

THE JAVA SPARROW

The Java Sparrow is one of the more common foreign birds to be seen in aviaries in Australia. This bird, a native of the East Indies, has proved to be a free breeder in captivity in Australia. The appearance of this bird always seems neat and tidy. One of the reasons for this neat and sleek appearance is the fact that it is a constant bather, and after each bath spends a great deal of time preening its feathers. Because of this habit ample bathing facilities should be provided.



The colour of the sexes is identical. The head is black with a white patch on each cheek. The nape and back are grey, and this extends to the rump. The tail is also black and the wings carry a mixture of colour, this being black flight feathers, with the upper portion of the wing grey. The chin is black, and the breast being grey gradually shades into a paler colour on the lower portion of the abdomen to a pale suffusion of pink. The under tail coverts are white, and the legs and beak are a coral pink. The eyes are surrounded by a circle of tiny red feathers. Abnormally-coloured birds of this species exist in an all white, and a pied colour, and the latter in South Australia is almost as common as the normal. The white is certainly a very attractive bird, and although it is not an albino it is far harder to obtain. In addition to these mutations, a third has been added in recent years, this being a fawn originally bred by one of the fanciers in South Australia. As an aviary bird the Java Sparrow settles down very quickly. However, if they are to be housed with a collection of mixed finches, it is wise to include some of the larger species such as Diamond Sparrows, Chestnut-breasted and other

species capable of protecting themselves. A fault I have found with these birds when housing them with smaller finches is that they have a habit of edging alongside the smaller bird and, without any warning, take a sharp peck at their legs.

The sexing of these birds is difficult, due to the fact that there is no distinct difference in the markings of their feather pattern or shape. The only really safe guide which will lead to a clue, and one characteristic of other species that are hard to sex, is their mating display. The cock bird will display to the hen by performing a dance on the perch during which he hops up and down on the perch at her side. Whilst this performance is going on the cock bird also makes an endeavour to burst into song, and this emerges in a buzzing and wheezing noise in a high pitched tone.

For nesting facilities I have found that a nest box approximately 9" x 4 ½' x 6", with an entrance hole 2½" in diameter, is most satisfactory. To encourage them I usually place a handful dry grass in the box, leaving few loose ends sticking out of the front entrance hole. Although this procedure is adopted, abundance of grass is also thrown onto the floor ready for their selection. On observing the birds entering the nest box feathers are supplied, and these are readily accepted to line their nest. This task seems to be carried out with the greatest of care by both parents.

The normal clutch of eggs is usually four or five, these being white and devoid of any markings. When the clutch is completed the hen settles down to incubation and this covers a period of proximately fourteen days. Following incubation the young seldom leave the nest until 21 days later, and when they do appear their colouring is of a pale brown and grey with a dark grey beak. In approximately five months they attain their adult plumage.

The feeding of the Java Sparrow is not difficult; they take readily to white millet, a little oats, canary and jap millet. In my experience with these birds I have found that they rarely eat panicum seed. They are fond of seeding grasses, but show little preference for other greens.

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