

THE BENGALESE—AN OVERVIEW

The Bengalese, *Lonchura striata domestica*, known in the United States as the Society Finch, is not a naturally occurring species, but a fertile hybrid. It is the most domesticated of the "finches" [it is actually a Munia] but its ancestry is the subject of debate. Nobody is quite certain which wild finches the Bengalese is descended from, but the Striated Finch and the White-rumped Munia are thought to have played a considerable role in their development.

They are well adapted to captivity and do well in the company of humans. They breed well and are good foster parents for other finch-like species. It has been found the best "pairing" for fostering is to use two males, this works better than either two females or a male and female pairing. Two males will usually accept eggs, or even partly grown young without any hesitation.


It is mostly accepted that these birds were first bred by the Japanese (Chinese?) some 500 years ago, and over the years, breeders have managed to breed a lot of colour variations including fawn, chocolate brown, pied, *etc.* There is also a very attractive crested variety of the Bengalese. Over the centuries individual colour patterns have been developed. For instance, in Japan, one family may have developed all white birds with black wings, while another family may breed ginger birds with white heads *etc.* Development of these strains has taken several generations of the one Japanese family to perfect.

These birds are a very close flock species and tend to all roost in the one nest if kept in a group. This tends to make breeding harder in an aviary situation, and they breed better if kept as single pairs in individual breeding cages [as used for Canaries and Budgies]. This close flocking behaviour is also responsible for their American name of "Society Finch". They are cheerful little birds that are quite easy to look after. They are also quite easy to breed provided they are, of course, correctly sexed. Obtaining a female-male pair can present a difficulty because both genders look exactly the same at first glance.

However, it is possible to determine gender by behaviour, as males tend to display to impress and court females. The best way of using this method to sex Bengalese is to place a single bird in a small cage and completely isolate it from its own kind [both sight and hearing] for several hours; then introduce another Bengalese to the cage. If the first bird is a male it will immediately display to the newcomer. Unfortunately this does not

necessarily mean the introduced bird is a female. But if the first bird does not display it is almost certainly a hen. However, a quicker and more sure method of sexing is to compare both the head width [in a line across the top of the head between the eyes], and the shape of the under-side of the beak. The male has a much broader head than the female; and the male's under-beak [where the beak meets the feathers of the neck] is a "V" shape and the hen's more rounded like the bottom of the letter "U". In both these methods the two birds should be held side by side to compare.

Feeding is simple, as all they require to remain healthy and breed well is a diet of small millets, green-food, grit and fresh water. They will not usually take live-foods, but it has been found they will often accept house fly pupae, which they crack like seed. This is particularly useful if they are being used to foster species that require a high protein component to be successfully reared.



SPECIES

- Bourke's Parrot
- Turquoise Parrot
- Scarlet-chested Parrot
- Elegant Parrot
- Blue-winged Parrot
- Rock Parrot

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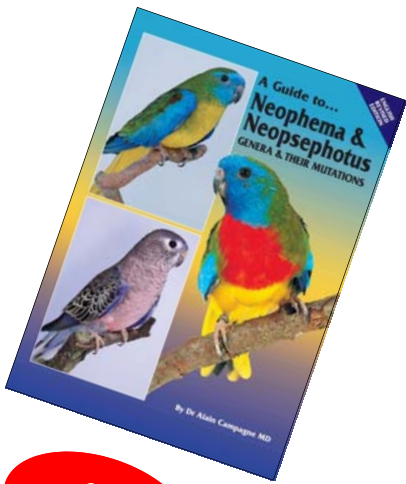

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Due for Release June 2008

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THE WISE OWL SAYS... freshly purchased birds may carry diseases, so it is always wise to quarantine them before releasing them into an aviary. This is especially important if there are other inhabitants in the aviary. The minimum quarantine period is forty days, but sixty is preferable. The quarantine facility should be well away from other birds, and all new stock should be placed there as soon as they are obtained. While isolated the birds should be checked for internal/external parasites and other disorders. After completing these checks the birds should be wormed. If after the quarantine period there is no sign of any health abnormality, the birds can be introduced to their permanent living quarters.