

FINCH BIZZ



March 2015

Finch Bizz—March 2015

The Hawkesbury Finch Club.
A branch of The Finch Society of Australia
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Next Meeting: 22nd April 2015

Editorial

The bird sale season has begun with the first large sale at Orange done and dusted. From all reports it was a great success with many sellers and buyers.

I've had many mixed reports on how successful the breeding season has been both good and bad. One breeder I know had a great year with Masks and Diamonds but a disaster with many others.

I personally didn't have anywhere near the amount of green food variety I normally would have available, so I think that had a negative impact. Next year I will be planting some raised planters and growing my own to be sure of a regular supply.

Last Meeting

Last month we had our own Jeff Robards give a presentation on native finch distribution with detailed maps explaining the recorded sighting of various native species. This was very interesting and caused a few surprises, especially when sightings were recorded of Painted Firetails being seen in what looked like the Riverina area of Southern NSW. I think aviary escapees or they were blown down by Cyclone Tracy. Well done Jeff a very informative talk, as always.

Raffle— List put together by Debbie Thompson

No.	DONATION	DNT	WINNER
1	Bar Finches or Soft Bills	Geoff Robards	Peter Berry
2	2 Pair Gouldians	Ken Smith	Roslyn Davidson
3	Chocolate	Roslyn Davidson	James Clark
4	Chocolate	Roslyn Davidson	Glenn Johnson
5	Mug	Roslyn Davidson	Brian Chapman
6	Containers	Roslyn Davidson	Neville Simmonds
7	Parrot Picture	Peter Berry	Peter Chapman
8	Small Bromeliad	Peter Berry	Ken Smith
9	Wine	Larkin Family	Peter Berry
10	Book - Bali	anonymous	Mikayla Larkin
11	Magazine- Bird Keeper	anonymous	Ron James
12	Magazine – Aviary Life	an anonymous	Reg Brouwer
13	Magazine – Aviary Life	anonymous	Peter Chapman

Thanks for all those generous members who donate prizes for the raffle each month.

Wear your badge on club night and you could win 5 tickets for the raffle! – Thanks Deb & Amelia

Snakes — Glenn Johnson

This summer has been a bad one for snakes; two of our members have had bad experiences with snakes in their aviaries. I have had a few people from outside the club report of problems as well; one lady lost a dog to a snake bite as well as a horse having to have expensive Vet treatment.

So be careful keep the areas around your aviaries clean from too much grass or rubbish and keep on top of any mice problems. As you know snakes like mice.

Read Peter Berry's Snake stories later in the Newsletter

Bird Genetics — by Peter Berry

I have always been impressed by how much many of our club members seem to understand about the genetics of bird breeding and the ability to predict the outcomes of crossing various colours/mutations/types etc. To me it has always been, and continues to be, a complete mystery and I never have any idea what I am going to get from the various breeding activities in my aviaries.

I have been reading a book about the development of canary breeding over the centuries and the ultimate development of the red canary. It is a fascinating book and I would be happy to lend it to any interested club members. What is particularly interesting is that much of the knowledge of genetics which later became accepted by scientists was actually first understood by pigeon and canary club members. In fact, Charles Darwin, in developing his theories of evolution took the experiences of pigeon club members in Northern England as the basis for some of his determinations. He went to a number of pigeon club meetings in various dingy smoke-filled pubs in the industrial north to further his education on natural selection and he acknowledged how much he learnt from those pigeon fanciers.

Now I know we are a finch club, but I thought that I would demonstrate the mystery (to me) of bird genetics by listing the results of 4 recent clutches of budgies that I have bred. I would love someone to explain to me what it all means because I am totally baffled by it. All I know is that sometimes colours and types are sex-linked and sometimes not, but that is about the extent of my understanding.

Probably most of us started off with budgies as youngsters and moved into other areas as well as our interest in aviculture grew. I have never lost the interest in budgie breeding and I keep one aviary of about 20 birds and usually have one pair in a breeding cabinet at any given time. Of particular interest to me are the yellow-faced blue varieties which I find to be the most attractive of all. I even have a pet yellow-face blue named "Paddy" who thinks he is human, can speak about 25 different phrases, kicks and throws a little ball all around the lounge room, does a

daily flight around the house and even says "see you later" as we close the front door on the way out!

I have bred from a pair of budgies over the last year or so and the results stump me completely. Maybe someone in the club can enlighten me on the genetics of it all!

The cock is a yellow-faced opaline dark blue. I bred him myself and his parents were a pale whitish apple green opaline (cock) and a violet/white pied (hen). The hen I bred from is a yellow-wing light green opaline which was given to me by a neighbour of my daughter's so I have no idea as to its background.

There were 4 clutches from my breeding pair (with a bit of a break in-between) and there were 6 chicks each time. There was quite an array of colours. The sexing of young budgies is sometimes a little hit and miss but I have done my best to record which sex I thought the off-spring were as I sold a number of them as pet birds when only 6-7 weeks old.

This is the result:

6 light green (or olive) opalines (3 male, 3 female)

4 light green yellow-wing (2 male, 2 female)

3 yellow/green pied (3 males)

5 yellow-faced dark blue opalines (3 male, 2 female)

1 mauve/blue opaline (1 female)

3 yellow-faced grey/mauve opaline (1 male, 2 females)

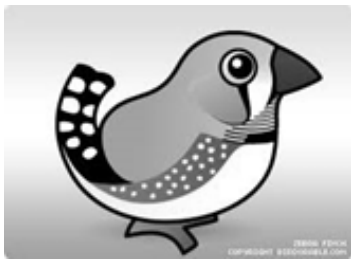
1 grey wing light blue (1 female)

1 pied white/blue (1 male)

So I don't know if any of this would be of use to Charles Darwin if he was still around. For me, it just re-enforces how little I understand about bird genetics!

White French Millet & Others – adapted by Shayne Merry & edited by Sam Davis – taken from The Finch Breeders Review – January/February 2015

White French Millet is a basic food for finches either as a dry seed, green milk seed (*Lowes product*) or in spray form either green or dry. Phil Davies, Sam Davis and many other finch fanciers grow and feed green sprays. Phil grows the white millet on a block at Timor and Sam on his land at Douglas Park. The seed heads or sprays are picked by hand (*which is a lot of work*) and frozen (*a large freezer is filled to over flowing*). The green sprays are fed to the birds as required. The green seed is great at keeping the birds in breeding condition and is a favoured food when chicks are in the nest.



Many finch breeders sprout white French Millet either as individual seeds or as part of a mix. Sprouted millets are a great alternative when green milk seed is not available. Compared to dry seed, there is a large increase in the nutritional value and digestibility of both green seed and to a lesser extent sprouted seed. Many mix their sprouted seed with various soft foods such as Wombaroo's Finch Soft Food, Russell Kingston and Mike Fidler's soft food products, Livermol or even hand-raising formulas. Sprouts can also be added to the Lowes milk seed to make it go that bit further. There are as many different mixes as there are finch breeders!

Millets are annual grasses and are some of the oldest of all cultivated crops. The term millet is applied to various grass crops whose seeds are harvested for food or for animal feed in China; records of culture for foxtail and proso millet extend back to 2000 BC. Millets are rich in carbohydrate and low in fibre. Nutritionally they are very similar to each other and as such are substitutable in birdseed mixes. Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica* L.) probably originated in southern Asia and is the oldest of the cultivated millets. In Australia panicum and panorama is grown. It is also known as Italian, German or Hungarian Millet. Its culture slowly spread westward towards Europe and today is grown primarily in eastern Asia. - Proso millet (*Panicum milliaceum* L.), is grown in the Soviet Union, China, India Western Europe and in the US. It is known here as White French Millet. Barnyard or Japanese millet (*Echinochloa frumentaceae* L.), is a domesticated relative of Barnyard grass. It is grown for grain in Australia, Japan and other Asian countries. It is dual purpose millet suited to grain or grazing. Often cattle farmers in Queensland will plant Japanese millet for grazing and after a couple of feeds will let it go to head and harvest it. Shirohie is a larger, white seeded selection of the variety often grown in Northern Victoria around the Murray River. We prefer to use Jap millet because we find the green/grey colour is more attractive in the mixes. Shirohie is coloured white/grey and makes the mix look monotone. These seeds are available from most seed merchants.



The Benefits Of Belonging To A Club – taken from Central Coast Avi News – February 2015

What does belong mean?

To be accepted in a group. But first, you must join. The root of join means yolk or unite- become part of a group. This is an action word-you have to do something, you are involved.

In science, Newton's Third Law states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. If you join a club and all you ever do is pay your fees and wait for your magazine, there is no action and you are not involved. If all members did this there would be no magazine, no meetings, no aviary visits, no bird sale i.e. NO CLUB. Even if you cannot travel to meetings you can still contribute; by writing stories, taking pictures, making things that the club can use, sell or raffle, even just a phone call can make a difference. It keeps you involved, makes you a part of things and keeps you interested.

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We are happy to sponsor The Finch Society of Australia Hawkesbury Branch	

But why join a Club? There are many benefits and I will cover some of the main ones as I see them.

Social Aspects

A basic human need is to feel you belong and be a part of a family, or social group. As such you can enjoy the company of like-minded people who have the same interests as you, as well as make new friends and have fun. Clubs are also a networking opportunity, people know people, and so no matter what part of Australia or the world you go to you can usually find someone involved with birds and make even more new friends.

Access To Birds & Market for Your Birds

One of the first principles of marketing or selling is to get qualified customers. For example if you sell furniture, if the customer coming through the door is looking for a sofa you have a much better chance of selling to him than someone who is walking down the street past your-door on the way to a doctor's appointment.

Guess what? You are selling birds, and in a bird club all the members are interested in BIRDS.

If you are looking for birds to buy, then your fellow members are breeders. If you buy from members then you know what the breeder has been feeding the birds and what kind of environment they have been bred in, you can get information from him and advice and you know what you are getting.

Information

For a novice this is especially important. Joining a club gives you access to experienced breeders who can answer questions and help with problems. Even experienced breeders have problems from time to time. Sometimes just talking a problem over with someone else, shows you a solution. You also have access to specialised products.



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Even if your club has no sales table members have contacts where you can source what you need and learn about what products to use. You should also have access to new research results, events as related to birds and bird keeping and trends (new mutations, new species etc.) If you are a member of a club, that club is bigger by one. This is important when we look at our hobby and the law makers that govern our country. If aviculture can continue to exist as a hobby, clubs need to be part of a greater whole. These days the world is as political

world whether you like it or not. You need to be able to make your voice heard on issues important to you, like your birds.

Conclusion

Stay positive and be involved. If you can spare some time, volunteer, help, join in and do your bit to be an active part of your club.

Season Of Snakes – by Peter Berry

I think it was at our September meeting that some club members said that they had seen their first snakes of the season. It certainly proved to be an early sign of things to come as I have had more snakes around the garden and aviaries than any other summer in the last 42 years of living at Mt Riverview. I know that other club members have also spied quite a few of the unwelcome reptiles during the warmer months and that some have lost birds to snakes.

I had one particularly troublesome red-bellied black snake that made several incursions into my aviaries avoiding capture each time. On his last visit he ended up

contributing to his own demise by getting entangled in the strip of bird netting I have hanging over the doorway to minimise bird escapees. He was hopelessly caught up in the netting and the only assistance I could offer was to expedite his journey to the afterlife by spade power!

In his final escapade, the snake had made his way into my Gouldian aviary perhaps hoping to swallow a mouse or have a drink of water as none of the finches were missing. The only feathered casualty was a male King quail which lay flat on his back as dead as a door nail probably from shock. But the snake hadn't eaten him. Amazingly, the hen quail was sitting on a clutch of eggs at the time and didn't seem flustered by the metre long serpent and 2 weeks later she successfully hatched 4 fatherless chicks.

I also saw a couple of other nameless snakes during the summer slipping into the undergrowth a few times. They were slender grey-coloured types and I convinced myself that they were whip snakes rather than opening up the possibility that they happened to be juvenile eastern browns!

My latest encounter was on 11th March when, on returning from a few days down the south coast, I did my customary aviary check to make sure all was in order. In my largest aviary I have a mixed population of finches, canaries, neophema parrots, and doves. When lifting the lid of a parrot nest box I was stunned to discover a diamond python curled up asleep! He was only a little chap, about 80cm long and totally docile and again an audit showed that there were no birds missing. He must have just been looking for a cosy place to bed down.

Diamond pythons are beautiful creatures with the most intricate markings and I didn't bear him any ill-will – all I wanted was for him to reside somewhere other than my aviary. My son-in-law, who is a snake enthusiast, couldn't wait to take care of the situation. He quickly arrived to get the obligatory photos of the good-natured snake hanging from his arms and draped around his neck. He later released him in the bush at Faulconbridge after taking him to show off to his mates at footie training.

So for me, it certainly has been a season for snakes. I wouldn't mind having a few less next summer!

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Vermin Control – by Peter Phippen – taken from Finch Breeders

Review – December 1983 p9

One of the biggest problems expressed by bird breeders, in some way or another, is vermin; rats and mice, predatory birds and animals, reptiles, insects and anything else that disturbs the peaceful existence of your birds. From my research, it appears that there is no definite way to prevent vermin from invading your aviary, but there are ways of deterring or eradicating the problem.

Rats and Mice

These are one of the worst problems, especially rats, as they not only disturb the birds, but they also eat them. The only good news on rats is that they are easier to stop from getting into your aviaries than mice, due to their size. Rats need a gap at least 1.25cm x 2.5cm to gain entry, so if your aviary has no gaps in the walls and you used ½" wire, and you stop them from digging under by extending the walls at least 25cm below ground level, then you can keep them out. Mice, however, can squeeze through ½" wire as if it wasn't there. Small mice can even get through 3/8th inch "mouse proof" wire, so the only recourse is to eradicate them with poison or traps. The variations on mouse traps are numerous, but most appear to work. However, make sure the birds cannot get near the traps as their natural curiosity will cost them their lives. Most mouse poisons work, but again don't let the birds get near it either. Most breeders face facts and assume that there are always mice in their aviaries, so they leave baits and traps set in out of the way places at all times. If you do this, check them regularly, and you won't have a problem. The breeders, who wait until they have the problem and then try to get rid of them, end up having a real struggle.

Predatory Birds

These include hawks, eagles, currawongs, magpies, owls, noisy miners, and our old favourites, the butcher birds. It appears that a lot of breeders forgot that all these birds are protected, since some people cure this problem with a dose of 4.10 or .22. Without breaking the law, there is virtually only two methods of controlling these pests, short of getting someone to constantly patrol your aviaries. An electric fence is good for giving them a fright, and reports say that they are a good deterrent. However, the best solution is to double wire your aviaries. It won't keep them away, but they will go away eventually because they cannot get at your birds. It is expensive, especially with finch flights, but you won't have your birds dragged through the wire. If you can't afford double wire, make yourself a scarecrow.

Predatory Animals

The main animal in this group is our old feline friend, the cat. It is not illegal to dispose of these vermin provided that you trap them in an authorised cat trap and then take them to the R.S.P.C.A. for disposal. However, if you don't fancy extermination as a solution to this problem, there are other avenues. Cats and also possums create the most havoc when they get on top of the aviaries and romp around. If you keep them off the roof you eliminate most of their nuisance value. The most effective method is the electric fence. If positioned properly, it will keep

them off, and usually one or two nasty encounters on the wire will keep them away for good.

Cats, foxes and some carnivorous native mammals can also be a problem around the perimeter of your aviary. If the base of your aviary walls extends 30cm or more underground, and 60cm or more above the ground, and it is made of solid material such as brick, concrete, wood, metal, and not just wire, then this will alleviate this problem.

Insects and Reptiles

Most insects are welcome in finch aviaries, since the birds eat them. However, the common black ant is a pest. They get into the food, into the nest boxes, and even kill the young birds in the nests. No one seems to be able to keep them out, but some breeders have alleviated the problem fairly effectively by placing ant poison at the ant's point of entry into the aviary. This appears to be your only defence against these little pests.

Reptiles, on the other hand, are a different proposition. Lizards and frogs don't appear to be a problem, as one member even keeps lizards in his parrot aviaries. Snakes, however, are a different story. I've never had a problem, but country breeders constantly report losses due to an invasion by a snake. Snakes, like rats, are somehow able to pick the difference between Zebs, Stars and the more common species, from Senegal's, Blue Cap's or Siskin's, and always eat only your best birds. It appears that to completely keep snakes out of your aviary is very difficult. Most snakes can crawl through 1/2" wire, and have been known to tunnel under walls. The solution seems to be to extend your solid aviary wall base to the dimensions mentioned before. If you live in a snake infested area, then bring the solid aviary wall base up to around a metre to be sure. Remember, if you corner a snake in your aviary, TAKE EXTREME CARE AND CAUTION, because who's going to feed your birds while you are in hospital?

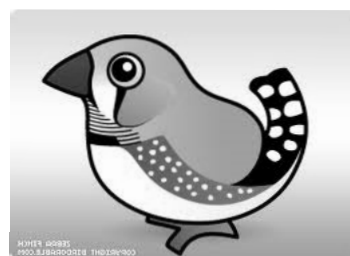
Conclusion

Basically, when it comes to vermin control, there are three things that should be done:-

1. Electric fence.
2. Continuous supply of rat poison and traps.

Solid aviary wall bases 30-70cm underground and 60-100cm above ground.

If all else fails, get yourself a catapult and a bag of marbles.



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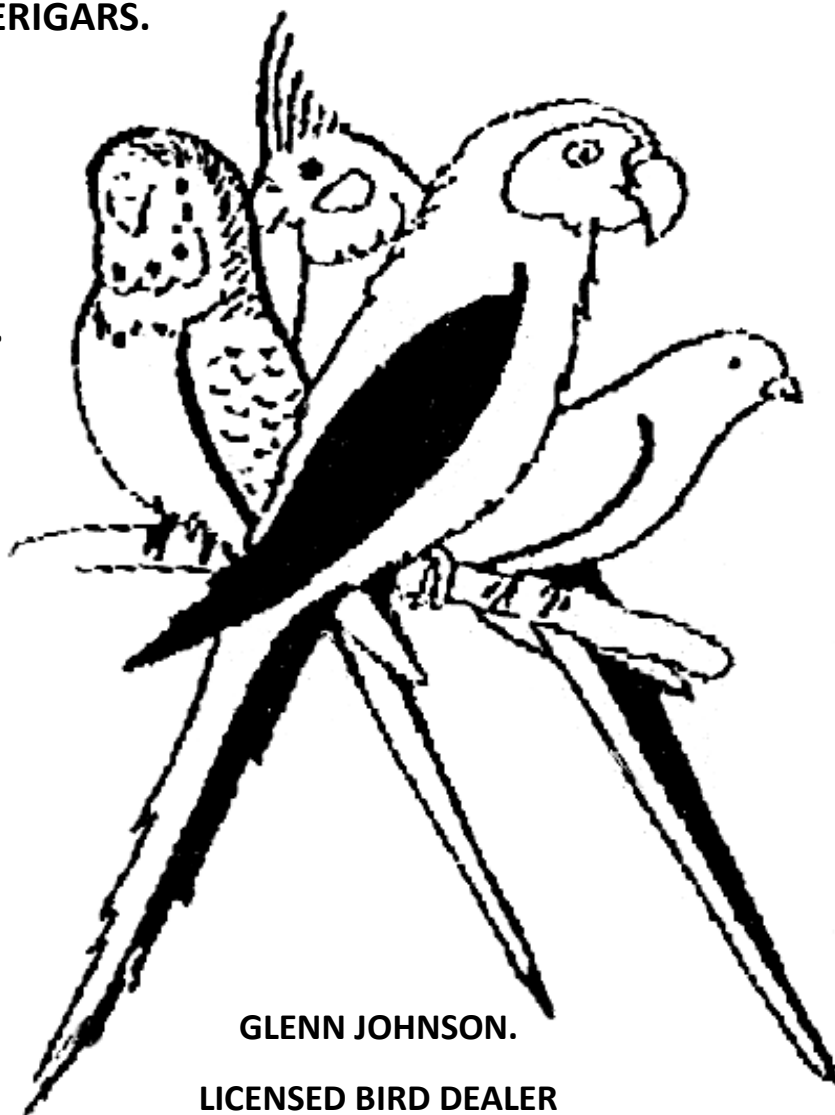
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