

THE PEKIN ROBIN



The Pekin Robin, *Leiothrix lutea*, is a member of the Old World babbler (Timaliid) family. It is a common cagebird in some parts of the world, but is not readily available in Australia. In aviculture is known by various names: Red-billed Leiothrix, Pekin Nightingale, Chinese Nightingale, Japanese Nightingale, and Japanese (Hill) Robin, the last two being incorrect as it is not native to Japan.

The species is about 15cm (6") in length. Adults have bright red bills; and a dull yellow eye-ring. The back is dull olive-green; the throat bright yellow-orange; and the chin yellow. The edges of the wing feathers are brightly coloured with yellow, orange, red and black and the forked tail is olive brown and blackish at the tip. The cheeks and side of the neck are a bluish gray colour. Females are a paler version of the male, and lack the red patch on the wings. Juveniles have black bills.

The Pekin Robin is native to Southern Asia. It has been introduced to the Hawaiian Islands and since the 1980s small populations of escapees have existed in Japan.

Locomotion is usually by hops, runs and short flights, except in open habitats where flying is more often utilised. It is a very active species, an excellent singer but very secretive in its habits.

In the wild the range is from India (Himalayan foothills), Burma and southern China. It is a bird of the hill forests, and is found in many types of jungle, but prefers pine forests with understory bushes. It can be found from near sea level to about 2300m (7,500 feet). They are most commonly found in well watered areas.

The Pekin Robin feeds on both plant and animal matter. It eats various species of Flies, Land Molluscs, *Lepidoptera* (moths & butterflies), and *Hymenoptera* (wasps, bees and ants). Soft ripened fruits are also taken. Food is usually gathered from foliage and dead wood in the lower strata of vegetation.



Pair at Chester Zoo

Photo: Gwyn Richards

The Pekin Robin gathers in groups of about ten to thirty birds during the non-breeding season, but break off into pairs and become territorial during the breeding season. The song consists of short powerful notes that are repeated continuously throughout the year but reaches a peak during the breeding season. The males attempt to attract a female with a long and complex courtship song.

The breeding season is from early April through to September. The open-cup nest is composed of dry leaves, moss and lichen. The usual nest site is in dense vegetation, to provide protection against predators, and within 3m (10') of the ground.

Clutch size is two to four eggs with an average of three. The eggs are broad and blunt in shape, pale blue in colour with reddish-brown spots encircling the larger end. Newly hatched chicks have bright red-orange skin and a bright orange-red gape.

The scientific name *Leiothrix luteus* is derived from the Greek—"leios" smooth, "thrix" feather, "luteus" yellow.

The Pekin Robin is currently listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as "*Least Concern*". However, habitat clearance is now threatening the species, and this classification may well need to be reconsidered.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia



Silver-eared Mesia
Leiothrix argenteauris
another member of the *Leiothrix* genus
Photo: Lip Kee Yap

