Suddenly he strike. A brief struggle and its all over. Strangely enough, the other birds don't learn by their observations and will soon fall victims themselves.

Now, apart from "shooting the bastards", what can we do? Electric fencing is one answer but it won't stop the birds in the aviary from breaking their necks. Roofing the flight with clear fibreglass seems to minimise attacks from above as well as providing shelter from heavy rain. Have an overhang on the sides and front to prevent birds from leaning own over the top.

Provide shelter in the aviary by planting dense bushes and have deep shelters so your finches can "go to ground". Parrots reaction to predatory birds is to out fly them and that's why they break their necks. Finches however, dive for cover and lie "doggo". This is good for everything except Butcher birds who lure their victims out of cover. So don't give the Butcher birds anything to sit on. They are not equipped to hang onto wire effectively as their legs are very short and weak. Clip back screening shrubs so that they don't get too close to your wire sides. Avoid ledges formed by pipe or crossbeams by wiring on the outside.

If owls are a problem at night, then have an apron for the front of the aviary which you can roll down at night.

Remember, especially when newly acquired birds are released into an aviary, that they have no tolerance of big birds, particularly if they have been inside a shop for a while.

Remember, if you have just built an aviary then you are going to have visitors. If you take precautions from the start you may be able to live in harmony with predatory birds. Don't blame sudden deaths on the breeders or dealers that you got the birds from as it won't necessarily be their fault. Protect new birds for about a week until they get used to the avifauna of your garden and never release birds into an aviary after lunch as they won't settle own in time and the noises they make at night will attract owls.

Red-Crested Cardinals

by Terry Atkinson—Taken from *Finch Breeders Review*—March 1986

(This article is based on a lecture presented to the Finch Society of Australia by Terry Atkinson in February, 1986.)

I have kept Red-Crested Cardinals for a while now, but I have not had very much success with them because they suffer from a three month syndrome problem. For some unknown reason, after the young have fledged and are about three months old, they die. One day you will see them in the cage in the morning, and they will be jumping around with nothing noticeably wrong. However, by that afternoon they are on the ground and within a couple of hours they are dead. When you pick up the dead bird, you can actually put your fingers either side of the breast bone. They deteriorate a great deal in only six hours. After having a lot of problems with this, I had a talk to Mike Cannon, the Wollongong Veterinarian, and he suggested that the minute that the chicks hatched we should put them on a product called Amprol Mix, and keep them on it for three months. Amprol Mix is used on birds that are going light, plus it is used for Coccidiosis. The Cardinals have not got Coccidiosis because we had them under the microscope and we had cultures done on them. They have a "going light" syndrome.



Since putting them on the Amprol Mix the day they hatch, we are starting to rear them. Once they get over three months of age and start to break their first moult, you don't lose them.

They are a long lived bird and they will breed for years and years. I know one chap that has had one Cardinal for twenty-three years.

The biggest problem with these birds in years gone by was the sexing of them. The new idea of surgically sexing them has solved this problem. Cardinals are easy to surgically sex by placing a scop in between their third and fourth rib. In the past, a lot of breeders had two cocks or two hens together, and as soon as they had them surgically sexed and correctly paired, they haven't stopped breeding. Some people say that you can sex them by the difference in size. You may be able to sex them that way when they are five or ten years old. Other people will tell you they can be sexed by the colour of the head. Well, I disagree with that because I've got a cock bird at home and it is duller on the head than what the hen bird is. Some breeders will even tell you that you can sex them by their whistle. I think that they're wrong with that as well, because both the cock and the hen whistle exactly the same.

They are a vicious bird and you have to be careful as to what birds you put in with them. They will tolerate some birds while, for some unknown reason, they'll get stuck into others. When you get a pair of these birds and put them into a cage, just watch them closely and take out any birds that they look like knocking around. There are plenty of birds that they are compatible with, such as Weavers, Wydahs, Singers, or birds that will stick up a little bit for themselves. They do have a tendency to get stuck into Waxbills.

The cage that I keep the Cardinals in is a very well planted aviary. It is 3.6m long, 1.8m wide, and 2.1m high, and it has only pair of Cardinals in it and no other birds. I put them on their own

to give them every possible chance to breed. I did have a pair of English Chaffinches in with them when the Cardinals first hatched out four young. The Chaffinch decided that she was going to feed the young Cardinals, and when she couldn't, she threw them out of the nest. The Chaffinches were quickly removed from the aviary.

The food that I feed these birds is the normal mix that I use on all my birds; one part French white millet, one part Jap millet, and two parts Canary seed. Live food is very important, but if you give them too many mealworms or maggots they will get very obese (fat). When they are not breeding it is not a good idea to over-feed livefood. I give them mealworms in winter and maggots in summer, and they get white ants all year round. They also get fresh water every day, as well as shell grit and cuttlebone.

They have not got much shelter in their aviary as they don't appear to like it. Whenever it's raining, I have always seen them out in the flight. I don't know where they roost because I don't go near the aviaries at night.

They build in an ordinary canary nest, either tied into a shrub, or in the Melaleuca brush stuck in the back of the flight. Some pairs build nests while others won't. When you put the Canary nest in it is always a good idea to put coconut fibre and a small amount of grass into it. The hen will sort of scoop out a little dish shape and lay her eggs. She usually lays between three and four eggs which are a darkish blue with a brown flecking all over them. They are an egg that you can't put up to the light to see if they are full because the shell is too thick. So you don't know if they are full or clear until it is time for them to hatch. I have very rarely seen the Cardinals have clear eggs.

The cock birds are chronic drivers of the hens. You will think he is killing her but he's not, he's only getting her mind on the job. They will have up to six clutches per year, but if the clutches are big you might only get four. They are good parents and the way they feed their young is a sight to see. They will have anything up to six mealworms or a dozen maggots all hanging out of their mouth as they go up to feed the young. They feed the maggots or mealworms one at a time to each chick until their beak is empty. They will then go back down to the bowl and they will pick up another beak full and repeat the same thing.

They are fully insectivorous when they are breeding. In other words, if you don't have livefood you won't rear the young. You cannot rear them on egg supplement or a protein supplement because they will just not rear their young. I know a bloke that had a hen Cardinal desert a nest of two eggs, so he put them under a canary. The canary hatched them out and fed them on egg food, which they accepted. As well as this, every hour to an hour and a half, this bloke was going in with a pair of tweezers and he was feeding all the little mealworms and maggots direct to the beak. The canary kept them warm and kept feeding them until finally they fledged. He then started to have a problem feeding them because they were not in the nest. As it turned out, he raised them because they are the type of young that find the food themselves after only three or four days out of the nest. They will eat anything that is crawling around.

The incubation period is 28 days and every time you go near the cage the hen is off the nest. The cock bird stands guard and the minute you walk down towards the cage he gives a little chirp and she comes off the nest.

They don't seem to have any problems with feet or beak disorders as they get older.

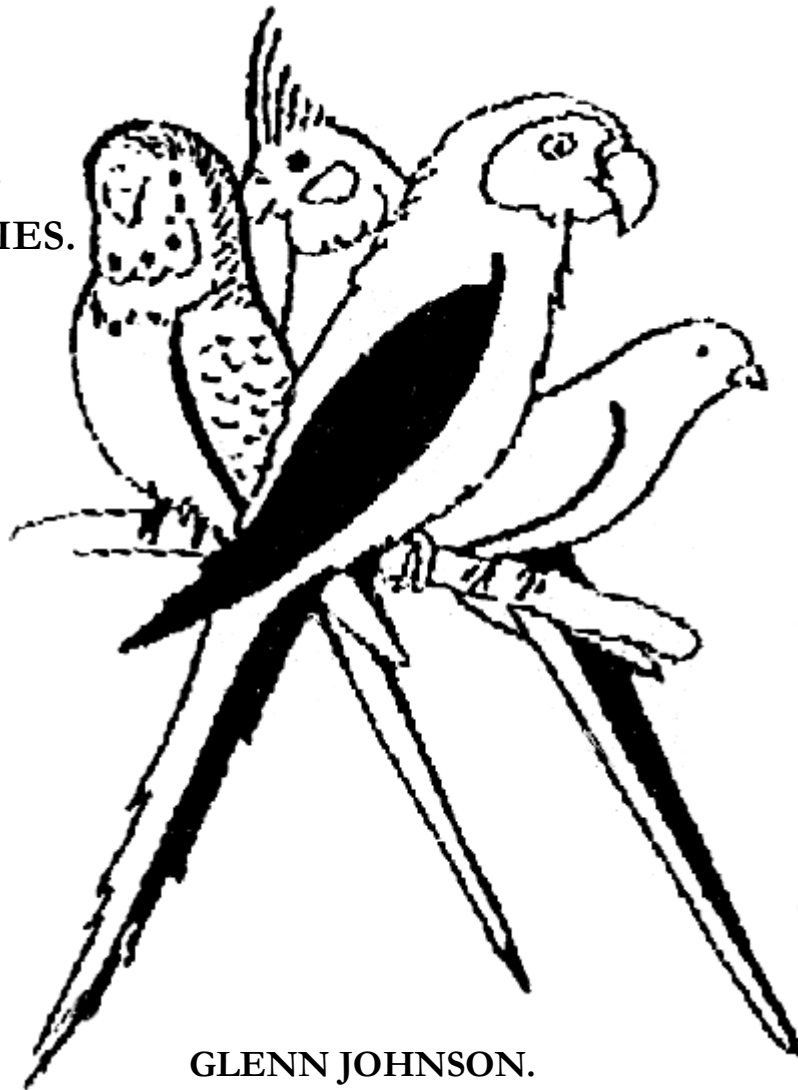
I do worm the Cardinals twice a year with Nilverm, and I use a pretty stiff dose on all my finches. I put three capfuls to a 10 litre watering can and I repeat the dose after ten days. I have used Nilverm successfully for years.

There are not many Cardinals around so, as you can imagine, they are pretty expensive if you are lucky enough to get a pair. They are sort of in the Bul Bul family so I hope the Vertebrate Pest Act never includes Cardinals on the list.



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