

AGAPORNIS...THE LOVEBIRD FAMILY

Continued from the September edition

#4 NYASA LOVEBIRD



The Nyasa Lovebird (*Agapornis lilianae*), known in some parts of the world as Lilian's Lovebird, is the smallest mainland African parrot species, being just 13cm (5 inches) in length. In captivity around the world it is uncommon, and many fanciers find it difficult to breed.

In Australia it is now nowhere near as common as it was in the 1950s and 60s, at that time it was second only to the Peach-faced Lovebird in numbers, Masked Lovebirds being quite scarce and Fischer's Lovebird very rare indeed. Unfortunately, it is now not often that a pure Nyasa is seen. Most of those now available have varying amounts of Fischer's Lovebird genes in their make up. This is most obvious in the head and neck area. The pure Nyasa has a small round head set on top of the body. This has often been described as looking like a golf ball set on the shoulders. Fischer's have the head tapering through the neck in a continuous widening slope to the body. Now most so-called Nyasas have the tapering neck of the Fischer's.



**THE BIRD ON THE RIGHT
HAS A TRUE NYASA HEAD**

This Lovebird is mainly green with a white eye-ring. It has an orange head, neck and upper chest and has a green rump. Although both the male and female look identical in appearance the female is usually the larger of the two.



DISTRIBUTION OF THE NYASSA LOVEBIRD

Nyassas are endemic to Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In 2004 the wild population was estimated to be less than 20,000 individuals. The largest concentration is in Linwonde National Park however a few flocks occur in the surrounding forests outside LNP. The distribution is rapidly becoming restricted to the park because their feeding and breeding habitats are being exploited for agricultural purposes. Recently, cases of Nyasa Lovebird poisoning have intensified although it is not known why poachers are poisoning the birds. It is assumed they are trying to poison larger animals and the Lovebirds are unintentional victims.

In the wild they feed on grass seeds, millet, wild rice, flowers, and fruit. In the aviary they need a mixture of small millet seeds, a little sunflower (especially during the colder months) and fresh greens and fruit. Soaked seed will be beneficial leading up to, and during, the breeding season. Their general care and maintenance is similar to that for Fischer's and Masked Lovebirds.

In their natural habitat they breed from January to March and in June and July. They make a roofed nest in tree hollows. In the aviary they will readily accept a budgie-type nest box. The average clutch consists of five to six white eggs, these are incubated for eighteen days, but as the hen usually doesn't sit tightly until the second egg has been laid, the chicks hatch about twenty-one days after the first egg was laid. The young leave the nest about forty-two days after hatching. They are then fully weaned after thirty days.

In the 1930s a South Australian aviculturist, Mr. Pendergast, produced a striking sex-linked lutino mutation of the Nyasa Lovebird. The mutation became well established and was held by a number of fanciers until the mid 1960s; after that the gene pool became restricted and the quality of the birds rapidly declined. The last known specimens of the mutation were held by a gentleman at Unley, but they suffered from over-grown beaks and he used to grind them back with an electric grindstone every few weeks! These birds died out soon after, and the mutation became extinct in South Australia. The last lutino Nyasa I saw was in a Perth aviary

in 1980. There was just the one lutino in an aviary containing about twenty birds. The owner had no idea which birds were the parents, and said he wasn't intending to isolate it for a controlled breeding programme. I later learnt that the bird died a couple of years later without another lutino appearing.



Photo: Bodo Ochs

There are now lutino Nyasas being bred, but as they are not sex-linked they are almost certainly the result of crossing the non sex-linked lutino Fischer's Lovebird with a Nyasa and then breeding back to Nyasas. There are also blue Nyasas around, but once again these too are almost certain to be the result of crossing a so-called blue Fischer's with a Nyasa and then breeding back.

Reference: *Wikipedia*

FREE ENTRY TO THE GORGE WILDLIFE PARK



Our Co-patron, Yvonne McKechnie, has kindly granted free entry to the park for members and their families. Also, a special discount will apply for accompanying friends. To gain this privilege all that is required is production of your current Membership Card when entering.



We thank Yvonne for her generous gesture.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What is a flock of Goldfinches called?
2. What is the correct terminology for a young pigeon?
3. What is the smallest Australian bird?
4. What is the correct terminology for a twelve day old Californian Condor?

Answers: 1. A charm. 2. Squab. 3. Weebill. 4. A twelve day old Californian Condor of course.

WHAT BIRD IS THIS?



OK, all you bird experts, let's see if you have an eye for a bird. Try and guess, research or compare, this image with other photos, or your own collection, to come up with what type of bird this is.

WHAT BIRD WAS IT?



So, did you go with guessing this bird from the last magazine?

Answer:

Aratinga solstitialis
SUN CONURE