

## THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING CUBAN

Have you noticed how few Cuban Finches *Tiaris canora* are around these days?

When the ban on importation was implemented in 1949 we were lucky to have a fairly large stock of relatively free-breeding Cubans. After Castro's revolution in 1959 this delightful little bird was no longer available to the rest of the world. So, for many years we had the only free-breeding aviary-bred Cubans in the world.

So far so good, but then overseas fanciers got to know of our success with the Cuban; and of course wanted some themselves. Nothing wrong with that you say. Of course not, but what is not available often evokes the good old "the grass is greener in the next paddock" syndrome. Thus pressure was put on Australian breeders to export Cubans; with very high prices being offered.

When I went to Brisbane in early 1980 to promote the *First National Avicultural Convention* (planned and hosted by this Society) I was billeted with a finch breeder who had about twenty-five pairs of Cubans in breeding cabinets on his back veranda. When asked why so many were in small cages he volunteered the information that he was trying to get at least another twenty-five pair as he had an order for fifty pair at \$100.00 a pair (and this was 1980 dollars) for export to South Africa. These birds were eventually sent, although I don't know if he managed to find the full fifty pair. After that there didn't seem to be much more interest in sending Cuban Finches overseas; and I was of the opinion that the South Africans must have bred them well and thus were able to supply the overseas market.

However, of late there has been a huge demand for Cubans to be exported to the USA. This time it appears to be bird dealers involved, not the odd aviculturist or two. Some dealers appear to have agents visiting all the various Bird Sales around the country buying up every Cuban on offer and pushing the sellers for more. Reports suggest the exporters are receiving up to \$400.00 a pair; an extortionate mark-up on the prices they pay the Australian aviculturists. Sure, there's costs and a lot of red tape involved in arranging the shipment, but these people have no thought for tomorrow, they don't care if Cuban Finches disappear from the local scene...so long as they make a fast buck today! The greed of a few individuals to whom a quick buck is more important than the long term future of the species is decimating Cuban numbers in Australia.

The export of Cuban Finches is quite within the law. So what can be done if we wish to retain a viable breeding population in Australia?

In my opinion the answer is threefold:

1. Demand a higher price from anyone who "will take all the Cubans you can breed". Cubans are very territorial so they obviously don't want them for their own aviaries. Why should such a buyer make a huge profit without doing anything, while you, who did all the work, don't get a fair share?
2. Intensify your breeding efforts, to ensure the Cuban population can at least maintain its numbers despite the overseas drain.
3. Make sure you don't sell, to anyone, for other than what you think is their true worth. "Supply and demand" should result in them being worth more anyhow, as their numbers are definitely dwindling. After all, a higher price will encourage more people to breed them.

Unless we do something **now**, we may well be reminiscing in a few years time about how we once had Cuban Finches in abundance, but how, like the once common Bronze-winged Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata*, they died out; and we no longer have this cheeky, inquisitive and melodious little bird in Australian aviaries.

With finch importation unlikely to be allowed in the near future, any species we loose now are gone forever. If however, finch importation is ever approved, it is sure to be along the same lines as those established for parrots...if the species is not in Australia at the time it will not be approved to be imported.

Your comments on this situation are invited.

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