

THE HOODED SISKIN

Carduelis culcullata



HOODED SISKIN

Photo: "Siskini"

The Hooded Siskin, also known the Red Siskin, is a small passerine* bird resident in tropical South America in northern Columbia and northern Venezuela. There was an introduced population on the island of Trinidad, now believed to be extinct, as there have been no sightings since 1960.

The Hooded Siskin is found in open country, forest edges and grassland with trees or shrubs. The female lays 2-3 greenish-white eggs in a cup-shaped nest in a tree. They were common in the early twentieth century, but were considered to have been almost extinct in the wild, with a population of just 600-800 pairs^[MOUNTFORD 1988]. However, some hope has been given to this highly endangered species by the discovery in 2003 of a population of several thousand birds in southern Guyana, 1000km from any previously known colony.

The female is grey on the head, breast, and upper-parts, apart from a red rump and upper-tail. The breast is grey with reddish flanks, and the rest of the underparts, the wings and tail resemble the corresponding areas of the male. Immature females are paler than the adults, and immature males are brown rather than red. The call is a high-pitched chitter and sharp *chitit* not unlike the Indian Silverbill, the male's song is a musical Goldfinch-like melody with twitters and trills.

They are a colourful addition to any collection of finches, but require special additions to their diet of Niger and crushed Sunflower seeds.

As the day and night temperatures vary little in their natural habitat the hens leave the young uncovered at night after just a few days. In southern Australia the night temperatures are too cold and unless the young are given some form of heat during the night they will invariably perish. The extra warmth can be supplied by the use of a ceramic heat globe near the nest, or, as is more usual, the young can be taken into the house at night, kept warm, and returned to the nest the next morning. The hens are not perturbed by this interference and will feed the young as soon as they are put back in the nest. If when taken in at night the young have full crops no hand-feeding is necessary; but if the young are not warmed at night they will surely die.

Reference: *Wikipedia*

R.V.C.

* A passerine is a bird of the order *Passeriformes*, which includes more than half of all bird species. Sometimes known as perching birds or, less accurately, as songbirds.