

# YELLOW-RUMPED MANNIKIN

By Josie Pyle



**Other Names:** Yellow-tailed Finch, Yellow-rumped Finch.

**Habitat:** The Yellow-rumped Mannikin prefers open woodland near water, feeding on a variety of seeds and roosting in rank grass bordering rivers, dams and irrigation channels. They are often found in mixed flocks with the Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, with which it can hybridize.

**Distribution:** The Yellow-rumped Mannikin has a restricted distribution from the eastern Kimberley region in Western Australia to the western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. While basically sedentary, flocks do move inland and south during the wet season following ripening of seeding grasses. No sub-species are recognised. Degradation of habitat by stock and hybridisation with the Chestnut-breasted Mannikin are listed as possible threats, although there is uncertainty as to whether its past range and abundance was any greater than currently.

**Avicultural Notes:** While not showing the bright colours of other Australian finches such as the Gouldian Finch, the Yellow-rump is still as attractive bird, with chestnut-brown back, yellow rump and grey head colours contrasting with pale cream underparts (see photograph in centre spread). Combined with a quiet and gentle nature, it is a species which seems to have been under-appreciated in aviculture. Sexing birds is difficult as males and females look very similar. Cock birds can be distinguished by a more silvery grey colour on the head, larger, broader upper bill mandible and darker brown colour on the thigh and under-tail coverts. However, these differences are less obvious in young birds and colony breeding is the optimal way to keep Yellow-rumps.

Yellow-rumps do well in a long flighted aviary planted with tall grass clumps. While they are suitable for mixed aviaries (except other manikins, both Australian and foreign, with which they may hybridise) the importance of the species in aviculture is such that they should be given an aviary of their own to minimize interference and maximize breeding success. While known as a species difficult to breed, they are known to breed freely given the right conditions.

**Diet:** Finch mix, greens and seeding grasses. While they can breed without livefood, better results will be obtained if termites, maggots and other suitable livefood is provided.



**Nesting:** In southern Australia Yellow-rumps nest in autumn and spring and may double-brood. Nests are constructed in clumps of grasses, bamboo, brush or shrubs, in preference to man-made receptacles. Three to four young constitutes an average clutch and the fledglings emerge well-developed coloured dark brown with a dull yellow rump and greyish underparts. Adult plumage takes approximately five months to develop.

**Status:** The Yellow-rumped Mannikin has never been kept or bred in large numbers. In the article “**The Status of the Australian Finches in South Australian Aviaries 1986 - 1989 - 1991 – 1994**” published in 1994, the following statements were made:

- During the period 1989 to 1991 there was 87% increase in the number of Yellow-rumped Finches.
- Even though the Yellow-rumped Finch has never been a particularly popular bird in South Australian aviaries, in 1994 more than twice the number of birds were held than in 1986 (398 compared with 150), which is a very encouraging result.

Unfortunately this trend does not seem to have continued, although it does show that the yellow-rump can be bred successfully. While exact figures for the current avicultural population are not available, increasing difficulty obtaining birds both within South Australia and interstate suggest numbers have declined. Being rare in the wild, it is essential that aviary numbers are improved and a stable breeding population be established in aviculture. With no opportunities to obtain new stock, failure to do this will result in loss of this species from aviculture.