

THE STATUS OF AUSTRALIAN FINCHES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIARIES 1991 - 1994 - 2003

By Tim Keynes and Josie Pyle

Introduction

The data used in following article were kindly supplied by Hannah Dridan of DEH. The amount of time and effort DEH staff have put into the compilation of these data should not be under-estimated and we are deeply indebted to them.

From the data provided, we are able to provide a continuing analysis of the popularity and breeding results for Australian Finches over a 12 year period between 1991 to 1994 to 2003. Please note that the 1991 data are for the three month period ending 30th of April 1991 and the 1994 data are for the twelve month period ending 30th of April 1994. Both the 1991 and 1994 data were collected from all permit holders. Aviculturists will recall that in 1999 alterations to the Keep and Sell Permit System resulted in a large number of species becoming exempt from the permit system, and therefore the data for the 2003 period necessarily reflects only those species still requiring a permit. The unfortunate consequence of this change is that the status of the species exempt from the permit system can no longer be determined as aviculturists are not required to forward information to the DEH. For Australian Finches these species are the Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Double-barred Finch, Long-tailed Finch, Painted Finch and Star Finch. No Red-eared Firetail and only a single specimen of the Beautiful Firetail were recorded in South Australian aviaries in 2003 and these two species are therefore excluded from further discussion within this article.

Results

Results are shown in the following two tables.

The first table provides raw data for the nine species of protected Australian Finches held in South Australian aviaries for which Keep and Sell Permit returns are required.

COMMON NAME	2003			1994			1991		
	Permit	Stock	Bred	Permit	Stock	Bred	Permit	Stock	Bred
Gouldian Finch	717	10172	4281	1172	12254	5330	1086	11046	3055
Diamond Firetail	209	1348	413	280	1917	628	302	1652	345
Plum-headed Finch	159	753	249	266	1445	435	246	1192	283
Red-browed Finch	102	708	156	221	756	147	284	981	154
Black-throated Finch	76	335	130	239	1134	334	198	1044	146
Masked Finch	41	187	23	98	385	85	146	461	68
Pictorella Mannikin	33	125	45	68	274	90	113	413	48
Crimson Finch	26	88	6	111	215	29	96	341	44
Yellow-rumped Mannikin	13	62	4	94	398	79	78	422	66

The second table shows the changes in number of permits and stock held for each species between 1991-1994 and 1994-2003.

COMMON NAME	Permit		Stock	
	1991-1994	1994-2003	1991-1994	1994-2003
Gouldian Finch	7	-39	11	-17
Diamond Firetail	-8	-25	16	-30
Plum-headed Finch	8	-40	21	-48
Red-browed Finch	-29	-54	-23	-6
Black-throated Finch	17	-68	9	-70
Masked Finch	-49	-58	-16	-51
Pictorella Mannikin	-66	-51	-34	-54
Crimson Finch	14	-77	-37	-59
Yellow-rumped Mannikin	17	-86	-6	-84

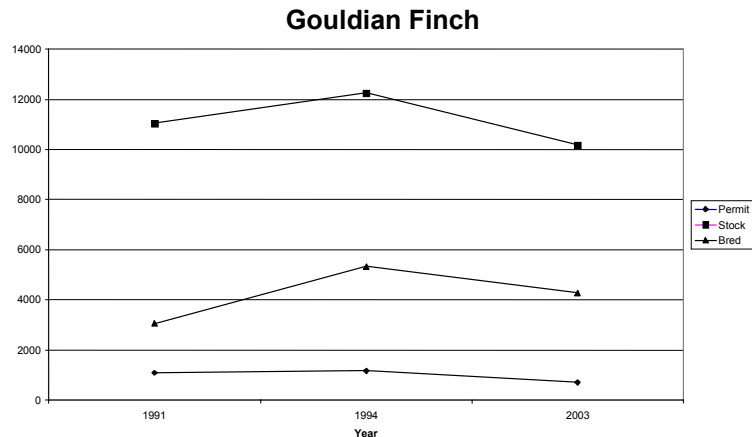
From the above tables, it can be seen that during the period 1994 to 2003 all species showed a dramatic decline in stock held and number of aviculturists keeping them. Some species such as the Gouldian Finch and Diamond Firetail are still popular birds kept and bred in good numbers. Other species such as the Crimson Finch, Pictorella and Yellow-rumped Mannikin show both a continuing and accelerating decline. This is graphically shown in the discussions on individual species that follow.

Discussion of Individual Species

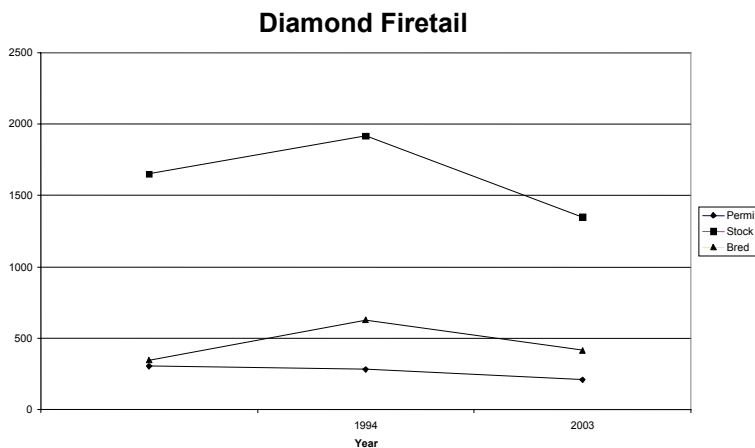
In the section below each species of finch is discussed in descending order of total stock held at the end of 2003. Please note that the scale of each of the following graphs varies according to total numbers held i.e. the Y-axes are not to the same scale on all graphs.

Gouldian Finch

The Gouldian Finch remains the most commonly kept protected Australian finch in South Australian aviaries and appears to be somewhat insulated from the general downward trend shown by most other species.



Over 700 people keep over 10,000 birds and more birds are being bred per aviculturist in 2003 than were in 1994. It should be noted that, as Gouldian Finches are scheduled to be moved from the Basic list to the Exempt list under the Keep and Sell Permit System in July 2004, this will be the last time that we will have the ability to report on their status in this way.



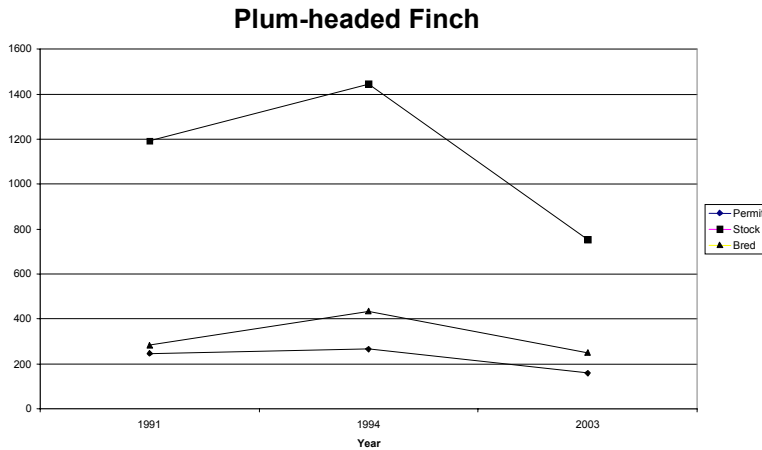
Diamond Firetail

The Diamond Firetail has traditionally been a popular aviary bird. From 1991 to 1994 there was an encouraging rise in the stock held of this species. Since 1994, although its popularity has waned, the 2003

figures may reflect an overall decline in aviculture as a whole rather than any real drop in the popularity of this species. In 2003, 413 birds were bred and this reflects favourably as a breeding result when compared to 1991 and 1994 when higher numbers of birds were held.

Plum-headed Finch

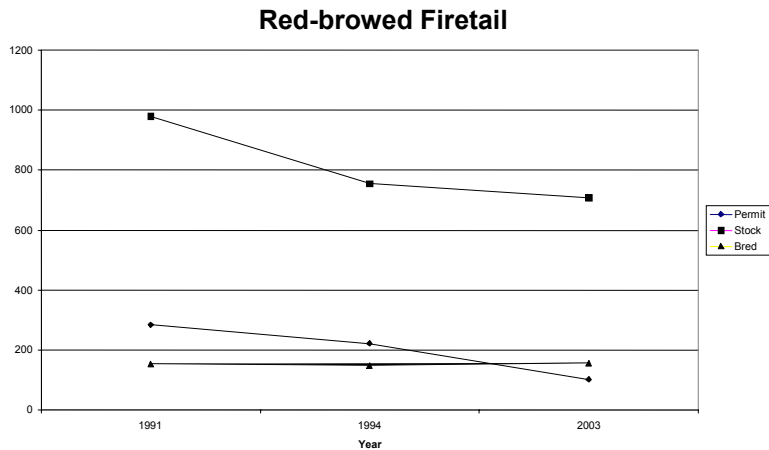
In 1995 we reported that this species appeared secure in SA aviaries. However, in the past 8 years there has been a 48% decline in stock held with 40% less people keeping this species. Thus, current 2003 stock levels are now equivalent to 1986 figures. If this trend continues, this species will



soon be in trouble. It is interesting to note that despite the almost 50% reduction in the number of birds being held, the numbers bred have remained relatively stable throughout.

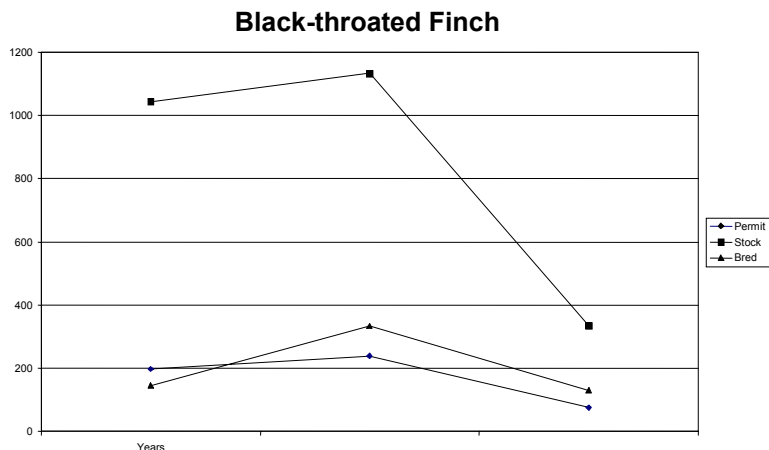
Red-browed Finch

Since 1994 stock levels of this species have only declined by 6% in spite of a 54% decrease in the number of people keeping the species. Thus the people presently keeping this species each keep more birds. The number of birds bred is also relatively stable.



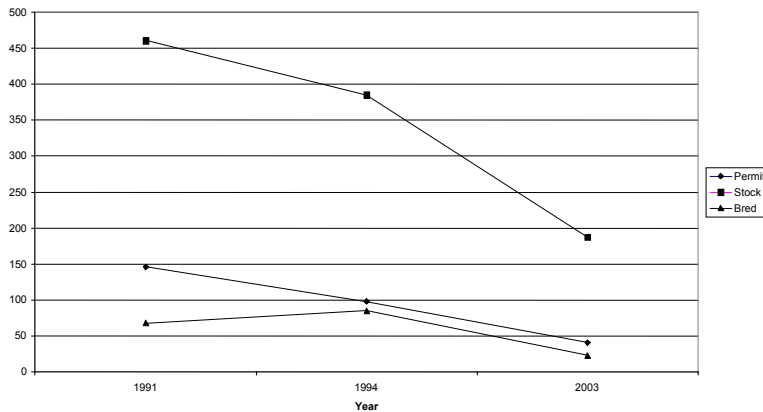
Black-throated Finch

In 1995 we reported that this species showed a consistent increase in all periods and was deemed relatively secure in SA aviaries. This situation has



markedly changed, so much so that in 2003 the total stock held was equal to the number of birds BRED during 1994 ! Something needs to be done immediately to redress this dire situation !

Masked Finch



Masked Finch

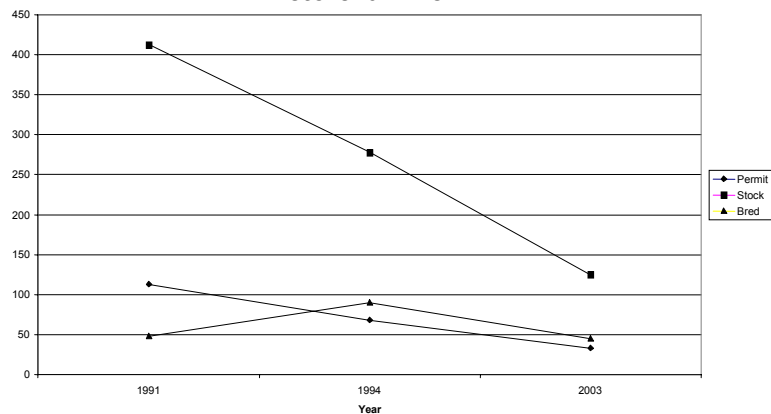
In 1995 we reported that this species was in trouble in spite of the Society attempting to raise its profile in the preceding years. Regrettably, in 2003 the situation has worsened with both

the number of people keeping the species and the total number of stock held being both over 50% lower than in 1994. 41 people now keep 187 birds, but breeding results are pitiful (23 only). Once again we would implore dedicated finch breeders to concentrate their efforts on this delightful species.

Pictorella Finch

The decline in the status of the Pictorella Mannikin is even more concerning than that of the Masked Finch. Again, both the number of people keeping this species and the stock held have declined by over 50% so that in 2003 only 125 birds are held by 33 aviculturists (with only 45 bred).

Pictorella Finch

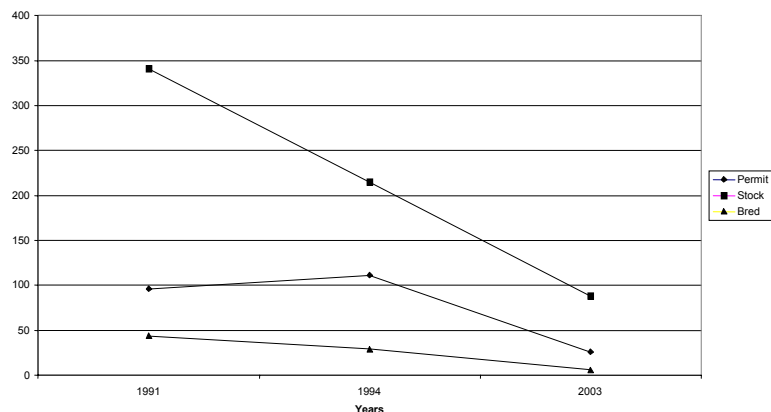


Such a continuing decline is not compatible with the long-term viability for the species in SA aviaries.

Crimson Finch

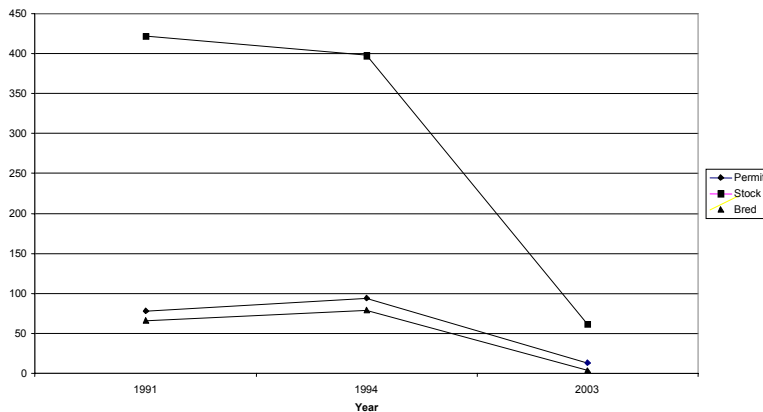
The worrying decline between 1991 to 1994

Crimson Finch



has regrettably continued between 1994 and 2003 to the point where there are serious concerns for the long-term viability of this species in SA aviaries. With 26 people keeping 88 birds and only 6 being bred during 2003, things will have to change positively very soon otherwise the future of this species as a self-sustaining population will be in serious jeopardy.

Yellow-rumped Finch



Yellow-rumped Finch

If the future outlook for the Crimson Finch is grim, what can we say for the Yellow-rumped Mannikin ? All we can do is encourage the 13 people who keep the 62 birds on record to pull out all the stops and get together and make a

concerted effort to get some breeding results with this species ASAP.

Summary and Recommendations

On the positive side

Unfortunately, we cannot think of anything to put here as no species increased in numbers from 1994 to 2003.

On the negative side

During the period 1994 to 2003, the points to notice are :

- that not one species showed an increase in stock held or number of permit holders,
- 5 of the 9 species showed a greater than 50% decline in both stock held and number of permit holders.

On the desperate side

Without wishing to paint too gloomy a picture, at least 5 of the 9 species are in dire straits and positive, proactive action needs to be taken **NOW** if we are to continue keeping and breeding these species in SA aviaries in the years ahead.

Dedicated finch aviculturists must immediately concentrate their efforts on Yellow-rumped and Pictorella Mannikins, as well as the Black-throated, Masked and Crimson Finches. If there are any Society members out there sitting on odd birds, same-sex pairs, or non-breeding birds, please make use of the Society Exchange Steward to contact other people and get these birds together to maximize their breeding potential.

Editors Note

Please note that the above data are only as accurate as the information on the returns that permit holders submit to the NPWS and have not necessarily been thoroughly checked for computer operator / data input error. Use of the above figures should, therefore, be treated with some caution.