Finch Bizz



The monthly magazine of the Hawkesbury Finch Club

A Branch of the Finch Society of Australia Inc.

June 2023

Finch Bizz June 2023 The Hawkesbury Finch Club

A branch of The Finch Society of Australia

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Next Meeting 1930hrs June 28th, 2023:

HAWKESBURY FINCH CLUB A BRANCH OF THE FINCH SOCEITY OF AUSTRALIA INC

DATES FOR MEETINGS 2023

25 th	JANUARY	2023	ANNUAL	MEETING
SUBS	CRIPTION	DUE		

- 22nd FEBRUARY 2023
- 22nd MARCH 2023 * 5 Wed this month
- 26th APRIL 2023
- 24th MAY 2023 * 5 Wed this month
- 28th JUNE 2023
- 26th JULY 2023
- 23rd AUGUST 2023 _* 5 Wed this month
- 27th SEPTEMBER 2023
- **25th OCTOBER 2023**
- 22nd NOVEMBER 2023 CHRISTMAS MEETING * 5 Wed this month NO MEETING IN DECEMBER

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May Minutes:

FINCH SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC

HAWKESBURY FINCH CLUB

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Excellent numbers at our May Meeting:



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THE BLUE FACED PARROT FINCH:



Pair Blue-faced Parrotfinches (Erythrura trichroa), male (left), female (right)

Photo: Esben Elmer, DK www.birdz.dk

Article kindly provided by Doug Hill & Marcus Pollard Availability

The Blue-faced Parrotfinch (*Erythrura trichroa*) is becoming a common bird in Australian aviaries.

Sexing

The blue facemask of the male Blue-faced Parrotfinch extends much further back on the head than the female. The colour is a much darker blue than the hen. The green body colour is a darker green on the male and the red on the rump is a brighter red than on the female. He is usually a bit bigger than the female, but at times a well-bred hen can easily be as big.

Mutations

We have the pied Blue-face where the green of the body is replaced by splashes of yellow. Pied Blue-face are a rarity in our aviaries. Lutino Blue-face are not a common sight in your local bird outlets and would have to be procured from a breeder. The Lutino is a bird that has all of the green on the body replaced by a buttercup yellow. The blue facial mask is replaced by white and the rump is a deep pink. It would not be fair on a Lutino bird to have the bird in a very bright sunny aviary, as the eyes are red and very tender to light.

View fullsize



Scientific name: Erythrura trichroa

Other commonly used names:

- Blue-faced Finch
- Blue-headed Parrotfinch
- Green-backed Finch
- Three-coloured Parrotfinch
- Tri-coloured Parrotfinch

Country of origin:

- Australia
- New Guinea

Geographic distribution:

- Northern Australia on the eastern side of Cape York Peninsula in Northern Queensland
- New Guinea and the surrounding islands

Distribution

Northern Australia on the eastern side of Cape York Peninsular in Northern Queensland, Papua, New Guinea and basically throughout the surrounding islands north of New Guinea. There are a large number of different races of this bird scattered throughout their range – this may help to explain the large variation in the blue colouration in the head of Blue-face. In particular some hens have hardly any blue on the head while others have as much as some cock birds.

Compatibility

Blue-face Parrotfinches can be impetuous at times and never sit still. I think that they are a terrific bird for a mixed aviary. I have never seen the Blue-face attack any other bird in a communal aviary. I have however had them take nesting boxes from other birds such as the Gouldian. However, when breeding season beckons their 'pursuit and attack' policy when pursuing hens may disrupt smaller waxbills and 'more nervous' finches!

Ease of breeding (1 easy -10 difficult)

3/10. The Blue-face are about the easiest of the Parrotfinches to go to nest. They will not demand too much for their breeding needs and will readily reproduce.

Purchasing your bird

Blue-faced Parrotfinches are an easy bird to find in any of the specialty bird outlets or pet stores. If you have trouble in finding birds then I suggest to you to join a specialist finch society (such as The Finch Society of Australia Inc.) and there you will find specialist breeders of various finches from whom you can purchase your birds.

Good points to look for

Look for birds in good feather as these birds moult very heavily, to the extent that they may be unable to fly! Moving them can also bring about this heavy moult. Size of the bird. Clear bright eyes. The bird is always on the move. The deepness of the colour of the facial mask. The depth of colour of the body. The mandible and legs are clean and not flaky. The vent is clean and clear of soiling.



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"If your relatives are easily offended by 'overt shows of sexual behaviour' DON'T let them near your aviary when these guys are mating!"

Faults to look for

Birds that are lethargic. Soiled vent. Fluffed up with closed eyes. Poor feather and poor colouring. Look for cleanliness of the beak and legs. If you see a Parrotfinch fluffed up on a warm day, forget it!

Aviary or breeding cabinet

Although Blue-face can be kept in small aviaries they will not do as well in them as they are a bird that appreciates a bit of 'room to move'. The bigger the aviary the better and the more cover the better!

Breeding season

I breed Blue-face in the warmer months of the year although they will breed all year round. The best times I have found for them are about the start of October through to the end of May and then give the birds a rest in the winter months.

Off-season feeding

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An austerity diet of mixed seeds, grits, cuttlebone and eggshells is supposedly efficient. A fresh supply of some seeding grasses is also recommended.



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Should I feed soft foods?

If you do have a good mix of egg and biscuit formula it can be fed to the birds on a daily basis. Beware that some breeders have experienced problems with the consumption of large quantities of

Madeira cake to the detriment of the bird in the long run!

What green feed?

Fresh grass seed can be fed daily in the breeding season. Other green feed can consist of cucumber, chickweed, endive and boc-

choy. You can expect better breeding results if fresh seeding grasses are fed during the breeding season.

What live food?

It is not necessary to feed Blue-face live food when breeding but they will have better results if they are fed a diet that includes live food. Live food that can be fed to your birds are gentles (maggots), mealworms and termites. All of these foods are taken readily when raising young.

"As with the Red-faced Parrotfinch, the Blueface are a delight to have in your aviary of mixed finches. They can easily hold their own against the larger finches and are not overly bossy with other smaller finches in the aviary."

Breeding season feeding

When the weather starts to warm after the chills of winter is usually the time to start your breeding program. This is when you start to *slowly* give your birds some extra bits in their feed tray. Let the birds build up to the extra live food such as termites, mealworms, gentles and green seeding grasses. Too much too soon can easily cause all types of problems including scours. Some of the seeding grasses that may be used are, Johnston

grass, African veldt grass, chickweed, winter grass, Guinea grass, milk thistle, Panic grass and shepherds purse. It is best to give Blue-face the seeding heads half ripe.

What age do they breed?

Blue-face Parrotfinches can be bred anytime from 8 months of age.

What if I lose a mate?

Pairing of Blue-face is fairly easy, as they will readily take a new partner at any stage of the breeding season. I would introduce a new partner almost immediately after losing a mate.

Nesting receptacles

This is a bird that does not really favour any particular type of nesting receptacle as they will nest in almost anything at all! I have had them nest in nesting baskets, wicker baskets, Gourds, wire cylinders, other finches old nests, small parrot boxes, milk crates, in the brush growing in the flight and in brush attached to the aviary walls.

Nesting materials

I have had Blue-face use anything from shredded paper to gum leaves for their nests. Mostly they use a nesting receptacle and at times they will build their own nest in which to raise their young. When they use a nesting receptacle they will stuff it full of most anything that they can find on the aviary floor. Their first choice is longer pieces of a coarser type of grass and the interior of the nest is usually lined with a softer grass such as November grass. Blue-face do not line their nests with too many feathers if at all, but will use them if they are available.

The nest

When the Blue-face build their nest in the shrubbery in the aviary it is usually a well-built construction. They tend to build their nests high in the aviary and are at times jammed against the roof of the aviary. As the nest is tightly woven it can be a trap for heat and if the nest is high in the aviary you could run into problems with the young dying from heat exhaustion on very hot days.

Mating behaviour

The mating ritual can be, for the first time owners, very painful to watch! The male chases the hen relentlessly around the aviary where she finds no escape from his amorous pursuits. Finally, as she weakens, the male will grab the hen by the feathers at the back of her neck and copulation takes place. Prior to the chase at times the male will begin by turning his head from side to side and begin a dance by bobbing up and down on the perch at times holding a piece of grass in his beak. Males also emit a loud trill while 'courting' the hen!

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Male Blue-faced Parrotfinch (Erythrura trichroa)

Photo: Esben Elmer, DK www.birdz.dk

Eggs

Between 4 and 6 white eggs are laid. Some nest inspections are tolerated but not too much, as they will desert the nest. If you are going to look do it the once and then wait for them to fledge – this way you will not lose the young or eggs.

Brooding time

It generally takes 13/14 days to incubate the eggs with the hen doing the majority of the sitting. The male sits during the daylight hours sharing the duties with the female. It is the hen that sits the eggs at night.

Fledging time

Fledging usually takes around 21 days. It may take a bit longer during the colder months so allow for that extra day or so before poking fingers into the nest to see if all young are OK. **Be aware** that if you poke your finger into the nest and the young are not too far off fledging you are going to have young blue-face jumping out of the nest at a rate of knots and you cannot successfully put them all back into the nest. Young will not return to the nest once they have initially left it.

Independence from the parents

Independence is around 21 days.

How long do the young stay with the parents?

I haven't had a problem with leaving the young with the parents until the young males begin to colour up. The dominant male can, and most probably will, inflict injuries on the younger males if they are not removed. Also the more males in the aviary the more the hens will be 'attacked' by the pack-rape' tendencies of the male Blue-face. It is best to leave the young with the parents for at least 4 weeks.

What do I feed the fledged young?

The young birds can be given the same diet as the parents.

When do I ring the young?

The young can be rung with aluminium closed rings between 6 and 8 days of age - if it is done very quickly and the parents are not upset by taking too long in handling the chick. Otherwise wait until the young have left the nest and ring them with plastic split rings. If you take too long in ringing the young the parents may desert them. When ringing young birds, be careful not to damage the toes.

Separating the pairs

Sometimes it is necessary to separate your Blue-face as they will simply over breed and the bird's wear themselves out quickly. Males can also be VERY severe on the hens to the extent that they will kill them as the hens weaken from the stress of raising chicks. The best time to separate them is at the onset of winter to give them at least a 3-month break. This way you will not subject your birds to the rigors of trying to raise young in the cold.

Showing your bird

It is unfortunate that the Blue-face does not show very well, the bird is too flighty and will not settle down in a small show cage and easily becomes distressed. The feathers also are easily damaged.

Gene pool

We have a very secure gene pool of the Blue-faced parrot finch in Australian aviaries and we should do everything in our power to preserve it by keeping pure birds pure and the mutations separate.

Life expectancy

A Blue-face can have a very productive and long life if given ideal conditions but these birds are generally fairly high maintenance, especially as regards worming. You could expect them to attain an age of around 6 to 7 years.

Common ailments

Blue-face tend to spend a lot of their time on the aviary floor picking around at almost anything on the floor, so a good worming program should be adhered to. Remember that Parrotfinches may suffer if wormed on hot days and some show a marked intolerance to some Levamisole based worming products – or one in particular!

Summary

As with the Red-faced Parrotfinch the Blue-face are a delight to have in your aviary of mixed finches. They can easily hold their own against the larger finches and are not overly bossy with other smaller finches in the aviary. They are a bird that when everyone else is sitting about the Blue-face are always doing something! As

stated earlier the only 2 problems I have found with them is the taking over of the occasional nest and the overpopulation of the aviary when they start breeding. Would I have them in my aviaries? Yes I would and I always have a couple of pairs of them lurking about somewhere in my aviaries!

A Mugs View!

The Blue-face Parrotfinch was one of my favourites for a long time a few years back, but it was a love hate relationship when it first started! I purchase my first pair and the hen died two days later. A new hen was procured and the cock bird then up and died. He was replaced and the hen died you get the basis of my experience with these birds. After deciding to call it guits and let the surviving hen go 'out to pasture' a mate saw her and asked if I wanted to buy a male 'to keep her company'. I simply looked at him strangely and declined and told him that the hen he was looking at represented the national debt of several small third world countries!! Never one to be put off he duly returned and gave me a spare male he had. "Bet ya one will be cactus within the week" was my rather ungrateful retort. So for every morning and evening I adopted the finch keepers' stance and searched the floor and the Tea-tree for the body. Well, this time they were out to dazzle me with their brilliance. It became obvious that the male I was loaned had not been with a hen for 'quite some time'!

He hounded her from morning to dark, often hitting the wire so hard with her that it twanged!

She must have thought that the only way to avoid this madman was to go to nest. So, nest she did again and again and again! The usual clutch was 5-6 eggs, which always yielded 5-6 fledglings and, best of all, most of them would be hens.

The following season I had reduced the national debt and had 6 unrelated pairs ready for action. This loose colony bred 77 odd youngsters and the aviary was awash with little green bodies. Little green bodies that crash, belt, smash and collide with every other unfortunate bird in the aviary. I learnt a valuable lesson with Blue-face - keep to 2-3 pairs or move the rest of the birds to a saner environment! Needless to say, like every good aviculturist, I simply built another aviary! Oh, another thing, Cuban Finches, Tiaris canora, have no sense of humour when they encounter young Blue-face and, unless you remove one or the other, your Blue-face may resemble the set of the 'Last of the Mohicans' – scalped!

In three years of breeding three of us had sent countless numbers of Blue-face to NSW, South Australia and Queensland and traded them for a wide variety of other finches. Not to mention the odd house building materials that they supplied! "Beware: Blue-face Parrotfinches are highly intolerant of high temperatures when breeding and young are often lost through over heating, so position your nest boxes with this in mind."

One point to watch with these birds is that the males will pack rape any females that they encounter. I have witnessed males waiting in ambush for the hens to leave their nest and then seeing 2-3 simply 'attach themselves' to the hen and bring her to the ground by weight of numbers. However you would work out the actual fathers of most chicks is beyond me! But beware! If you let the numbers of males build up – and there is a tendency for far more males to be fledged than females- then you are in real trouble for this unwarranted attention will lead to the deaths of hens. I have seen them literally torn to pieces, drowned and driven into walls head first with the inevitable end result. The green bodies of these birds are often difficult to distinguish in a planted aviary and the number of males can often 'sneak up upon you' before you know it.

After swapping several pairs of these birds for some Red-faced Parrotfinches, *E. psittacea*, I was given an even greater lesson in frustration. No one remembered to tell me that Red-face are notoriously bad parents when they are young! My two pair would have 100% fertility but would leave the chicks at different stages

 from just hatched and on the floor or, for variation, just with feathers on and onto the floor.

Then one day, a breakthrough! I entered the flight and found two baby Red-face chicks, probably about 4-5 days old, lying on the floor but they were both very much alive and pleading with me to feed them - fat chance guys! What to do? The only thing I could do was place them in the nest of a Blue-face which already had young of their own, unfortunately a lot older than these guys. As I placed them in the nest I felt a twang of guilt as I suspected that they would soon be reacquainted with the floor or simply pushed to one side. To my amazement the only chicks that left this nest were the two Red-face that I had placed into the nest and the bodies of their own chicks were cemented into the bottom of the nest. On a number of other occasions I have observed the same interesting phenomena that Blue-face will desert their own chicks and rear the fostered Red-face chicks. Why? I have no idea. Suffice it to say that the 12 Red-face I reared that year were all fostered under the Blue-face and Red-face were not exactly cheap when this event occurred!

So now you know that when I said that my introduction to Blueface was mixed I was not altogether joking. After an absence of several years I now have the Blue-face in my aviaries again but am finding that the Red-face are easier to breed at present! Even though I have bred many Blue-face I still find them a temperamental bird especially in our cooler climate. As Doug has pointed out make sure that you are up to date with your worming regime and watch for any tell tale signs of illness in your Blueface – this is usually when they stop belting around the aviary at 150 km/hour! Watch these birds, and their cousin the Red-face, when worming with Avitrol Plus as I have seen and heard of large numbers of deaths when birds are wormed with this product – especially in warmer temperatures when the birds might consume more water, and wormer, than is their norm.

The Lutino mutation is always a bird that never ceases to amaze other bird keepers and 'civilians' alike. They are captivated by the 'tameness' that they demonstrate on a sunny day. Unfortunately they are nearly blind on such days and are only unafraid because they can't actually see us! If you are foolhardy enough to enter their enclosure you are likely to end up with concussion or wearing one as a brooch. I have produced a few from so-called 'normal' birds and don't keep them as a rule. I have heard that they can be bred in small cages and good luck to you I say. I once paired three normal males with three Lutino hens in an aviary only to have the males start to mate with themselves rather than the Lutino hens! The only thing I can put this down to was the abnormal flight pattern of the Lutinos when the sun was up.

We were lucky enough to have a pied Blue-face which was stuck in a severe moult for months. It was a striking bird with patches of yellow that provided a real contrast to the normal blue and green plumage AND, more importantly, it had normal coloured eyes! After months of work on getting this bird up to scratch it was just beginning to fly (never could fly when it arrived and several people hinted that it might have been due to its ancestry!!) when it was released into the holding aviary. To show its appreciation for its freedom it flew straight under my mates gumboot – scratch



Male Blue-faced Parrotfinch (Erythrura trichroa)

Photo: Esben Elmer, DK www.birdz.dk

Summary

 Don't let the number of males in your aviary build up to a dangerous level – for the sake of the hens!

- Plenty of greens will see excellent results and live food is not essential to rear youngsters.
- Red-face Parrotfinches crossed with Blue-face Parrotfinches are sterile so DON'T do it!
- Care must be taken when worming these Parrotfinches.
- If your relatives are easily offended by 'overt shows of sexual behaviour' DON'T let them near your aviary when these guys are mating.
- If a fellow breeder tells you that his surplus males are trying to mate with quail BELIEVE HIM!
- Most can be sexed like canaries in the breeding season –
 males have a dip after the abdomen with a raised 'pipe' that
 points downwards while the hens don't have the dip and her
 vent points out behind her.
- Some youngsters can be sexed by the intensity of the green in their bodies not long after they leave the nest.
- A still Blue-face is a sick Blue-face (or a Lutino searching for his/her sunglasses!!).
- Just because knowledgeable people tell you they are easy to breed don't expect them to 'play ball' for YOU.
- Watch them around smaller waxbills as I have seen them squashed between two mating Blue-face – not a pretty site but imaging how the Red Strawberry felt!!
- Cuban Finches don't like many birds but they appear to exhibit a pathological hatred for Blue-face at certain times.

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- BEWARE: Blue-face are highly intolerant of high temperatures when breeding and young are often lost through over heating, so position your nest boxes with this in mind.
- If your Blue-face throw their chicks on the floor simply put
 them back in the nest and, in the majority of cases (but not
 all I hasten to add!) they will simply carry on feeding them as
 per normal.
- If you are not good with worming your finches see someone
 QUICK to show you how!

Persevere, they are worth it in the long run!

Page 39 $Finch\ Bizz$ Hawkesbury Finch club's monthly magazine

Hawkesbury Finch Club / Club Membership Form:

Contact <u>yarrajames@bigpond.com.au</u>

I wish to become / renewal a member of your Club as a:

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Annual meetings are held on the Fourth Wednesday of the month each year. In January each year subscriptions become due and are payable. Those people who join the Society at the January meeting or after are not required to pay the subscription until the following January.

We ask that you please try to attend our meetings and the various functions we have, to enable you to get to know your fellow members and enjoy your membership to the fullest.

Ron James Hon. Secretary NOTE: * Delete which is not applicable

Attention, Attention, Attention:

Available each and every meeting from Rosslynn Davidson:

A list of what items I carry to each meeting **Cydectin plus** 50/100ml jars \$7.50 /\$15.00

Baycox 50/100ml jars \$15 /\$30 both use separate or together to treat worms and coccid.

Coopex powder used as spray or a paint for crawling insects, ants' cockroaches. \$11.00 packet

Split plastic coloured bird rings small /large finch and small parrots \$4.50/\$4.50 \$5.00 a sleeve of 10 rings

Mouse season is quickly approaching I did my bate stations a week ago and found an adult mouse within 2 days.

Attention, Attention, Attention:

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