

SUMMARY OF MEMBER QUESTIONNAIRE ON MASKED AND PICTORELLA FINCHES

This article is a summary of the responses to the Member Questionnaire on Captive Breeding of the Masked and Pictorella Finches conducted by the Breeding and Research Sub-Committee. It will deal with each finch individually and address each of the major areas of their husbandry in the same order as the Questionnaire.

The Pictorella Finch

This bird was kept by far and away the majority of the respondents. In general they are kept in large outdoor aviaries that are well planted with Grevillea, Hakea, Callistemon, Acacia, Melaleuca and grasses. The aviaries face between the north-east to the west with a preference for the north. There was one respondent who kept his birds in indoor aviaries measuring 2.4m x 2.4m x 1.2m. Protection from the elements for the birds was stressed by all respondents and even more so for those members from Victoria. The measures taken included fully roofed aviaries, entirely enclosed shelters and plastic blinds to cover the open aviary front in inclement weather. The final point to come out of this section was the need for privacy for the birds to feel secure.

The diet fed to the birds included Canary, Pannicum, Red Pannicum, Jap and White Millet, and Niger seeds as well as Canary Tonic Mix. The majority of respondents also soaked seed for between twelve and forty-eight hours, with a final rinsing in a solution of bleach and fed this daily all year. Seeding grass such as panic, wild oat and winter grass are fed when available. A compost heat in the aviary was a feature in most responses (for the live food), half of the respondents fed mealworms with the other half providing vinegar flies, gentles and termites. It was reported that the birds were keen on the mealworms in particular. In general fruit and vegetables were not fed but those that do feed such things as apple, capsicum, and silver beet. Commercial Egg and Biscuit, Wombaroo mix and boiled egg were common supplementary foods. A shallow broad water dish was provided by the respondents as the Pictorellas were reported as bathing frequently.

The Pictorellas were kept in one to three pairs in mixed collections of birds such as Cubans, Hecks, Red and Blue-faced Parrot-finches, Green Singers, Gouldians, Red Strawberries and Scarlet-chested Parrots. Aggression was noted between the Pictorellas but not towards other species. Cubans, Green Singers and Diamond Finches have been seen to show some aggression towards the Pictorellas but not to any great degree.

The birds were reported as building their nests in a brush lined shelter, shrub and in grasses, often high up near the roof. They do not have a roosting nest. The nest is usually constructed from long dry grass, smaller green grass and lined with feathers.

Most of the respondents provided a number of feeding stations due to the fact the birds were in a mixed collection. They seem to be fairly hardy with no common ailment being reported. The oldest bird reported was 6 years old with the only average life span given at 4 years old. Most respondents use either a number or colour coded system of leg rings to identify their birds.

There are a number of different systems used to pair up birds ranging from pairing up adult birds, pairing up young birds, to allowing a number of young birds to select their own mate, all were reported as producing successful pairs. The minimum age for successful breeding was between 7 months (from birds kept in indoor aviaries) to 2 years, with the oldest successful pair at 5 years old. There was no clear idea as to the most productive period, but with older birds 3 years and up to 5 years being generally favoured. The breeding season was reported at different times of the year at different collections with the conclusion being that they can breed at any time depending on local conditions.

The courtship display was not recorded and the only information on nest building was one respondent who said both sexes constructed the nest. The respondent did not inspect the nest as he felt the birds were too nervous and precious to take the risk. The average number of eggs laid would seem to be three with the highest at 7 laid and fledged. The incubation period was recorded at 14 days with the male sharing the duties. The young fledging at about 22 days with the young leaving the nest over a series of days. The

young obtain white breast marking by 3 months of age and these can be used to determine their sex.

Masked Finch

The requirements for the Masked would appear to be very similar to the Pictorella judging from our respondents' experiences. One major point is that they seem to breed in the winter unlike the Pictorella and construct a nest with an entrance tunnel, with the birds having up to three clutches a season.

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