

BEGINNERS BIT :

LIVE FOOD, ITS VALUE IS UNLIMITED

Which Australian finches require live food when feeding young, and are there any foreign finches that will rear young on seed alone? This is a question that no doubt many have been asked in an endeavour to arrive at some solution in relation to the feeding of this type of food, its potential value if supplies are continually made available, and the ultimate results that can be expected with this method of feeding.

Generally it can be accepted that there are only a few exceptions among the species of Australian finches that can be classed as uninterested in this type of food. This, however, does not imply that they are totally uninterested. As an example, the majority of aviculturists never entertain the idea of feeding live food to Gouldians, and they obtain good results, yet some who may have these housed with a collection of mixed finches which normally are supplied with live food contend that the Gouldian will partake of their share, and in fact eventually are particularly keen to get their share, and the results in regard to breeding young are quite good. This certainly is something that can be given consideration, particularly when it is realised how many species respond when live food is made available to them, and whether it is Gouldians, Red-browed Waxbills, Diamond Sparrows, or any of the other Australian finches that normally are not solely reliant on live food, their liking for this type of food always appears to make them more determined to rear their young.



In making reference to live food, this implies the feeding of such foods as white ants or fly pupae, and it should not be accepted that this is meant to be mealworms, although these in addition (but very moderately) can also be instrumental in inducing some stubborn pairs to rear their young. Very few species of Australian finches would require this additional food if ample supplies of pupae or white ants are made available, and provided they also have reasonable supplies of seeding grasses, results should be exceptionally good.

On the other hand it is remarkable how some species that once were considered a possibility only if live food was supplied are now responding and rearing young without any of this type of food being supplied. Of these probably the *Emblema* is the most changed of all. This species, when initially introduced to aviculture many years ago, was entirely reliant on live food to rear its young and without it was quite a problem to obtain just the slightest success. However, today many fanciers are breeding them in far greater numbers than ever before, and they never feed live food. Much the same applies to Blackhearts, and to some degree with the Masked, but usually it will be noted that where successful achievements are being obtained a liberal supply of seeding grasses are made available.

As a guide to those who are not fully conversant as to which species show a little more preference than others, and which to some extent do rely on live food, the following list in order of preference should assist and serve to determine the individual requirements of each species. Ranking high in showing preference are most: Bloods (Crimsons), Diggles, Parsons, Masked, Stars and Pictorellas, and on a slightly reduced scale Yellow-rumps, and nowadays the *Emblema*, Double-bar, Bicheno, Blackhearts and Hecks, and only occasionally interested the Plumhead, Red-browed, Gouldian and Chestnut.



Any adversities can be attributed to an insufficient supply of live food; and by the same token an inadequate supply of seeding grasses; each must be considered as essential, and any great reduction of either could be instrumental in terminating very abruptly a promising breeding achievement.

In regard to the requirements of foreign species of finches it is doubtful if many species can be reared without live food. If white ants are withheld, it is more than likely these would need to be substituted by either mealworms or pupae/maggots. It is possible an odd pair may rear young on an ample supply of seeding grasses, but it is doubtful whether this would extend beyond Fires or Orange-breasted. Occasionally a pair of Cubans may oblige, but generally it can be accepted that nearly all require live food. It is quite possible to rear the different species of Nuns without live food, but it is essential they have an adequate supply of seeding grasses, and this is something they readily accept and really enjoy. Getting back to

the supply of live food for foreign species of finches, it is doubtful whether any will require more than the Melba with a close second the Aberdeen, or to put it more appropriately, it is doubtful if any are more capable of devouring a greater share, whether they are breeding or not.

Apart from these most other species can usually be kept supplied with little difficulty, and if supplies are made available morning and afternoon they appear to be content. It is also surprising the number of finches, Australian or foreign, that only appear to show an interest in live food when they are rearing young. Their interest in this type of food when nesting appears to increase immediately the young are hatched, and in a number of instances it will be maintained until they leave the nest.

Immediately the young are on the wing it is remarkable how the parents become less interested, and it is noticeable in the case of Fires, Orange-breasted, St. Helenas and Cordons, which appear to be very anxious to get their young on seed as quickly as possible. Cubans are another that have this habit and of course soon after they have accomplished this they start to show resentment towards the young.

As mentioned earlier, some species will rear young without live food, or to be more specific, it is possible some pairs within a species will produce good results and never have access to live food, but these it must be considered are exceptionally good and are among the rare pairs, and so long as they continue to rear young under these conditions no attempt should be made to upset their breeding by altering the diet.

The above **Beginner's Bit** is an Extract from "*The Avicultural Writing of Eric Baxter*". Eric Baxter served as Editor of the Society for 24 years from 1954 to 1977. In 1985 the Society published a collection of the articles he had written for the magazine during his tenure as Editor. Copies of this book are available from the Book Steward, Mr Jack Hannant.