

NEST INTERFERENCE IN FINCHES

By Ian Forsyth

Have you ever wondered how much nest interference finches will tolerate before abandoning the young?

No? Well recently I had occasion to find out the answer to this question with a pair of Blue-faced Parrot-finches.

It all started when I was at a loose end during the holidays. In my small, mixed, aviary the Siskins had abandoned their eggs and there was apparently nothing else nesting or feeding nest-bound young so I decided to have a cleanout. I put on the dust mask, grabbed a bucket and in I went. All of the old nesting material in the baskets came out and got dumped into the bucket so while I was there I decided to clear out the buildup of rubbish in the needle brush. In one particular area there was grass, feathers, leaves, bird poo, etc from several failed attempts at nesting so I thought that might as well go too.

I pulled out great handfuls of stuff, crammed it into the bucket and satisfied that all was fine, headed for the door. It was about this time that I noticed a movement in the bucket and when I pulled out some of the leaves, there looking back at me was a pair of pink/grey/green babies. I'm sure the neighbours wondered what had happened when they heard the agonising AARRGGHHH that followed this discovery.

After the initial shock, several questions came to mind "Is it possible to hand raise baby finches? Can I put them back? Will the parents continue to raise them? Why can't I learn to leave things alone?"

After mulling things over, I decided to put them back and to keep an eye on them. See what happens. I stuffed what appeared to be a nest of sorts back into the needle brush, built up the edges a bit, put the babies back in (several times) and exited to watch.

Within a fairly short period of time mum and dad finches were checking the damage. Over the next few days they rebuilt the nest around the babies and continued feeding them. Ten days later, two healthy looking Blue-faced Parrot-finches fledged and both have thrived in spite of their interrupted nesting.

I think that there is a moral to be gained from this experience. Some would say that it's 'all is not necessarily lost no matter how much damage you have caused'. I think I prefer "JUST LEAVE IT ALONE" until winter.