

## THE GUNNEDAH BIRD SALE

By reputation, the Gunnedah Bird Sale is supposed to be the biggest in Australia. Quite by chance, I visited the pet shop in the town the day before the sale and spoke to the owner, who mentioned in passing that he was one of the organisers of the bird sale. So is it the biggest? Try these statistics – 130 plus breeders offering birds for sale; 28 trade stands with several more being knocked back because of lack of space; an expected crowd of 2000-3000.

With the doors due to open at 9.30am, my wife and I arrived at the site around 9-15. Car parking was plentiful, since the sale is held in the basketball stadium, which is part of the showground's complex in Gunnedah but we had to park a fair way from the entrance. After parking the car we joined the throng waiting for the doors to open. Entrance fee was \$2-00 with children and pensioners admitted free. To prevent a crush at the door, members of the organising club, the Naomi Valley Bird Society, moved among the crowd placing a stamp on the hand of each entrant as the fee was paid. This certainly proved to be effective in getting people quickly through the door at opening time.

Outside the hall, tea/coffee and a hot dog/steak sandwich caravan had been set up to provide sustenance for those who were hungry or thirsty while a sign advertised that breakfast had been available from 6.30am, no doubt for the benefit of traders who had come along early to set up their stalls.

Once inside we found that the hall contained two full size basketball courts, which will give you some idea of its size, with those selling birds in rows with most of the trade displays around the walls of the stadium. While the aisles between the rows were quite wide, the number of people in attendance made moving around much like being in the Rundle Mall during the Christmas rush, although by the time we left, at about 12.00, this had thinned out somewhat.

As you would expect there was a wide variety of parrots offered for sale. All the usual Australian parrots were available with Turquoisines, cockatiels (called Quarrions by some breeders) and Bourkes, in all their mutations, abundantly available. Indian Ringnecks were also readily available, while the more uncommon species were represented by Black-headed Caiques, Moustached and Derbyans, although this is by no means a complete list of what was available.

However, unlike the bird sales I have attended in S.A., finches were represented in greater numbers. Many breeders had Gouldian mutations for sale, with Orange-breasts, Emblemas and African Fires (called Ruddies in NSW) also in good numbers. Most surprising was the number of Zebra finches offered for sale, although most of these were mutations. Surprisingly, given the number available, there were few Charcoal Zebras seen and those that were offered were, in my opinion, not of as good a quality as I purchased from Dan HASSELL late last year. Red-faced Parrot Finches, including the sea-green mutation, were available in large numbers. Other species I noticed were Nuns and one unusual finch sized bird, the Whydah. This bird has a tail about six inches long. Another breeder had Blue-capped Cordons for sale at \$100 per pair, but again this is not a complete list of what was available.

There was one breeder who had Canaries for sale, but nothing unusual – lizards, common yellow and red factor – but priced in excess of what I would expect to pay in S.A. I also noticed a pair of Little Button-quail for sale at \$100 per pair, Red-breasted Button-quail at \$250 per pair and Californian Quail for \$80 per pair.

And what of the other prices for birds? I know little about prices of the larger parrots, but was pleasantly surprised at what was being asked for those species with which I am most familiar. From looking at interstate price lists, I had expected high prices at Gunnedah. However, in my opinion the asking price for most finches and grass parrots was comparable with what I would expect to pay in S.A.

Again in my opinion, the trade stalls alone were worth the entrance money. As you would expect, some of the ‘national’ companies such as **Australian Birdkeeper** and **Wombaroo/Passwell**, were there along with NSW based suppliers of feed, chemicals and accessories for birds. You could have bought aviary building materials, nest boxes, carry cages and the like, but prices were much the same as in SA. If you desired, you could have joined the **Australian Parrot Society** (\$5 special discount) or the **Queensland Finch Society**. One of the more interesting displays gave you the opportunity to purchase a new magazine – **Just Finches and Softbills**. The first edition grew out of a special edition of the **New Zealand Birdz Magazine** which was produced for the first finch convention across the Tasman. This proved so successful that a second magazine was produced with three editions planned for this year as a trial run. Not cheap at \$10.95 per copy. I purchased both magazines and since returning home have subscribed for the next three editions at a cost of \$30.

And who was at the sale? Obviously the crowd was dominated by people living in NSW. However, I did meet up with some Mid-North members of the ASSA and my wife saw another acquaintance from Port Augusta. I also spotted several members of the Riverland Bird Club. In the caravan park where I was staying a bus load of birdkeepers from the Gold Coast Bird Club camped for the night and I also spent some time talking to a finch breeder of 30 years from Brisbane. The well known Smith brothers from Victoria had birds for sale on the day. The clubs of many visitors was identified by the club shirts they were wearing.

Now, do I hear you say, ‘Gunnedah is a long way to go to buy birds?’ That’s true! However, never having been to that part of the country before, my wife and I incorporated the sale into a three weeks touring holiday in our caravan. The sale itself is certainly an eye opener. So if you’re thinking of touring in northern NSW, try being in Gunnedah on the first weekend in April which is when the sale is held each year. I’m sure you will enjoy the experience.