

FINCH BREEDING IN GERMANY

By Joerg Landenberger

I realised my dream this year to travel to Australia and was overwhelmed by the size of the country and the friendliness of its inhabitants.

In Adelaide I became acquainted with Jeanette and Tony Melbourne and with our common interest in finches soon became very good friends. Tony took me to a Society meeting, which I greatly enjoyed and I was particularly impressed with your Journal. Tony suggested that on my return to Germany I should write an article on finch breeding in Germany for publication in the Journal. I am more than pleased to do this and hope that you find it of some interest.

During my ten weeks trip through Down Under I visited many breeders, collected a great deal of information, took hundreds of photos and made many friends. Since my youth I bred birds together with my father. He started some forty years ago with European finches, such as the Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Canaries, Common Redpoll, and the Common Bullfinch. Later we added Red Siskins, Hoodeds and the Green Singers to our collection.

The last 15 years we have concentrated our breeding to Australian and African finches. We still have Common Bullfinches, Bearded Reedlings, plus some African Starlings. We currently have some 70 breeding pair of finches.

I was really taken by the large aviaries you have in Australia where your birds can winter outside. This not possible in Germany with our cold weather, so birds are kept in heated areas with the temperature set at 20 degrees.

To breed we hold the ambient temperature 21° in these areas. Unless the birdroom is connected to the house's central heating system it is a very expensive exercise. Many breeders in Germany breed their birds in cages or small aviaries in closed rooms as not every house has its own garden to built aviaries in. So the birds remain the year over in closed rooms in the house.

The diversity of species available to German breeders is very large, with nearly all kinds of finches, parrots, sparrows and softbills available.

There are 2 large federations in Germany, one of which has over 25000 members. Each Federation has a monthly magazine with current topics and breeding reports. They also conduct championships with up to 20000 birds being exhibited at these shows.

Many feeding companies offer a multiplicity of high- quality seed mixtures and separate seeds as well as hand rearing mixtures and insect foods. Seedhoppers , water dishes, bird nets etc. are also available, much like your trading table. Live food is a lot cheaper in Germany than Australia.

Many breeders I met in Australia bred their own livefood, not so in Germany most of them buy it. We feed frozen fly maggots that we buy in the fishing tackle shops. We thaw them with hot water, then thoroughly rinse them, dry them on a towel and re freeze for future use. My mealworms are fed with carrots and bran and before feeding to the birds I spray them with Vitamin liquid and than powder them with a supplement's mix. We also feed half ripe millet (white French), which we buy from a farmer. These are also frozen for storage. We find half ripe millet an excellent food and absolutely necessary in the rearing of young birds.

In my outside aviaries in summer I have a wire box filled with fruit and in a couple of days this produces large quantities of fruit flies. The birds really like these and are eaten by all my birds. Likewise I feed sprouted seed which consist of different seeds like white French, jap millet, mung beans, niger and the normal seed mix that I feed. The sprouting mixture is soaked in water for between 1 and 2 hours before being thoroughly rinsed. It is then placed in a dish 3 cm thick for approximately 2 days, when rinsed again and let dry a little. I then mix it with my soft food, add some grated carrots and other supplements.

We breed mainly in cabinets which gives us better control of our birds and can see exactly what they are eating. There is less disturbance from other birds and as we have the nesting boxes on the outside of the cabinet the birds are not disturbed by anybody walking in front of the cage. It also makes it easier for daily nest inspection. The birds build their nest with

coconut fibre and pad them out with a mixture of wool, cotton and cotton wool.

To sell birds in Germany its necessary that they are closed ringed and you can only exhibit ringed birds. Each breeder has his own number together with the year, sequential number and ring size on the ring. The colour changes annually which has the advantage that you don't have to catch all the birds in the aviary you can see the different classes.

At the moment we breed: Pictorellas, Red-brows, Plum-heads, Double-bars, Painteds, Masked Finches, Black Crimson, Tri-coloured Parrot-finches, Peales Parrot-finches, Katanglad Parrot-finches, Yellow-winged Pytilia, Melbas, Blue Caps, Common Grenadier, Lavender Waxbill, Black-rumped Waxbill, Red Fire-finch (Ruddies), Dybowski Twinspot and Brown Twinspot. We also breed Bearded Reedlings, Bullfinches and Amethyst Starlings.

With each species we breed with 3 to 6 pairs. The main breeding season is in the winter from November to May and then in the outside aviaries over the summer months. The exhibition season is between September and December and we can only begin with breeding if the German Masters Show is over at the end of November. We have extra cages to separate the exhibition birds from each other to prevent feather plucking and things like this.

We have a breeding room in the cellar of our house with 60 boxes, which can be increased by the use of sliding walls. Here we breed the Australian and the different Parrot Finches. In the garden is a 40 square meter large birdhouse with 7 aviaries inside, as well as further aviaries approx..80m2 outside, which are partly connected with the bird house.

The bird house is heated in the wintertime at 20°, so the birds can remain there and don't have to move into the breeding area in the cellar. We breed the African Finches as well as the Masked Finches and the European Birds in this Aviaries, which is planted with bushes and inside with thuja branches . We use Hazelnut branches in the aviaries and the boxes for perches.

We normally make 3 clutches per pair in one season, then the birds are kept

separately according to sex in the holding aviaries. The juveniles are separated from their parents when they can feed themselves. Later in the summer they are put into an outside aviary where they can bath daily. In August the young birds are sorted out and the first are sold.

I would like to thank all bird friends in Australia at this time, who accepted me so cordially and made it possible for me to have such an unforgettable trip in Down Under. And thanks to Jeanette and Tony who made the start in Australia easier for me. We had a very good time and I hope I can see you soon again take care.