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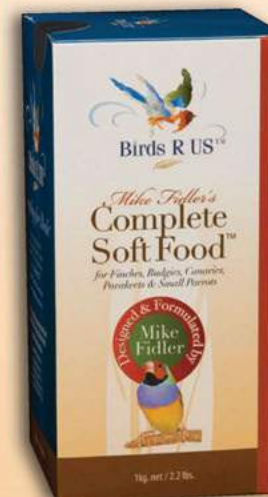
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The National Finch & Softbill Society is dedicated to the introduction of the enjoyment of keeping and breeding Finches and Softbills to all interested parties, enhance the knowledge of our members in keeping and care of these birds, encourage breeding programs, and cooperate with organizations for the preservation of aviculture in this country.

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Editor's Message

I hope NFSS members will enjoy this color issue of the Journal. We are lucky to have some great submissions in this issue, including two by NFSS Region 3 Vice President Jason Crean. Jason's green aracari "Cricket" was featured on the cover of the last issue. In this issue, you can read about Jason's care and breeding regime for these colorful and interesting ramphastids.

We are also fortunate to have two original articles on different Carduelian species. First, we have a very thorough article on a great breeding success with the European Hawfinch, written by Roderick Abela of Malta. Roderick has been especially generous with information about his breeding program and what has led to success with this species. Thanks also go to Tim Roche and members of the Carduelian finches Yahoo!® group for helping NFSS obtain this valuable article.

Finally, we have a very unique article on our own North American Rosy-Finches by NFSS member Paul Rodenhauer. As native species, the Rosy-Finches cannot be held as avicultural subjects here in our country (not without special permits anyway). Nonetheless, I am certain that finch enthusiasts will find the subject matter very interesting and there are plenty of good pictures to give us a sense of what this family of birds looks like. Paul is also a talented artist, and his beautiful painting of a Rosy-Finch graces the cover of this issue.

As it happens, there are no articles focusing on estrildid finches in this issue! I'm sure we will get back to them as the year progresses, but for now, let's enjoy the softbills and Carduelians.

Tom Keegan
NFSS 2nd Vice President
Issue Editor

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President's Message



Making Changes

We're making some changes and we would like your feedback as we move ahead.

I invite each of you to take a tour of the NFSS Website, nfss.org, and look around. Our new Webmaster Barbara Jaquez has made many improvements and additions. There's a new Classified Advertisement section, a Calendar of events where you can advertise your club's shows and find local bird related events. Please take the time to make sure your club's shows are listed on the Calendar. There's a page listing Aviaries, Local Clubs, Societies, Member Sites, Books, Businesses, Feed, Resourceful Links & Advertisers, check it out and suggest additions. Click through the Journal archive for articles about those species you keep and those you have an interest in. These Journals are password protected to make them accessible to members only. Passwords will be provided in each Journal and on the NFSS Finch/Softbill Forum. The current username is `nfss_member`, password: `orangeweaver2010` Username and passwords are case sensitive. There is an underscore between `nfss` and `member`. You may access these at <http://www.nfss.org/articles/index.html> While you're on the website, visit the NFSS Census and

go through the species you keep and those that interest you.

We're looking for breeders interested in forming Species Groups for Finch-Save. The new Census suggests many species have large enough reported populations and a reasonable number of breeders to make them good candidates for new Species Groups. Developing species specific conversations and sharing what works and what doesn't can be a critical part of establishing self-sustaining populations. The potential for trading and selling between participants should reduce inbreeding and improve the bloodlines. Roland Cristo, Rebecca Mikel and Sally Huntington have agreed to guide a renewed effort to build this aspect of the FinchSave program, which remains under the leadership of Vonda Zwick. Interested breeders should contact any of them or contact me directly. Contact information for all of us is on the nfss.org website and in the back of this journal.

We're attempting to do more to make your NFSS membership a bargain, something you'll tell your friends about. Let us know how we're doing!

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TEA TIME! The Many Benefits of Tea

by Jason Crean, NFSS Region 3 Vice President

Though water quality is important for our avian companions, what birds drink in the wild is far from sterile. It is commonly known that many species of birds visit water sources like tree hollows in which plant components leach their tannins and other compounds and minerals. And many of us have seen wild birds drinking from "dirty" puddles and other water sources that are brewing with fallen leaves and mud.

According to Chinese legend, Chinese emperor Shen Nung drank some hot, discolored water after some leaves had been blown into it. He was pleased and continued to experiment with the brewing of different leaves. The common tea leaf is from the plant *Camellia sinensis*, a flowering shrub native to China. Over time, this practice spread around the world and we now have many types of teas that are brewed using the leaves, flowers, buds, and twigs from a variety of plants from which we garner important nutrients and minerals.

You may ask how this affects your birds. The purpose of this article is to simply share our experiences with the use of teas in our program and stimulate readers to begin their own research on this topic. Special thanks to Karen Becker, DVM, NMD who has increased our knowledge on this topic and was the impetus for our research and the incorporation of teas into our avicultural program.

Different types of *Camellia* teas are commonly used and they differ according to the time the leaves are harvested and the process used to prepare them. The younger the buds and leaves, the more caffeine. They also differ in their benefits to animal physiology. It is important to mention that *Camellia* teas contain caffeine so they should

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be decaffeinated by way of a natural process using CO₂ and/or water, not chemically treated. Many commercial teas may say “naturally decaffeinated” but use ethyl acetate which should be avoided. It is essential to choose your teas wisely and buy organic loose teas whenever possible.

Teas from the Camellia plant include the popular green and black teas, as well as white tea. Green tea consists of young leaves that are picked and dried quickly to avoid oxidation. Oxidation is simply the absorption of oxygen by the leaves when drying which causes biochemical changes to the leaves, similar to fermentation. We’ve all seen oxidation at work when apples turn brown after being sliced. Black teas are completely oxidized before firing, giving them a more wilted look. White tea is picked before the leaf buds have even opened and they are steamed and

quickly dried and are, therefore, also unoxidized. Each of these teas has its own benefits for you and your birds.

The following is just a sample of teas that are used and their possible benefits:

Green tea’s properties have been well-established and are frequently in the news. Green tea possesses potent polyphenols, antioxidants found in plants that have amazing benefits that include regulating cholesterol, reducing blood pressure, and aiding weight loss. Professional research journals have cited additional benefits such as preventing gene damage which can lead to cancer, reducing heart disease and decreasing the incidence of stroke. Green tea also helps boost the immune system.

Black tea also possesses antioxidants that help maintain healthy blood vessels and promote healthy blood flow. We

use black tea specifically for our softbill breeders and pets, like our green arcaris, which are prone to iron storage disease as the tannins present in the tea bind to dietary iron and prevent it from being stored in the liver. Many aviculturists use black tea for other iron-sensitive species and zoos around the world have seen its benefits for some time.

White tea has a host of important antioxidants that deters gene damage and inhibits the start of cancer. It also helps the body in breaking down cancer-causing agents and acts as an antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral agent. There is also evidence that white tea supports bone health and density as well as enhances skin health.

Herbal teas

Herbal teas originate from plentiful sources of various flowers, leaves, buds, and other plant components.

Each herbal tea has its own set of health benefits according to its chemical composition.

Dandelion tea is packed with vitamins and minerals, including calcium, and aids digestion and liver function. It also helps with weight loss in obese birds. It also possesses properties that can improve skin quality and thus, feather quality.

Chamomile tea is one of our favorite teas. The flower itself is used to brew this tea and, as many of us know, is very effective in settling digestive upset and calming the nerves. It also has antibiotic properties and relieves muscle spasms. We often use this with birds that are prone to night frights as it acts as a natural sedative and helps eliminate insomnia, anxiety and stress. Thus, we have also seen it help birds that pluck or chew their feathers. Some





pet owners who struggle with feather mutilation have even used chamomile topically in a spray bottle so that the bird ingests the tea while preening.

Milk thistle tea also aids the body in cleansing the liver and is used often for the treatment of liver disease. It is also an important addition for the treatment of kidney and bladder problems.

Raspberry Leaf tea should always be available to breeders as it is a very useful and potent female tonic. It helps stimulate the muscular contractions in the female reproductive tract and helps pass the egg with less complication. We have used it successfully with egg bound hens and many zoological institutions use it with many different species, bird and other, that may have complications during labor.

Calendula tea is another favorite. It is

actually a flower in the marigold family and contains fair amounts of beta-carotene. It has been used as an anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial agent and is great for the skin. In our household, we use it ourselves for sunburn with unbelievable results. It also helps detoxify the body and helps limit the occurrence of digestive problems like ulcers.

Rose hip tea has great flavor and is high in Vitamin C. It helps cleanse the blood and maintain liver and kidney health. It is also good for fatigue and helps the body recover from illness.

Ginger root tea has been used to relieve pain from arthritis and improve circulation. It helps eliminate nausea as well, one of the reasons we're given ginger ale when we're sick as youngsters!

Peppermint tea also has an irresistible flavor and is useful for digestive upset.

This is one of the reasons peppermint candy is offered after meals in restaurants. It has antiseptic properties and contains compounds that are believed to possess antiviral properties as well.

Rooibos tea is high in mineral content and has many advantages. It is known for calming muscle spasms and indigestion as well as possessing anti-allergenic and anti-inflammatory properties. It also works all the way down to the genetic level by maintaining chromosome integrity due to its anti-mutagenic elements.

Anise seed tea is effective in treating respiratory irritation like bronchitis. It can be used to halt coughing and soothe inflamed airways. It also helps quiet indigestion.

When first provided with tea, some birds will be suspicious so it is recommended to start out with weak tea and increase the concentration as they become familiar with it over time. You should always brew tea in hot, but not boiling, water to maximize steeping ability. It is also recommended to make use of a stainless steel mesh tea steeper when brewing tea and to always remove it before serving. It is not recommended to completely replace water with tea, however, so as to avoid dehydration if the bird chooses not to readily accept the tea provided, especially in mixed aviaries where some species may integrate it faster than others.

There are other ways to glean the benefits of tea as well. When cooking for your bird, it is quite easy to substitute water for tea when preparing egg foods, beans, rice, pasta and other items that are prepared in hot water. Baking is another opportunity

to incorporate tea by replacing water with tea in the recipe for bird bread, crumble, muffins or another concoction your birds prefer. Offering certain teas without steeping them is another option, as small birds love to eat flowers, for example, within their dry food mix. For our softbills, we also roll items like chamomile or calendula flowers into our daily fresh fruit mixture for our birds to increase and diversify the nutritional content of every bite.

The use of tea is yet one more way to incorporate additional items to the diet and increase the amount of vitamins and minerals in your daily regimen. Teas can also serve as a great enrichment tool, using a different kind each day to keep things interesting. The many methods discussed here will hopefully allow you to provide more diversity in your birds' diets and help your birds to not just survive, but thrive.

Author Biography

Jason Crean is a biology teacher at the high school and college levels, works in the zoological community, and takes great joy in educating people of all ages about the natural world. See his web site at www.beaksbirdhouse.com or email him at beaksbirdhouse@aol.com.



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Green Aracaris in Aviculture

by Jason Crean, NFSS Region 3 Vice President



Green Aracari "Cricket," photo by Jason Crean.

I have long been amazed with the toucan species and the related taxa for many years and have found the green aracari (pronounced 'ah-rah-sorry') to be a wonderful specimen in so many ways: its relatively quiet demeanor, its playful attitude, and its fearlessness in most household situations. Keeping them as pets, which I frequently use in education programs, has motivated more people to consider obtaining them. Maintaining an individual aracari is not difficult as they eat a simple fruit mixture along with some low-iron pellets. Breeding has proven to be a challenge as they have some requirements that may be difficult to satisfy. I will detail my personal experience in this article including the feeding regimen, breeding requirements, and basic breeding and husbandry tips that have

worked for us after working with other breeders and avian veterinarians.

Pteroglossus viridis is the smallest species in Family Ramphastidae, with the birds in my collection averaging around 130g each. In the wild, they occupy a range in the Northern part of South America that includes Brazil, Guyana and other nearby areas that contain tropical forests. They can be gregarious, living in small groups outside of the breeding season. Green aracari consume mainly fruit though protein intake in the form of insects and small vertebrates can increase during breeding season. Like most frugivores, they fill an important niche in their natural habitat by spreading seeds in their droppings after quickly digesting the various fruits they devour daily. It is unclear just how

many different fruit trees are frequented by these birds but, with the diversity in these tropical forests, you can be sure the number is vast. It is also thought that these birds, like many arboreal primates, utilize a water source in the trees and not on the ground. Water is collected in the hollow notches in trees where groups of organic compounds seep into the water from the fallen leaves, tree bark and other plant components. These compounds, mainly tannins, have been found to bind to dietary iron, disabling excess storage in the liver which causes hemochromatosis, a disorder to which Ramphastids, as well as mynahs and other species, seem to possess a predisposition.

Diet

In my dietary preparation, I include everything that I can obtain and safely offer. Living in the Midwest, the diversity of fruit available through the winter is small so adaptations must be made. We offer some fruits as a staple, using mostly organic fruits that have been thoroughly washed. We avoid citrus fruits as they are high in ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) which increases the uptake of iron. Our diet includes:

- Cantaloupe, organic when available and soaked in cleanser
- Honeydew, organic when available and washed
- Papaya, washed
- Apples, organic and washed
- Pears, organic and washed
- Blueberries, US Domestic only and soaked in cleanser
- Grapes, same as blueberries and

avoid Chilean imports due to dangerous fungicides used

- Sweet potato, organic, peeled and steamed
- Squash varieties, organic and steamed
- Plums, organic when available and soaked in cleanser
- Nectarines, organic when available and soaked in cleanser
- Peaches, organic when available and soaked in cleanser
- Guava, soaked in cleanser and washed
- Carrots, washed and steamed or defrosted when frozen
- Figs, soaked in cleanser when in season
- Banana, organic but fed separately and not mixed with other fruits
- Others including other berries and some fleshy fruits

Green Aracari "Cricket," photo by Jason Crean.



Some fruits like blueberries are frozen when they are abundant and stored until winter when domestic produce is largely unavailable. In addition to the fruit above, greens are added twice weekly for enrichment purposes and increased for calcium absorption during egg-laying and chick rearing. We also sprinkle decaffeinated black tea every other day over the fruit mixture as well as some organic dried oregano which has anti-fungal properties and seems to keep the fruit mixture fresh longer. We also add tea leaves to the drinking water and a drop of grapefruit seed extract (GSE) which also seems to have some anti-fungal and anti-microbial properties; we have yet to encounter a single case of *Candida* in any of our birds to date and attribute this to these dietary supplements. I also add low-iron pellets to the diet. There are a few brands of low-iron pellets available to the public but I do provide a low percentage of these as a part of the whole diet, usually less than 20%. We have also added coconut oil to the diet and

have found plumage to be of a much higher quality with the addition of this source of Omega-3 fatty acids.

The difference between pet diets and breeding diets is subtle yet important. I have found that some birds like certain embellishments when feeding chicks that I do not offer to pet birds. Defrosted peas are a favorite of some breeding individuals and some like live food. Because my aviary is considered to be "indoors," insects are not freely available to my birds as they would be in an outdoor environment. Some of the birds like crickets where others expand their tastes to mealworms and waxworms. I have also tried an organic dry dog kibble that I soak overnight in the tea and, though they did feed it to their chicks, it did not seem necessary so it was discontinued. I do not mean to say that livefood is mandatory for feeding chicks, as there have been clutches which have been successfully reared without it, but it does seem to provide a form of enrichment

Green Aracari chick. Photo by Jason Crean



that encourages chick feeding. I feed pairs that are rearing chicks twice daily instead of the usual one feeding per day. I also increase the supply of leafy greens when feeding chicks as they usually prefer to feed these first before any other item.

Housing

We have designed housing for our breeding pairs in a carefully designed four-season building. Light quality is key for this species so we designed a facility that has screened windows around the perimeter and skylights to provide a great deal of natural light as well as fluorescent tubes to increase the photoperiod at certain times of year. The "aviarium," as we call it, has more of a passive ventilation system and no forced air. A solar-powered attic fan pulls air from the room during the day and warm air is trapped at night. The room is on a heated concrete foundation which radiates heat from below without drying out the aviary. A trench drain that reaches from one end to the other allows all fecal material and discarded food to be flushed simply and quickly. The walls are made of fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP) which are extremely durable and easy to clean. This paneling is also white and brightens the room even more due to the reflected light. Live plants are kept outside of each aracari flight but are plentiful around the outskirts, especially passion flower (*Passiflora*) vines which winds its way around the flights and grows easily in pots.

Each flight is approximately eight feet tall and eight feet long with a width of four feet. Most perches are brushed manzanita and grapevine trees that hang from the top of each flight, keeping the floor clear. All dishes are

accessible from the outside of the flight to avoid aggression from nest-protective birds. Hand-reared birds make fine parents but are not afraid of humans like parent-reared birds so caution should be taken. Misters have been placed on each flight but are only used when temperatures are high during the summer. Aracari love to bathe and enjoy the mist as well as bathing in their large water bowls.

Breeding

Though our birds will breed year-round, we usually notice the males feeding the hens when courtship begins and will make a purring noise while offering food. They will also begin to tidy up their nest log by excavating layers to provide a somewhat bare surface. We mount four-foot long palm logs that are hollowed with an entrance hole about 8-10 inches from the top and are placed elevated so the entrance is as high as possible. We drill another hole into the bottom side where we place a PVC access port that we can simply unscrew to remove chicks. At the top of the log, in a hard plastic lid, we place a wireless camera to monitor hatching and chick progress. These cameras have "night vision" which gives us a very clear picture, day or night, of the eggs and chicks, as well as the frequency of hens incubating and feeding chicks.

Our pairs, without fail, lay 3-4 white eggs in a clutch over a few days. From our direct observations via our cameras, the hens sit fairly tight from the beginning with slightly less frequency closer to hatching. The male will typically sit just inside the nest entrance, clinging to the side through the night or will sit at the bottom along side the hen. We have also watched them take a hearty drink and then fly directly into the nest



Green Aracari chick. Photo by Jason Crean

where they appear to be tucking some of this moisture beneath the eggs. After about sixteen days, the eggs begin to hatch in the order and frequency in which they were laid. As we have noticed, the chicks pip through the egg and as they emerge, the pair consumes the shell almost immediately. Typically, however, pairs usually do not raise all chicks from the clutch.

We have a unique opportunity in our aviary as we have a pair who successfully fosters. We provide wooden eggs similar in size to the natural eggs in the nest for three to five days and monitor the pairs to be sure they begin incubating. We then take two of the four eggs from the laying pair and switch them out with the fake eggs just before dusk. This pair has raised a number of offspring and has been more successful in chick rearing than the source pairs. All pairs raise chicks until they are two weeks old when we pull them for handrearing.

For the first few days, we usually offer some live food to increase chick

survival. The pairs carry food, sometimes piece by piece, to feed to the chicks. We have seen that they will feed a host of foods to their chicks, including shreds of plants that they apparently can reach outside of the flight and consume! We know this as the chicks' feces reveal their last meal or two before they were pulled from the nest. As the chicks grow, they hold their heads up, wobbling back and forth while begging for food. The youngsters are pink and completely blind. Their beak is quite short and heads are flattened; these take shape as the chicks grow over the first couple of weeks. No down feathers emerge; only full feather shafts make their way out of the skin which looks rather uncomfortable!

Handrearing & Pet Quality Birds

Handrearing is a time-consuming process. Since these birds do not have a crop that can be filled, one must note the amount of food intake needed to maintain healthy chick weight. We usually offer 1cc of formula per 10g of body weight though younger chicks may take more and older chicks may take less. This seems to enable chicks to put on a few grams of weight per day. The formula consists of 50% neonate chick formula and 50% organic baby food that consists of blueberry, banana and/or apple. Within the first twenty-four hours, chicks will readily consume handfeedings every 1.5 to 2 hours from morning until night, usually sleeping 6-8 hours without the need of a feeding.

We offer 1-2cc of food at a time until the mass of food can be seen traveling down the esophagus on the right side of the neck. We also add one drop of GSE every other feeding to preserve good gut flora and prevent infections like *Candida*. We also soak our syringes in

a solution of GSE and use it to clean the beaks of our messy eaters. Chicks are kept in a brooder set at 90 degrees when pulled from the nest and is gradually lowered as they feather out. We also keep a soaked sponge in the brooder to retain a good humidity level.

When chicks start perching and manipulating objects with their beaks, we offer soaked pellets and diced fruit. They will play with their food for some time before actually learning to throw it back and swallowing it but, with a beak of this size, the learning curve is clearly understandable! Over a couple of weeks, they learn to eat on their own, decrease their formula intake, and fully wean between eight and ten weeks of age. At this time, their weight can decrease greatly and then, once fully eating the adult diet, their weight will bounce back up.

It should be noted that handraised birds make suitable breeders and, in our experience, have been more successful than their parent-raised counterparts. All of our pairs consist of one hand-raised bird and one parent-raised bird and all have now been successful at raising chicks. We have had requests for parent-raised birds because some believe they make better breeders but we have not found this to be true in our program. These handraised birds are not afraid of people and are, therefore, can be more aggressive towards us, especially during breeding season.

We have thoroughly enjoyed our success in breeding this species and look forward to sharing this love with others further. We talk with people who have received handfed birds from us and the positive response has been outstanding. They have discovered the special qualities mentioned above in their own

birds that have become part of their families. Keeping this species in aviculture is a necessity and hopefully more aviculturists will take on the challenge of breeding this rewarding species.

Author Biography

Jason Crean holds both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Biology, a Master's Degree in Education, and a graduate certificate in Zoo & Aquarium Science. In addition to teaching biology and animal science at the high school and university level, he aids in research and service work in the Genetics Lab at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo where he also teaches graduate courses in their Education Department. He also acts as an avian consultant to zoos and other institutions in the care, breeding, and propagation of avian species. He is the President of the Avicultural Society of Chicagoland and on the Boards of the American Federation of Aviculture and National Finch and Softbill Society. He is a breeder of softbills, specializing in aracarids and mousebirds.

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Notes on North American Rosy-Finches

by Paul Rodenhauser, Albuquerque, New Mexico

This essay features one of the many enchanting benefits of living in New Mexico. The captivating Rosy-Finches of North America extend their southern migration to the Sandia Mountains bordering the east side of mile-high Albuquerque. Sandia Crest at 10,678 feet has become a major site for the study of these fascinating finches. From mid-December through the end of March, the same Sandia micro-climates that

provide a winter haven for Rosy-Finches tend to challenge many visitors, birders, banders, and photographers. The winter temperatures as well as the 58 inches of moisture and ten feet of snow-fall annually at Sandia Crest create conditions that require determination, perseverance, caloric intake, layers of clothing, extra camera batteries, and caution. I'm grateful for all-wheel drive in both directions on the long, winding, East Mountain road to and from to this winter playground for Rosy-Finches.

Male Brown Capped Rosy-Finch. Photo by Paul Rodenhauser.



The two faces of the Sandias are as different as day and night—or one could say as the southwest and northeast quadrants of the continent. No doubt these distinct differences enrich the Rosy-Finches' winter environment and contribute significantly to their attraction. The west slope of desert grassland begins as a reflection of the relatively arid, New Mexican climate and grassy vegetation that extends north of the Chihuahuan Desert. Subsequent zones from base to top host a mixture of pinon and juniper, ponderosa pine, mixed conifers, and finally spruce and fir. The east slope benefits from the moisture released as the winds from the west curl skyward across the mountaintop's ridges. The lush ponderosa pine, spruce and fir forests of the East Mountain, as that region is known locally, remind me of Maine.

It's no wonder that Rosy-Finches have attracted a great deal of attention in the form of birder interest, Sandia Crest visitations, publications and internet commentary—even postage stamps! These are beautiful birds. The challenges they offer don't include getting close enough to observe or photograph them. They are relatively unwary and easily approached. Their primary challenges are the distinguishing characteristics of the various species. These are not only beyond the grasp of casual observers, but even seasoned birders often scratch their heads when asked to differentiate among them, particularly between the Brown-Capped and Gray-Crowned species. But even Black Rosy-Finches can be confused with dark Gray-Crowns. Morphologic differences within a species can baffle some experts, not to mention the distortion produced by certain lighting, the similarities among females across species and

among first year birds. Despite seeking consultation and reading extensively, my sense of uncertainty about the species represented in my most recent oil painting, a head study of a Rosy-Finch (see cover of this issue of the Journal), is not unique.

SPECIES AND SUBSPECIES

Although we see three species and two subspecies of Rosy-Finches in the Southwest, reports indicate that the genus *Leucosticte* consists of 27 species and subspecies of Rosy-Finches and Mountain Finches, most in northern Asia, but the number reported in North America varies from seven to eight, maybe nine according to one source (Arizona Birds Online, Volume 1, Issue 1, Summer 2005). For an in-depth description of many birds it seems advisable, if not necessary, to consult several sources of information. Learning about the taxonomy, distribution, and identification of Rosy-Finches is no exception. One potential pitfall when casting a wide net is the possibility of mystifying inconsistencies and contradictions. In my search for information on the subject of Rosy-Finches, however, the lack of agreement on the number of North American Rosy-finch subspecies is the only inconsistency I uncovered. Because a well structured essay should go full circle, readers can already anticipate a closing comment about the need for additional research, refinement, and availability of current information on the subject of Rosy-Finch subspecies, especially in North America.

Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) reports that the Asian Rosy-Finch, *Leucosticte arctoa*, is found in China, Japan, Kazakhstan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, and Russia. Initial awareness of the significant numbers

of Rosy-Finches in Alaska and the Aleutian and Pribolof Islands raises interesting questions about the relationship between the Asian and North American species.

Currently there are 7 species associated with *Leucosticte*. Three of these occur in North America. These are the Black (*Leucosticte atrata*), Brown-Capped (*Leucosticte australis*), and the Gray-Crowned (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*). There are two subspecies of the Gray-Crowned: a brown-cheeked (*L. tephrocotis tephrocotis*), referred to traditionally as the interior race of the Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch, and a gray-cheeked (*L. tephrocotis littoralis*) or Hepburn's Rosy-Finch (also referred as the Coastal race or form). A well-referenced study of Rosy-Finches published online by the Arizona Field Ornithologists and authored by Rick Wright (www.azfo.org) indicates that Hepburn's Rosy-Finches, usually residents of coastal North America, are the least likely to be found in the interior West despite their reputation for showing up in vagrant records as far away as the Midwest and all the way east to Maine! This wandering tendency gives more impact to the question about the relationship between Asian and North American species. Indeed, the ancestors of the North American Rosy-Finches did come from Asia. At one time, notably between 1983 and 1993, all North American species were lumped together with the Asian rosy-finch into a single species.

SOME GENERAL FEATURES OF NORTH AMERICAN ROSY-FINCHES

On average Rosy-finches are considered to be medium to large sized finches with a range of 5.5 -8.3 inches in length, a wingspan of 13 inches and a

range in weight from 0.8-2.1 ounces. Differences in size among the three species, some dramatic, will be addressed in the section on Distinguishing Characteristics which follows next.

Like other finches in the family Fringilidae, the flight of Rosy-Finches is undulating and buoyant. Their flight call, a high-pitched, chattering chew has been likened to the chirping of House Sparrows or Evening Grosbeaks, but softer. Their song, heard infrequently, is a series of slow descending notes characterized as a husky, whistled jeew, jeew, jeew. Despite regional variations in plumage, it is reportedly the only finch with a solid, dark breast. Rosy-Finches have long wings. When at rest, their wingtips extend to half the length of their forked tails, which are also long. Their legs are short and black. Bills are black during the breeding season but yellow during the winter months. The undersides of the flight feathers on all three species are pale, silvery, and translucent.

Rosy-Finches feed primarily on plant seeds and insects. Some Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finches include vegetation in their diets. The National Geographic Reference Atlas to the Birds of North America mentions that Rosy-Finches appear to consume more animal matter than other finches, particularly in early July. Compared to a diet of 5% animal matter in late June and September the percentage in early July for Brown-Capped Rosy-Finches has been shown to be 85%.

Although nesting materials vary somewhat based on the differing characteristics of the breeding grounds among the three species, nest placement is usually out of sight and shaded. Nests are tucked into cracks and crevices or



Female Brown Capped Rosy-Finch. Photo by Paul Rodenhauer.

holes in cliffs, on ledges under overhanging rocks or among boulders, and occasionally on the ground. Nest cups, tightly woven with fine grass, stems and rootlets, are protected by a bulky outer layer of coarse stems, roots and mud (or moss, lichen, grass, and sedge for the northernmost nesters) and lined with grass, feathers, wool and hair.

Clutches consist of 3-5 (sometimes 6) eggs, 2-6 among various Gray-Crowned forms. Eggs are white and unmarked with the possible exception of some reddish or brownish specks among Gray-Crowned species. Fledging occurs in 16-22 days and the parents feed their young for another two weeks. As parents, Rosy-Finches develop cheek pouches, openings from

the floor of their mouths also called buccal or gular pouches, which allow them to carry large amounts of food to their young.

Because of the remoteness of their breeding sites in steep, rocky terrain the breeding biology of Rosy-Finches is among the least studied among North American birds. Much of the available information is speculative. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology experts suggest that the inaccessibility of Rosy-Finches' alpine habitat and nest sites to humans could also explain why these finches seem almost fearless. Foraging characteristically in small flocks, these birds have been approached successfully to within 3-6 feet. Despite differences in the distance each species characteristically travels



Photo by Paul Rodenhauer.

away from its high elevation breeding locations in winter in search of the sustenance available in more hospitable climates, all species tend to depart their wintering grounds by April.

What is their status in the wild? Least Concern (LC) is the designation in several sources with the caveat that their numbers might be declining; however, the Audubon Watchlist indicates that the Brown-Capped Rosy-Finch population is declining rapidly and faces major conservation threats. Although at a slower rate the Black Rosy-Finch population is also thought to be declining. The Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch is not currently on the Audubon Watchlist.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finches

One internet site, referencing the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, states that the North American Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finches are divided into six subspecies, three with gray cheeks and three

with brown cheeks, the latter found in the interior mountains. The National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America describes only five subspecies and The Sibley Guide to Birds, only two, the coastal and interior forms. The gray-cheeked Pribilof (*L. t. umbrina*) and Aleutian (*L. t. griseonucha*) forms are especially large, accounting for the upper range of length and weight detailed above in the section on general features, and often twice the weight of the smaller forms. A brown-cheeked form (*L. t. dawsoni*) residing in the Sierra Nevada and White Mountains region is also described in the National Geographic Field Guide.

The Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch is a songbird of remarkably extreme environments. Of the three Rosy-Finch species populating the continental United States it has the widest range and distribution, nests the farthest north, and is most abundant. It breeds in the most inhospitable locations, preferring alpine tundra and high elevations. The brown-



Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch, Hepburn's race. Photo by Steve Cox.

cheeked Gray-Crowned (*L. t. litteralis*) summers from Montana to the Yukon. The gray-cheeked Hepburn's Rosy-Finch breeds along the Pacific coast from northern California to the central west coast of Alaska.

On some islands, and in the Canadian Rockies, these birds are permanent residents. Others migrate to the western United States. As might be expected, Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finches are disproportionately underrepresented in the southernmost range of their winter migration, namely northern New Mexico where they can readily be observed and counted at Sandia Crest.

The Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch (interior form) has a black forecrown surrounded by a light gray band or crown (sometimes called a scarf) that extends a limited distance down the back of the head. The throat is black. Usually the plumage is a rich, cinnamon brown. Compared to the other two species the Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch exhibits

less pink on the undersides, wings and rump. Hepburn's Rosy-Finches (coastal form) differ in exhibiting more gray areas on the crown and light gray cheeks that contrast notably with the black chin and create a hooded appearance. As in the interior form the pink in this subspecies is subdued.

Black Rosy-Finches

The scientific name for the Black Rosy-Finch, *atrata*, is Latin for "clothed in black." There are no recognized subspecies. Its year-round Rocky Mountain habitat extends from Montana to Colorado and a short-distance winter migration expands its range in those states as well as to parts of Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and New Mexico. Their range is therefore limited, especially in comparison to that of the Gray-Crowned species, but not as constricted as that of the Brown-Capped.

Its identification is comparatively straightforward. The forecrown, cheek,

breast and back are black. The rosy-pink on the flanks, wing feather edges, belly, rump, and undertail coverts is more extensive and pronounced than in the Gray-Crowned and contrasts boldly with the black feathering. Its silvery gray crown or scarf extends below eye level to the nape of the neck whereas the gray-crown's scarf stops at a slightly shorter distance in a line closer to horizontal from the eye.

Despite reports of concerns about its declining population (reported by Audubon Watchlist at approximately 20,000) and its limited range, no conservation efforts have been directed at this species.

Brown-Capped Rosy-Finches

Limited to the highest peaks of southern Wyoming, Colorado and northern New Mexico, but primarily to Colorado, the range of the Brown-Capped Rosy-Finch is the most southern of the Rosy-Finch species. The scientific name, *australis*, is Latin for "southern." This is a relative term, however. Brown-Caps thrive in snow, ice, frigid temperatures and high altitudes. They will remain in their domain despite freezing temperatures (to -35 degrees centigrade for example) as long as the snow doesn't reduce access to their food sources. The Brown-Capped species doesn't migrate; however, when snow obscures their food supply they move to more open areas in lower elevations where they survive on available seeds.

Brown-Capped Rosy-Finches sport a black forecrown and brownish crown. The chin is brown. Its breast, cheeks, and back are cinnamon brown. As is the case with the other two species, the belly, undertail coverts, rump and wing feather edges are rosy-pink. Although

the Brown-Capped is described to be the palest of the three species its rosy-pink markings are noticeably more pronounced and extensive than on the Gray-Crowned species.

As stated previously, among the Rosy-Finch species conservation of the constricted Brown-Capped population is the most threatened. Their decline has been steady over the last 30 years. Although little is known about potential threats and reasons for their decline because of the inaccessibility of their breeding sites, efforts to protect their lower elevation habitats are considered likely to be beneficial. To date, no conservation actions have been dedicated to this species. The population according to the Audubon Watchlist is approximately 45,000.

Brown-Capped Rosy-Finches are known to re-use abandoned Cliff Swallow nests, a characteristic not mentioned in descriptions of the other two North American species. This is possibly an oversight since Cliff Swallow breeding sites extend throughout the domains of all three Rosy-Finch species; however, in the context of threats to the Brown-Capped Rosy-Finch population, it's interesting to note that the Cliff Swallow population is increasing. Another possibly unique reproductive feature of this species is that the boundaries of males' territory are based on the location of their mates at any given time rather than on a geographic region. They produce only one clutch in a season.

Comparative Distinctions among Species

The species most likely to be confused with other Rosy-Finches is the Gray-Crowned. There are several major differentiating characteristics, however.



Brown-Capped Rosy-Finch (female). Photo by Paul Rodenhauer.

The cinnamon brown plumage is lacking in Black Rosy-Finches. Although the Brown-Capped species sometimes shows a light area at the sides of the crown (possibly the result of light reflection) it usually blends into the darker head and nape and is not well demarcated as in the Gray-Crowned. The gray crown on Black Rosy-Finches extends below the eye level and slightly farther onto the nape of the neck creating a more pronounced silvery hindcrown. In both the Black and Brown-Capped species the pink feathering is more pronounced.

Further complications and confusion result from hybrids between Gray-Crowned and Black species, between Brown-Capped and Blacks where their ranges overlap, and introgressants between Gray-Crowned and Hepburn's.

Although I encountered one very impressive, systematic description of differentiating features among the uniformly paler female and look-alike first-winter birds

of the three species, for purposes of this discussion it might be sufficient to fall back on the expressed experiences of many seasoned birders: it is sometimes impossible to determine the species of certain Rosy-Finches in the field. One birder lamented online that juveniles especially can be indistinguishable.

There are distinctions not based on the need for identification in the field. The 2007 Commemorative Stamp Collection issued by the United States Postal Service included an artist's rendition of the Brown-Capped Rosy-Finch in its *Nature of America: Alpine Tundra* series. The distinction of appearing on a stamp has also been awarded to the Gray-Crowned in Canada but apparently no such honor has befallen the Black species, perhaps the most visually striking of the three Rosy-Finches.

ACTIVITIES AT SANDIA CREST, NEW MEXICO

Given the prominence of New Mexico and Sandia Crest in the study of North

American Rosy-Finches, no essay on these engaging species would be worth its salt without including information from Rio Grande Bird Research, Inc. (RGBR) an Albuquerque-based non-profit that has been studying these birds for the past 7 winters. Michael Hilchey and Raymond VanBuskirk, under the guidance of ornithologists Steve and Nancy Cox, along with a small team of volunteers, congregate at Sandia Crest every Sunday morning from early December through March and manage to band about 80% of the available Rosy-Finch population. Making contact with this group in action at Sandia Crest requires an hour's drive from Albuquerque to the East Mountain area and includes a sixteen mile ascent to the Crest.

In rough, 22-degree (F) weather on the first Sunday in February 2010, I interviewed Steve Cox in the parking lot at Crest House, a small restaurant/gift shop at the peak. From its expansive

deck level, overlooking Albuquerque and the Rio Grande valley a mile below, people from all over the world indulge their fascination with Rosy-Finches. Our conversation would have taken place indoors under ordinary conditions; however, the concurrent snowstorm and weather forecast had already exceeded the restaurant manager's threshold for closing and, by the time I arrived, he and his staff were headed down the mountain!

"Dynamic," Steve emphasizes, is a key word in the world of Rosy-Finches. At Sandia Crest, separate flocks of Rosy-Finches come and go throughout the winter. They move around. Steve points out that the population at any given time is a dynamic of regional weather conditions mostly. When more snow falls up north, more Rosy-Finches can usually be expected at Sandia Crest. At the time we spoke, the number of Rosy-Finches in Taos was threefold the number at Sandia Crest. Steve's estimation

Brown-Capped Rosey-Finch (male). Photo by Paul Rodenhauer.





Black Rosy-Finch. Photo by Paul Rodenhauser.

of the Rosy-Finch population this year at Sandia Crest was around 200 whereas, as recently as three years ago, there were 800-1,000.

The RGBR Rosy-Finch Team estimate the species distribution so far this year to be roughly 60% Brown-Caps, 30% Blacks, and 10% Gray-Crowns. How the relative availability of the different species can differ from year to year is another example of the dynamic nature of Rosy-Finch movements during winters. Steve points out that for the last three seasons Brown-Caps have been the most abundant while the Black and Gray-Crowned population percentages shifted, for example 15% and 21% respectively in 2007-2008.

In stark contrast to the recent relatively steady abundance of Brown-Caps and

shifting numbers of the other two species, The RGBR Rosy-Finch Team's fastidiously recorded data indicate that as recently as the winter of 2006-2007 the distribution percentages were roughly 1.0 for Brown-Caps, 74 for Blacks, and 25 for Gray-Crowns. The range of Hepburn's present per year since 2004 has been zero to an exceptionally high count of 104 the same winter (2006-2007) that Brown-Caps were almost absent. For all seasons since 2004 the distribution of species (calculated through the current season) has averaged 30% for Brown-Caps, 51% for Blacks, and 19% for Gray-Crowns.

During the 2008-2009 season, for the first time, RGBR Rosy-Finch Team attached radio transmitters to a small number of birds with the following questions in mind: Where are the Rosy-Finches

when they're not at Sandia Crest? What are they doing then? Where are they roosting at night? So far the findings are inconclusive with the possible exception of some evidence for their use of local caves for roosting. Current and future data derived from the dedicated efforts of the RGBR Rosy-Finch Team at Sandia Crest can be found online at www.rosy-finch.com.

SUMMARY

Less than 20 years ago, our understanding of Rosy-Finches emerged from the unenlightened belief that they comprised only one species. Our knowledge of Rosy-Finches has grown exponentially since then; however, they still rank among the least studied of North American birds. Much of what we've discovered has added immensely to our appreciation of similarities across species but especially to our awareness of the distinguishing morphologic features among species and subspecies, although additional refinements on subspecies seem warranted. Studies have expanded our understanding of species- and subspecies-specific summer nesting sites, winter foraging ranges, diets and whether or not they migrate, yet our knowledge of their breeding biology and the causes of the documented decline in numbers among Brown-Caps especially, but also among Black Rosy-Finches, remains speculative. The status of Gray-Crowns is unclear possibly because of the vastness of their range and the universal, unpredictable flock dynamics determined and described by the RGBR Rosy-Finch team at Sandia Crest.

Although conservation efforts have not been directed toward any of the Rosy-Finch species, attempts to learn more about their behaviors and the competition

for life-sustaining resources are ongoing, albeit not under the aegis of an organization that can approach the task in a comprehensive fashion. In order to ensure that the future of the North American Rosy-Finches is as vibrant as their visual impact, in order to ensure that they won't become as imperiled as the current status of Gouldians in the wild in Australia, efforts at understanding the threats to Rosy-Finch species and actions to reverse their population declines will have to be appreciably accelerated.

FURTHER READING

Readers interested in additional information in the form of books, book chapters and articles relevant to the three North American species of Rosy-Finches can find substantial lists of references by searching www.wikipedia.org by species name.

NOTE OF APPRECIATION

The author thanks Steve Cox for his critique of the essay, the Rio Grande Bird Research Rosy-Finch team for information about their work at Sandia Crest, and Tom Keegan for his editorial assistance.

Author Biography

NFSS member Paul Rodenhauer's interests and activities include avian art, photography, pottery and master gardening. His avian companions include Gouldian, Society, Zebra and Yellow-fronted Green Singing Finches.



Black Rosey-Finch (female or first-year male). Photo by Paul Rodenhauer.

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THE HAWFINCH

(*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

by *Roderick Abela, Malta*

It was during the 2007 breeding season that I finally managed to fulfill the dream which I have long wished for and make it a reality. Many dream about breeding hawfinches, as most consider it as the ultimate bird to breed in the European finch class. Many breeders and bird admirers alike consider it a very difficult bird to breed and this makes it a more exciting challenge to go for.

My first attempt at breeding these beautiful birds goes back to 2005 when I first acquired a docile hen from a friend of mine. As usual, I tried to research as much as possible about these adorable birds but one has to say that not too much information is available on breeding these birds.

Soon after acquiring this hen I bought a nice male from a bird dealer to pair to this newly acquired hen. I read in a book that these birds can be very aggressive to each other if one of the partners goes into breeding condition earlier than the other and this can result in serious fights that can lead to death. Therefore I kept both sexes separate in double breeder cages separated by dividers until mid-April. Towards the end of April I put them together in a large 5m x 4m x 7m shaded aviary. However I noted that the male had put on so much weight during the period that he was housed in the cage that he could not fly properly. On the other hand the hen went to nest immediately after a week. You can imagine my excitement

when one day during the feeding routine I discovered a nest built in the most exposed nest pan in the aviary. Soon after she started laying until she laid a clutch of 3 eggs.

After 7 days I checked the eggs' fertility only to discover that these were infertile. This did not come as a surprise though as the male, as I said earlier, was too heavy to fly properly and was therefore unable to fulfill his paternal duties. After I removed the eggs, the hen went to nest another 2 times but all these had the same fate as they were all infertile.

There was nothing to be done at this point. After these 3 nests they went into moult. At least it was a partly positive experience from which I could learn some valuable lessons.

The following year I followed practically the same procedure with the difference that I paid more attention to the weight of the birds. Unfortunately during this year I did not manage to source any insects (except some live mealworms) unlike the previous year and this made a huge impact on the breeding condition of all my birds. Towards mid-April I put the birds again into the aviary together, but this time my desire to breed these birds ended abruptly because the hen went into moult soon after releasing her in the aviary. Maybe the difference in lighting from my birdroom where she was kept with the male separated with a divider, to the aviary which was chosen



Adult cock in February with beak still white. Photo by Roderick Abela.

to be in a darker place to give them privacy induced this moult. Nevertheless this was the same aviary I used the previous year where she nested 3 times.

Once again there was nothing to do. But as I said before, I regard every failure in life as one step closer to success. In bird breeding this is no exception. I had not discovered how to breed the hawkfinch as yet, but had discovered more errors that can prevent success.

With the experience of these 2 years in hand, I was determined to make 2007 a breeding success with such marvelous birds. In winter I started searching for reliable suppliers of insects from abroad. Such food is indispensable for hawkfinches and chaffinches. As I did in 2005, I managed to import a lot of frozen insects from abroad.

DETAILED 2007 BREEDING METHOD.

In February I placed the hawkfinch hen in the aviary that was to house the couple, and the male in a separate aviary. The scope of this was to leave them separated just the same, while allowing them plenty of space to fly and exercise to keep them fit for the upcoming breeding season.

A characteristic of these birds is that their beaks go darker and darker as they near the breeding season. However, my hen every year got a dark beak by January, when the male's beak was much paler (as shown in the photos). Therefore I made it a point to enrich the male's diet with more protein than the female's, by using buffalo worms and pinkies (fly larvae). The plan worked as the male's beak



Adult hen in February with beak already dark. Photo by Roderick Abela.

started turning seriously darker and darker after 3 to 4 weeks.

As for the birds diet, I must say that 5 years ago I converted all my birds to a pellet diet. However, I must also state that I use the pellets as their basic diet which is then further enriched with supplemental food during different periods of the year.

During the breeding season I enrich their diet with a much more varied diet. I believe that pellets are much healthier and more balanced than dry seeds. Therefore with my hawfinches it was no exception. During the resting period the hawfinches were on a pellet diet plus some dry seeds from time to time. However as I said I do not believe

that the diet that is sufficient and complete for maintaining the birds in good condition will be enough to support the youngsters in growing from a tiny chick to a full grown bird (around 15 times its original size) in such a relatively short time. Therefore, while I feed the birds pellets all year round (maintenance and breeding formula for the respective periods), I supplement it with additional natural foods. In the case of hawfinches, in the lead up period I give additional sprouted seeds with soft food, baked milk and egg omelette, frozen (thawed) peas enriched with vitamin and protein powder supplements and spirulina. On top of these I feed a few buffalo worms and pinkies. In order to stimulate their breeding instinct I like to throw a few live mealworms on the aviary floor for the hawfinches to search amongst the dry grass spread on the aviary floor.

In the beginning of April I put the male in with the female in the same aviary and observed them closely to make sure there were no fights going on. I also put in several different nest boxes and nest pans in different locations and different heights around the aviary. During this season I used a much smaller aviary than the previous 2 years. Its dimensions are 1m x 2m x 2m – the same kind of aviary I use for my other European finches. The only difference is that I covered the aviary front with a piece of dry palm tree branch for extra privacy as can be seen in the photos.

After some weeks, I observed the hen carrying around nest material in her beak, looking for the best place to construct her nest. Before I knew it the nest was neatly built purely out of coconut fibres. I provided all sorts of nesting material but she always chose only coconut fibre. The first nest consisted of 5 eggs. I always remove the first 3

eggs and replace them with dummy eggs until she lays the fourth egg. This time around the hen did not choose an exposed nest pan like 2 years before. She chose a wire box that is normally used by greenfinches, screwed to the top front corner, with a large plastic nest pan fitted inside. The front of the aviary was covered with green netting for privacy.

Unfortunately after six days I discovered that all the eggs were infertile. This discovery was a big blow to my morale because I had worked so hard at achieving something this time around. Nevertheless, deep down I thought maybe it will only be the first nest that will be infertile. It is not uncommon to have a first round with many clear eggs with other European finches such as greenfinches and goldfinches. In fact,

in the same year, I had the first round with all clear eggs except for one nest. But from the second round onwards it was full clutches for all hens except for a few exceptions.

And that is how it turned out to be with the hawfinches. After I removed the eggs from the first round, I gave her some additional calcium concentrate and electrolytes to prepare her for the 2nd round. After around one week she built a new nest again with 5 eggs. This time all of them turned out to be fertile. You could imagine my feelings when I checked out the eggs and saw that all of them were opaque and not clear as the previous nest.

After 13 days, four of them hatched and the next day the 5th one hatched. I started providing lots of pinkies and



Hen, cock, cock, hen. Photo by Roderick Abela.

buffalo worms to the hen in a separate dish plus the usual mix of sprouted seeds, peas, and egg food in a separate dish. However for almost 2 weeks she only consumed the insects and very little of the rest.

I was afraid that I might disrupt the hen, so for the first 5 days I could only wait anxiously hoping for the best and did not interfere in any way. I could see the hen eating the insects but I was not sure what was happening inside the nest. On the 6th day I finally approached the nest to ring the birds. I waited for a moment when the hen was off the nest because she would not leave her nest whenever I tried to remove her to check the eggs. I was delighted to find a full nest of youngsters all growing rapidly and healthy. I ringed 4 of them with K sized rings and their legs were already pretty tight.

The fifth one having hatched one day later was a little bit behind his siblings and therefore I decided to remove him as anyway he was falling back and I was sure that as the others grew bigger he would eventually die. The only nest I had at the time with youngsters his age was a reliable canary hen with 2 canaries chicks. Therefore I put this chick inside its nest and observed that the canary hen was feeding him. I helped her out with hand rearing twice daily and it grew steadily for over 8 days. However in the end, when it was about to leave the nest, it died suddenly and unexpectedly.

After about eleven days, the others that were still under the care of their natural mother left the nest and this was the time when I decided to remove the cock just in case he decided to harm the youngsters. I knew this will reduce the chance of getting a second nest, but I decided



Hen feeding young in nest. Photo by Roderick Abela.

to play it safe. After about 3 days I put all the youngsters with their mother in a flight cage with grids where they were in less of a risk from injury during this weaning phase.

Since it was now late in the season and the weather was extremely hot, I decided not to go for another nest. The youngsters turned out to be 2 cocks and 2 hens. They can easily be identified as seen in the photos by the colour on their wings and on their heads. The cocks have dark shiny bluish wings while the hens' are grey, and the heads of the cocks are much darker brown than the hens'.

The youngsters were weaned out in the cage and I left them in there for about a month, after which I put them in an outside aviary for the moult. The birds eventually moulted out into beautiful subjects. The following season, I bred another 11 hawfinch chicks from the 3 hens then in my possession.

The birds were shown in various shows both in Malta and also in foreign



Juvenile hen. Note lighter head color. Photo by Roderick Abela.

European countries, and I can say they were highly admired by show visitors each time. Being captive bred subjects they turned out to be very tame and this gave the opportunity for the visitors at the shows to admire a hawfinch literally

‘showing off’ itself in its show cage. I competed well with the subjects having won a best in show twice in national shows. However, the top award came only recently at the World show 2010 in Portugal when I won a silver medal with

Breeding aviaries used for the author’s Hawfinches. Photo by Roderick Abela.





Juvenile cock. Note darker head color. Photo by Roderick Abela.

a team of 4 hawfinch cocks in a hawfinch/crossbill class and a bronze medal with another cock in the singles' class.

I hope that by giving a detailed account of the experience I had with these birds in the past seasons, explaining both my ups and downs, I will be able to give a greater insight into breeding this bird – the King of the carduelan species.

I believe we, as bird breeders, all long for a new breeding challenge from time to time. I believe that in order to achieve this, we must observe our birds as much as possible, and discover as much as possible through research about the birds we want to breed. This will enable us to do our utmost in providing the right environment and nutrition coupled with a lot of common breeding sense to finally achieve that aim – that of breeding a new bird species we never had before. And all this gives us a great sense of satisfaction.

Author Biography

Roderick Abela is a keen breeder of carduelan finches and their hybrids from the Mediterranean island of Malta. Over the years he has had breeding with Hawfinches, African Chaffinches, Siskins, Greenfinches, Black Hooded Red Siskins, Goldfinches, Grey & Green singers, sparrows and other related species and has contributed his experiences in international aviculture magazines. He also has a passion for exhibiting birds and has enjoyed extensive success in this field both in his home country and abroad. His top achievement in this area of bird show competitions came in January 2010 in the World Show in Portugal where he won 2 silver and a bronze medal with his owner bred hawfinches and greenfinches.

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Alabama

Central Alabama Avicultural Society, Inc. Montgomery. tedsexton@bellsouth.net www.caasociety.com Events: Show/Bird Fair, Sept 4-5, 2010, Quality Inn & Suites, 2705 East South Blvd, Montgomery, 1-334-288-2800 (reservations). Contact: Ted Sexton, tedsexton@bellsouth.net, (334) 301-2920 or loveoffinches@live.com, (256) 892-3072.

California

Central California Cage Bird Club, Modesto, www.mycccbc.org Event: Canary and Finch Show and Mart, October 30, SOS Club, Modesto. Contact: Janna Place, naturesplaces@sbcglobal.net.

Finch Society of San Diego County, San Diego, finchsocietyofsandiego.com.

Florida

Treasure Coast Exotic Bird Club Inc., Stuart, tcexoticbirdclub.com Event: South East Regional Finch Show and Bird Expo, March 21, Martin County Fairgrounds, 2612 SE Dixie Hwy, Stuart. Contact: Kathy Dwyer, jim.dwyer@netzero.net.

Tri-State Avian Society, Tallahassee, webmaster@tristateaviansociety.org, www.tristateaviansociety.org Event: Spring Bird Fair, May 15-16, North FL Fairgrounds, 441 Paul Russell Rd, Tallahassee. Contact: Barry Laster, barryL7523@comcast.net.

Illinois

Heart of Illinois Bird Club, Peoria, hoibc@yahoo.com. Events: Bird Fair, Feb 28; Bird Show & Fair; Bird Fair, Oct 24. All events at Grand Hotel (Ramada Inn), 4400 Brandywine Dr, Peoria. Contact: Jody Lewis balu716@yahoo.com, 309-645-7773.

MWBBE, Lawrenceville Event: Show, March 20, Lawrenceville. Contact Lisa Grimes, lgtiels@yahoo.com
Judge: Annette Howard.

Finch and Soffbill Breeders and Exhibitors Club, Palatine, www.fsbec.finchfiles.com Event: TBA.

Maryland

Baltimore Bird Fanciers, Baltimore, info@baltimorebirdfanciers.org, www.baltimorebirdfanciers.org Events: Bird Mart, May 15 and Bird Show & Mart, Oct 12, Tall Cedars Hall, 250 Putty Hill Ave, Baltimore Contact: Joe Jones, josephmjones@comcast.net.

New York

Empire Finch & Canary Club, West Hempstead, irmanperez@aol.com Event: Annual Show, Nov 13, St. Mark's Methodist Church, Rockville Center. Judge: Laura Tinker. Contact: John Lund, irmanperez@aol.com.

New York Finch & Type Canary Club, NYC, barstand@verizon.net Events: Feather Show June 27, Averill Blvd Park (Meeting Hall), Elmont. Contact: Stan Kulak, barstand@verizon.net; Annual Show, Sept 25, St. Jude Church (Gyne Hall), 1677 Canarsie Rd, Brooklyn.

Oregon

Columbia Canary Club, Portland. Event: TBA.

Puerto Rico

Asociacion De Criadores de Finches, Inc, Caguas PR, finchespr@yahoo.com Events: Summer National Show, June, Centro Comunal, Alturas de Villas del Rey, Caguas. Show Judge: Martha Wigmore. Winter Regional Show, November 5-7, Centro Comunal, Alturas de Villas del Rey, Caguas. Judge: Armando Lee. Manager (both shows): Juan Alicea, juanalicea@yahoo.com, 787-479-7405. Note: The only finch species allowed for these competitions are Zebra, Society, Gouldian, Cutthroat, Cordon Bleu, Green Singer, and Brazilian Crested Cardinal Finch.

Puerto Rico Zebra Finch Club, Gurabo, przfc@yahoo.com, www.przfc.com. Event: Puerto Rico Zebra Finch Fall Show, Sept 10 – 12, Centro Comunal Santa Juana, Caguas. Contact: Jorge Mojica, przfc@yahoo.com, 787-550-3163. Judge: TBA.

Texas

Fort Worth Bird Club, Fort Worth, jerrycason@mindspring.com, www.fwbc.org. Event: Fort Worth Bird Show, Oct 2, Azle Community Center. Contact: Jerry Cason, jerrycason@mindspring.com.

Texas Bird Breeders and Fanciers Association, Temple, coculwell@verizon.com Event: Texas Bird Breeders Show, Nov 6, Mayborn Convention Center, Temple. Contact: Clarence Culwell, coculwell@verizon.com.

Virginia

Peninsula Caged Bird Society, Newport News, finchbreeder@earthlink.net, www.vapeninsulacagedbirdsociety.org. Events: Spring & Fall Marts & Shows, Columbian Center. Dates TBA. Contact: Deb Wilson, dwilson786@aol.com.

Wisconsin

Central Wisconsin Cage & Wild Bird Connection, Pittsville, mminor@tds.net, www.cwwcbc.us/bc/. Event: Annual Bird & Garden Fair, Saturday, May 15, 2010.

Regional

West Coast Zebra and Society Finch Show, Sacramento, CA. www.efinch.com/show Event: Fifth Annual Show, July 30, Sacramento. Contact: Jami Arndt, jamiarndt@comcast.net.

Foreign

Durham Avicultural Society, Ontario, Canada, www.birdclub.ca, secretary@birdclub.ca, 416-282-5997 (Jacquie). Event: Annual Bird Show, Sep 18 – 19, Ajax Community Centre.



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