

MY CORDON BLEU'S

By Foreign Finch Breeder

I have kept the Cordon Bleu for only just on two years, which is certainly not sufficient time to regard myself as an authority on the bird. However, the success I have enjoyed with the Cordon in this time has prompted me to write an article on my own personal 'formula' for Cordon breeding.

Procuring the Birds (In my opinion the hardest part) :

Purchase of young local bred stock is most important, as all aviculturists should know. Shipments of interstate Cordons are available occasionally but, judging from my own and friends experiences, most suffer very high loss rates when introduced into aviaries here in Adelaide. If purchasing from dealers consider all birds purchased at anyone time from the same dealer to be related and therefore must be kept in separate aviaries.



Sexing Young:

Provided birds are from the same nest, sexing within a day or two of birds leaving the nest is possible, cocks showing a larger extent of, and brighter blue than hens. However, this must not be taken as a guide when purchasing young as coloration can vary greatly between young from different parents. Cocks red ear patches have been noted to appear as young as 33 days (from the nest) at which stage the beak colour is generally half pink - half black. Birds are fully coloured at age 9 - 10 weeks.

Housing:

In my particular case aviaries are well protected from the south and west with flight roofs fibre-glassed over. Aviaries, which need not be large, my smallest is only 2.4 x 1.0 x 1.8 metres and largest 3.2 x 1.8 x 2.0 metres, are sited directly under shady trees which provide relief from the summer sun but still allow the sun to penetrate the flight from the north during cooler months.

Housing Cordon's with finches over which they are able to dominate (e.g. mine are housed in single pairs with orange-breasted or strawberry finches), I feel assists the Cordon's in their breeding. Although aggressive on odd occasions and in control at the live food dishes, no other finches come to any harm nor do their own breeding results suffer.

Nesting:

Takes place approximately March through to December. At age 6 - 7 months my birds have all commenced nesting procedures, although one hen at the age of only 6 months, has brought out young (2) from the nest. A clutch of three is normal, although four not uncommon, with a recent nest of five, one bird was, from its appearance, squashed/suffocated in the nest and ejected two days before the other four left the nest.

Sites for nesting are generally around 1.4 metres high in needle brush or shrubs. Material favoured for construction is swamp grass with cotton wool and feathers for lining.

Incubation is 12 - 13 days and young leave the nest 17 - 19 days later. The parents are generally very quick to go back to nest, copulation often taking place before young have left the nest. Periods of 35-42 days between nests of young are normal, although I have recorded only 31 days between successive nests on one occasion.

Young are removed as soon as possible, generally at 16 - 21 days (from the nest) of age, the main reason being to prevent them devouring large quantities of (at times hard to come by) live food meant for young in the nest.

Most pairs will feed very little live food to young when they are about two days from leaving the nest. The temptation to sticky-beak to check that all is well should at any stage be resisted, and observation for a time, from a distance, will reveal whether the parents are still attending to the nest.

From the preceding it might be apparent that I keep full records of nesting. These records of, e.g. time incubation began, date left nest, etc. I consider essential to determine e.g. when to start feeding for young, when to separate young from parents, etc.

General Feeding:

The usual finch mix with (apart from summer season) a handful of niger and 2 - 3 teaspoons of cod liver oil mixed in the seed per 5 litre (large ice cream container) measure. Unwashed cuttlefish is always available.

Sprouted seed fed at least twice daily is mainly favoured for feeding young when they are close to or have shortly left the nest. The only green feed found necessary is silverbeet grown in pots while I consider the feeding of seeding grasses unnecessary as my feeding program centres around live food.

Live Food:

Young have been successfully reared without additional live food, i.e. sufficient insects were obtained from a compost heap (consisting mainly of lawn clippings) and containers of rotting fruit. This early success was I feel, largely beginners luck and young will generally be dumped from the nest at age 2 - 10 days unless additional live food is supplied - this is from my experience only and larger well planted aviaries (provided they are not overcrowded) could help considerably to provide sufficient insect supply.

Additional livefood in my case consists of gents and mealworms. Gents are bred from ox liver (refer article 'Breeding the Gent', **Australian Aviculture** – Special Edition or 'The Second Best Form of Live Food', **South Australian Aviculture** 1981, p.168). Gents bred from fish are not readily taken, if at all. Sufficient time, for gents to breed in meat must be allowed for cleaning out, (I use a half bran, half pollard mix) this varies from approximately 2 - 7 days, depending on temperature. A string of ice cream containers are used with gents at various stages of cleaning out. When fully clean (i.e. the gent contains no black colouration) they are stored in a refrigerator. Method of feeding gents is a problem because of escape, some is unavoidable, especially on a cold, dewy morning. Feeding straight from a refrigerator greatly enhances the gents chance of escape. I find cut down to approximately 6 cm ice cream containers with pollard sprinkled inside around the edges, keeps most in.

I had the opportunity during the winter months, when stocks of gents were low to find out the minimum number of gents my birds required for

breeding. Good young were obtained using just 60 - 80 gents per pair, per day, although 200 plus a day can be taken if supplied.

In conjunction with gents, which have been cut up, and small mealworms being much preferred to cut up larger ones.

In conclusion, the Cordon Bleu has certainly proved to me that it is a most reliable breeder, (39 young having been bred so far, this year alone, from only 3 breeding pairs kept) well worth the extra effort required in catering for its very insectivorous nature.

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