

## MY TROUBLE WITH CUBANS

By D. Patterson

The Cuban Finch, *Tiaris canorus*, is commonly kept in Australian aviaries and is generally quite easy to keep and breed. Being so freely available, they are often one of the first species of foreign finch that most of us take on, and this was certainly the case in my aviaries. I purchased a young pair about two years ago and housed them in my little 3x3m planted aviary with a single pairs of Cordons, Emblemas and Parrotfinches. This pair of Cubans were fairly sporadic breeders, bringing out a few chicks here and there, but were always building nests without actually settling down. The few times that they did rear young, no aggression was shown to the fledged chicks but they were always removed as soon as they were independent as a precaution.

In late April this year, this pair nested again but threw the chicks out of the nest at ten days old. Three to four days later I found the female dead



THE DEAD HEN  
Photo: D. Patterson

on the floor. She had been scalped, her wing-butts picked at and some flight feathers plucked out. I had been away for the week at the time so can only assume that the cock had tried to drive his mate back to nest and, failing that, had turned on her. He had never once shown any aggression towards her or any other aviary occupants before. So, I removed him from the aviary and stuck him in a spare flight with some young Long-tails and Emblemas to cool him down for a while.

At the ASSA Bird Sale I picked up a Cuban hen, hoping to pair her with the spare male. She was placed in the same planted finch aviary and allowed to settle in. Things were very busy at work and I didn't get a chance to introduce the male for another fortnight. When I had a spare afternoon, I caught him out of the spare aviary and put him in a large carry box. This was placed in the shelter of the aviary containing the new female for the day. Both seemed very interested in one another and everything seemed fine so far. The next morning, I released the male at feeding time and left for work soon after. I realise now that I had made a big mistake. That evening when I got home the little female was nowhere to be seen. It was nearly dark and I thought that maybe she could have gone to roost already, but, somehow I knew something was wrong. Sure enough, next morning she was missing. So I scouted around the floor and found her under a grass clump, dead. Again, she had been scalped and her wing butts stripped. I did not want to take the risk with this male Cuban again and decided it was best to end his future breeding potential permanently.

What could I have done differently? Maybe I should have introduced the new pair into a smaller aviary or cage initially, but I thought I was doing the right thing by introducing him into her territory where he would be out of his depth for a while. I certainly should not have assumed that all would be well and should have waited for the weekend to release the male so that a close watch could be kept on him.

Aggression is a well known behavioural trait amongst some male Cubanans and would seem to vary between strains. Individual males may live in complete harmony with their aviary mates for a period of time, but if something upsets the balance or a new bird is introduced, then another side of the male Cuban might come out. Their dislike for other birds carrying yellow in the plumage is often referred to in aviculture texts and when they decide that they don't like another bird, then it can be final. Unfortunately for me, my particular male took his aggression out on both of his mates, either through territoriality or, more likely, sexual frustration.

I hope that this story will be of some use to a newcomer to finches who, like me, often have to learn from their mistakes, pick themselves up and start again.

