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Journal of the

National Finch & Softbill Society

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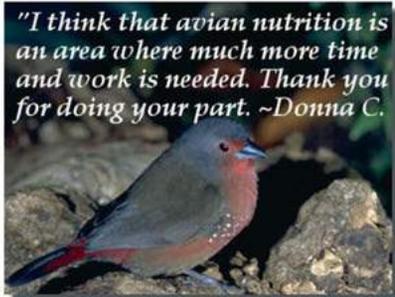
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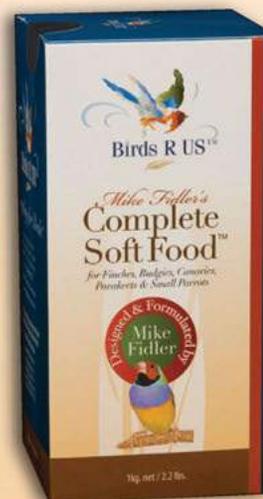
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The National Finch & Softbill Society is dedicated to the introduction of the enjoyment of keeping and breeding Finches and Softbills to all interested parties, enhance the knowledge of our members in keeping and care of these birds, encourage breeding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

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A Message from Your NFSS Editor:

Journal Articles Needed!

Although I am happy to produce another issue of what I consider high quality material on finches and softbills, there is a bit more reprinted material in this issue than I have been in the habit of using since I've been editing the Journal over the past year or so.

New material for the Journal is very much needed! If you have been working on an article, or just thinking about writing one, now is the time to get it done. If you have any questions about what we might be looking for, please get in touch with me and I'll be happy to discuss it with you.

Also, if you've got high-resolution pictures suitable for the Journal cover, please send them in. I hope to hear from many of you soon with your article ideas!

Tom Keegan
2nd Vice President

President's Message



Reflection

As I write this last column in my current capacity as President, there comes to mind a good number of people I would like to thank for all their support of NFSS. Space does not allow me to thank all of you individually. The membership, fellow members of the board of directors, contributors to the journal, aviculturalists in other communities all play a part in making NFSS the organization it is.

What is NFSS? In a recent conversation, I was reminded the National Finch and Softbill Society is the membership. It is not a few people on a board of directors, it is you that support it by paying your dues. It is contributors to the journal that share their experiences with us. It is members of the aviculture community that promote NFSS to those that are not familiar with what we have to offer, those that hand out brochures or membership forms when they go to fairs or other bird related events. NFSS is what we all want to make it.

NFSS is a community of individuals that all have some kind of interest in finches or softbills. Not everyone's interests will be the same but the birds are a common denominator. Someone pointed out to me that he sees bird friends when he goes to a finch/softbill show, and these people do not even exhibit birds, and he doesn't see them at fairs. Why do they go? To be part of the community that we all partake in. Shows are much more than ribbons for our birds. They give us the opportunity to interact with other bird owners, tell stories, trade, give and receive advice and learn from each

other. They give us the chance to be with each other that we can't get from a journal or internet forum. If you have never been to a show or other type of bird related event try to make a point to attend and see for yourself all the opportunities available.

Finch and Softbill Save is a program that I have heard many people express interest in. I would like to invite all those that breed specific species to contact Vonda Zwick, our FSS VP, to volunteer to be a Species Captain. There was a good conversation on the husbandry forum recently regarding Strawberry Finches, and it made me think if one of these breeders volunteered to be a captain we could help improve the stock of Strawberries in American aviculture. It just takes one person to get the ball rolling.

The board of directors is currently working on plans to recognize excellence in aviculture such as the first time breeding of a species in America or the successful establishment of several generations of a rare species. If you have other ideas you would like to share please contact any member of the board.

Again I want to thank you all for your support of NFSS and I hope to continue to serve NFSS for another two years.

Respectfully,

Bob Peers
President





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White-backed Mousebirds

by Jason Crean, NFSS Region 3 Vice President

Mousebirds are of the genus Colius and originate in Africa. They are primarily frugivorous and folivorous, eating a wide variety of fruits, leaves and some insects. Though these softbills appear to be "cardinal-like" in appearance, they are not seed eaters as they do not have a developed crop. They are a gregarious species, living in large groups and scurrying around tree branches with each other, a behavior that gave them their common name. They are peculiar in their posture as they hang from branches by their long toes and elongated feet, dangling their very long tail down below the body. They sleep in communal "clusters" where a group of birds, to maintain a comfortable temperature at night, will hang facing each other so their tails all hang down together. They also have a very pleasant "chirp" which can be very soft and pleasant.

The species we raise, the white-backed mousebird, has a grey body with a white stripe on its rump, bordered by two black stripes. Scientifically known as *Colius colius*, it also has a burgundy patch closer to the tail which is not usually visible unless the wings are spread. It is thought that, as with other birds with similar rump colors, these colors are only visible while in flight to surprise predators long enough to escape. They are also countershaded as their breast and belly are a buff color. One of their most intriguing characteristics is their crest that can become erect on their head and appears to be used for communication, much like other crested avian species. They also exhibit a beautiful silver beak with a black tip and a stiff tail that can extend to a length of over six inches, about half their overall

body length. They also have vivid reddish-orange feet and legs with long toes used for hanging.

DIET & HOUSING

They eat a diverse diet of fruits and have a voracious appetite! They will eat pieces of whole fruit with their small, pointed beak tips or consume diced fruits along with a pelleted diet. Larger softbill pellets that are soaked are preferred by most individuals though some dry finch pellets are accessible at all times. We prefer to mix a cockatiel sized pellet right in with the fruit and allow it to soften in the natural juices.

Common dietary items include apple, pear, orange, tangerine, grapes, blueberries, diced green, leafy vegetables, and their favorites, banana and melons including cantaloupe, honeydew, and papaya. These foods are either diced or put into the tray in chunks and covered with low-iron softbill pellets. Many mousebirds do prefer to pick at larger chunks throughout the day, especially fruits like bananas. For this reason, I place large slices of fruit into the tray and then add pellets and some diced fruit to it. In order to minimize mess, I put a tray of fruits and pellets on the floor of the cage where it can be seen no matter where the birds prefer to hang in their cage.

Diet preparation is quick and easy. As stated, I dice fruits without seeds and skins. I also recommend supplementing the diet with enrichment items like whole slices of fruit where the skins can be left intact. I add pellets to the diced fruit mixture and add that to the top

of the larger pieces. I also add leafy greens two to three times per week and increase that when chicks are in the nest. Each mousebird will eat approximately a ½ cup of food per feeding. We recommend feeding twice daily until they are about six months of age but one feeding should last throughout the day after they have matured.

I also use some whole food supplements that have helped my birds to thrive. Using tea is a staple for all of my birds and I use different teas in different situations. For mousebirds, I have found organic decaffeinated tea as a wonderful addition to the diet. The antioxidants, vitamin C, and other nutrients like vitamin B1, B2, and B6 makes this a superior addition to the avian diet. I will offer this steeped in their drinking water but also will mix in the ground tea leaves in with their diced fruit mixture. Other teas I offer include decaffeinated black teas and herbal teas like chamomile for calming nerve relaxation and digestion, rose hips for blood cleansing and potential fatigue, and peppermint for its antiseptic properties as well as its digestive benefits.

In the fruit mixture I add dried organic oregano as it has powerful antifungal properties that keeps fruit fresh longer as well as coconut oil. Coconut oil is a fantastic essential oil that is packed with Lauric acid, which promotes healthy metabolism and is known for its antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties, and MCTs (medium chain triglycerides) which increase available energy and are easily digestible.

Caging does need to be somewhat tall and wide to accommodate their tail. We prefer a cage that is at least thirty (30) inches tall and wide and fill the

cage with natural branches, especially willow varieties. Due to the fact that they hang on cage bars, it is helpful to hang a piece of thin Plexiglass or sit the cage on an easy-to-clean surface like so many other bird owners do for their psittacines. We also make sure to leave space on the floor for a plastic container for their dust bath which will be discussed later.

BEHAVIOR & BREEDING

Behaviors are unique in that they scurry about with quick jumping motions, a reason for their rodent name! They do love live plants so a well-planted aviary is a plus for breeding though they may be destructive to some plants. During breeding season, which indoors can be year-round, they will nest in just about anything like a canary open wicker nest or a finch covered wicker basket. I have even had very determined pairs toss out all of their food and stuff bedding into their stainless steel dish to lay eggs! I prefer the open top finch breeding box as it provides them security, is easy to inspect, and will hold the eggs and babies if parents are startled. They will also use just about anything to create a comfortable interior, including coconut fibers, cotton and cotton fibers, wood shavings and finely shredding paper. I have found dried leaves and twigs as well as mammal hair in their nests as well! Some birds have also completely built their own cup-like nests even though prefabricated nests are provided.

The reproductive cycle is somewhat shorter than that of psittacines and even other softbills as they can go to nest and lay a clutch of three to four eggs all within two to three days. The babies hatch after about 14 days, and they grow very fast. At day nine, they must be pulled if you are to hand-raise

them. At this point, they can be handled by using small forceps and giving them small bits of fruit and small soaked pellets. Another facet of hand-raising is the need to stimulate chicks to defecate, which the parents do by pecking at their vent opening to allow the solid waste out and remove it from the nest. Chicks also are adept at tilting their vent to release their feces out of the nest. We aid them in this behavior by lightly rubbing their vent with a paper towel. This only needs to be done the first few days until they have adjusted to their new diet and feeding regimen and can do it on their own. The babies have a short tail at this age and sleep with their tail straight up. We then feed them every hour from 6am until about midnight the first week, and then every 2 hours until weaning. They usually wean by 5 weeks of age though their adult plumage is not complete for another few months.

BRINGING HOME A PET MOUSEBIRD

When taking home a hand-raised pet, some may experience a little hyperactivity as they are quite inquisitive. Almost immediately they will want to be close to their human companions so holding them in the hand and offering them food from hands will help reinforce this bond. In no time, they will be hanging from your shirt allowing you to scratch them! Offer them a plate of food at the bottom of the cage so they can see it no matter where they are. They don't drink a great deal of water but a fresh supply should be available at all times.

They don't bathe in water, however, as they prefer to take dust baths. I mimic this condition by providing them with fine bedding, like Kaytee's Bird Cage Litter made of recycled newspaper granules that look similar to cat litter, in a deep disposable container on the floor

of the cage. They will almost immediately jump in and begin to roll in these granules. We recommend keeping this bath away from the food so as to avoid mixing bathing material in with their soffoods. Some mousebird enthusiasts have used children's play sand that has been sterilized to more closely imitate their natural bathing substrate.

Warmth is also key, especially for the first few potentially stressful days in their new home. Many birds, when in a new environment of any kind, will become stressed and warmth is important to make them as comfortable as possible. A heating pad under the cage or a heat lamp at a safe distance can really help though it is recommended you only use heat sources under close supervision. Keeping their cage in the warmest room in the house during this time is usually sufficient.

Mousebirds are a truly unique bird and make wonderful pets for owners who love them and train them properly. They love interacting with each other and humans if kept in the home and make a welcome addition in almost any family situation. We have thoroughly enjoyed our success in breeding this species and look forward to sharing this love with others further. We talk with many mousebird owners who have hand-raised birds as pets and their opinion is always positive. They have discovered the special qualities mentioned above in their own birds that have become part of their families. Families with children are particularly happy with this species as are apartment dwellers where noise must be limited. It is for these reasons mousebirds can be a wonderful addition to any home.

Author Biography

Jason Crean holds two degrees 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 college level, he has aided 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 aracaris and mousebirds. Visit his website at www.beaksbirdhouse.com

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Liechtenstein's Desert Finch

RHODOPECHYS OBSOLETA

(sometimes listed as *Rhodospiza Obsoleta*)

by *Darren Sefton, United Kingdom*

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Desert Finches are approximately the same size and build as a European Greenfinch (6"). The body colour is a sandy to pinky beige, the upper parts being slightly darker. The Primaries are black edged with white or pale pink and the coverts are pink and white. The tail is forked at the tip, with the outer tail feathers being black edged in white or pale pink similar to the primaries. The melanin in these feathers strengthen them. The beak is a similar shape to that of a Bullfinch, but both mandibles are the same length.

The male has a narrow black stripe running from the dark eye getting wider

towards the base of the beak. This stripe is missing in the hen and is therefore the main distinguishing feature between the sexes. The black markings on the male's feathering are a little lighter on the female, but this is difficult to see and isn't as obvious as the facial markings. The skin on the legs in my birds is much pinker than the illustration shows in *Finches & Sparrows* and the skin on the body is even redder than the legs. Overall, they do not look too dissimilar to Trumpeter finches or some of the species of Rosefinches.

THE COCK BIRD

The call is quite different from any other Finch that I have kept before, but reminded me of the call of a Greenfinch,



although not quite as tuneful, not unpleasant. It consists of a number of cheeps, twitters and whistles with quite a lot of repetition. The hen only makes a quite whistle. They do call in flight to one another. As I have difficulty matching the call descriptions in field guides to actual calls, I am not going to try, as I'm sure I won't make a better job of it. If you want to try then refer to Finches & Sparrows.

Finches & Sparrows by Peter Clement, Alan Harris and John Davis state that the home range is from South East Turkey through the Middle East to Western China and Mongolia preferring dry or semi-desert areas. A study I found on the internet had estimated that the population of this species in Turkey was approximately 1200 individuals.

They have been occasionally found as a vagrant in the UK, the most recent that I can find was 1 found at Dungeness on South Coast on 30 Oct 2001. It is certainly not a regular visitor and therefore should be shown in the Foreign Bird classes at shows.

I have never seen these birds before, although I had noticed adverts in Cage & Aviary Birds for them. They must have been fairly regularly available though, because according to the Foreign Bird Federation Breeding Register they have been bred occasionally since 1990. The reported numbers bred being as shown below.

1990 1
1994 4
1995 2
1998 3
2002 1

These numbers obviously do not reflect every breeding of this species, as not

every breeder will be participating, but it does give a good indication.

The first breeding by a Foreign Bird League member was in 1990 by R. Langley for which a medal was awarded. I believe that this was also a first captive breeding in the UK.

The birds that I have were purchased at the Parrot Society Spring show at Harrogate. The owner had an unrelated 2002 pair and a 2003 hen rung with a plastic split ring. I was informed that this younger hen was not related to either of the other two birds. There was no visible difference in the feathering of the hens, so I assume that all three birds were in adult plumage.

I was told that they had been kept in an outside aviary near York, not too far away from us and should be OK to put straight out into an outside aviary. However, I have followed advice about the housing of other birds that I have purchased in the past and the result has usually been a dead or very ill bird. So therefore I initially housed them in a treble breeding cage in the cooler of my two sheds (50 C). They were quite nervous and when I entered the shed they would flap their wings above their heads, but not really dashing about like wild birds do. I assume that this was due to them not being used to the close proximity of humans. They did settle down over the next few weeks, but they were never really happy when I was around.

One of my friends from Yorkshire Foreign Bird Society told me that he had seen the Desert Finches at Harrogate and told me that under no circumstances would I be able to coax these birds into breeding for me and the best chance I had was to foster the eggs out

to a pair of Canaries. This I took to be a challenge and decided there and then that it would be my goal to parent rear this species.

At the start of April I noticed that the younger hen's tail was starting to get ragged and she was losing feathers from the back of her head and neck. I wasn't sure whether this was due to mating or the older hen chasing her off. They would stop any activity when I approached. The older hen was only missing a few feathers from the base of her beak exposing the bright red skin underneath and the cock's feathering was absolutely perfect.

On Saturday the 17th of April they were released into a 8' long x 4' wide x 7' high flight, accessed via an enclosed feeding corridor. The rest of the first day they were just getting used to the flight and finding their way around.

This flight is made of 1/2" x 1" welded mesh of 16 gauge. It was built of this wire to deter the neighbourhood cats and the Sparrowhawk that has been visiting my garden. Normally, thinner 19 gauge wire would have been sufficient for this species, but I built these flights to give me the flexibility to change which species were housed there in the future.

The roof of all of my flights are covered with twin wall polycarbonate sheeting and, for the top three feet, the front was also covered to help to get them to settle and to give them some protection from the weather, as my aviaries face North. The backs of the flights are protected by a Larchlap fence a few inches away from the wire. I had placed a number of 5" square half open finch nestboxes and a couple of white plastic canary

nestpans, with felt sewn inside, in the flight at varying heights and positions.

The front 5' of this flight is densely planted with *Pyracantha*, Thornless Blackberry, Elder, *Lonicera* and Redcurrants – previously being occupied by a pair of Japanese Waxwings. The foliage of these plants, especially the Redcurrants, were eagerly pecked and eaten. After a week or so the young growth near the main perches was severely nibbled, but not sufficiently to do permanent damage to the plants. The back 3' of this flight has been left clear of plants to allow access to the bathing tray on the floor. Either side of this flight adjoined another flight. One of these contained a male Conure and the other contained a selection of small finches and Waxbills.

They were fed a mixture of small sunflower seeds, mixed millets of the type normally sold as a Budgie mix, softbill mix, moistened Cede eggfood (little of this was taken) and a few mini mealworms. All this was supplied in a triple swingfeeder with stainless steel dishes. I use these feeders, normally used for parrot-like birds, as I feel that they help in keeping disturbance to a minimum and there is less chance of the birds escaping through an open door. The sunflower seeds were always the first to be eaten as soon as the seed was replenished.

The next morning it was obvious that they had found the food and eaten a substantial amount, although the mealworms had not been touched. I did not supply grit to the Desert Finches as they could get whatever they needed from the soil in the bottom of the flight. I also put a little Calcivet (Liquid Calcium supplement) into their drinking water. I was surprised at how much water they did drink considering where they come from.

I spent some time on the Sunday morning watching them from a distance and it soon became obvious that the older hen was the one chasing the younger hen. The cock was not bothering the younger hen at all, in fact he seemed to be ignoring her. I concluded that the cock preferred the aggressor, so I removed the younger hen. She was put into an indoor flight containing various Australian Finches. By the time I returned to my viewing point the pair were mating! The hen was rapidly fluttering her wings close to her body, sitting low down on the perch, swaying from side to side and arching her head backwards. This was the invitation the cock was waiting for and he went for it. This continued on and off for the rest of the day.

When I returned home from work on the Monday I sat and watched again. Both birds were searching the flight for spider's webs and feathers and seemed to be lining the higher of the two nest

pan. This was out in the open with no foliage cover nearby. The hen occasionally snuggled down into the pan and turned around making it to her liking. The nestboxes were totally ignored, so I assume that they prefer open nests in the wild.

Unfortunately, the weather turned a lot colder over the next few days with temperatures dropping close to zero at night. The ardour of the cock seemed to have diminished somewhat, but they both still continued to peck at the felt in the nest pan rearranging it to make a nice cosy lining.

By the Friday afternoon the felt in the second nest pan was only about half the size that it was originally as the birds were pulling it apart to line the chosen nest site. There were quite a few clumps of this felt scattered about the flight, so I assume that this had either been blown about by the wind, or for some reason had been rejected by the birds.

**PAUL HANCOCK
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The first egg was laid on Saturday 24th April with the next two on Sunday and Monday. The eggs are a very pale off white blue and were measured very scientifically – they are approximately the same size at the end of my index finger up to the first joint ie about 24mm long and were quite narrow. The colour surprised me as birds that lay in open nests usually have camouflaged eggs. Perhaps, I was wrong after all and they do naturally lay in closed nests.

After the third egg was laid the hen started sitting in earnest and therefore I did not inspect the nest from then on, so I don't know how many others were laid or when. She didn't even come off the nest during a thunderstorm when the rain was beating down on the roof only 10 inches above her head. The sound was very loud, but at least she was dry.

The hen did all the incubation, not once did I see the cock sitting on the eggs. He did roost nearby, whilst the hen incubated all night.

On Friday 30th I looked closer at the fruit tree blossom that had drifted into the bottom of the flight and discovered the remains of two eggs. The yolks were dried up, so I think they had been there a while. The hen still had 3 eggs in the nest upon inspection.

Whilst I was in my local pet shop, I noticed some Canary conditioning seed and wondered if they would like it. I bought a kilo to try them with. This was given to them in a separate dish so that I could see how much they were taking. On the first day they only pecked at it and really only took a little. Then they seemed to get a taste for it and from then on this became their favourite and

was the dish they went to first. Their preference from the mix seemed to be the Hemp followed by the Linseed & Rape seed. From then on they left the mixed millets alone and the consumption of Sunflower declined. They were still not eating a great deal of the Cede.

The weather for the next week was very changeable with warm and sunny one day with thunderstorms and hail the next. On Thursday the 6th May after a night where the temperatures were close to zero, I noticed that the hen was not sat on the nest, so I checked and was disappointed to find that the eggs were missing. I made a quick search and I found a few broken fragments of egg on the floor of the aviary. Fortunately, both birds were fit and well, so I wasn't too downhearted.

For several days they seemed totally disinterested in the nest pan. During a few days of warm weather, nest building resumed. On Sunday 16th May I checked and saw that there was an egg in the nest pan. The following day the second egg was laid. The fact that there were no eggs on the Saturday confirms that eggs are laid on consecutive days.

On Friday 21st the cock was observed feeding the hen whilst she was incubating. Unfortunately, both Friday and Saturday nights were very cold and on Sunday morning the hen had abandoned and broken her eggs. It would appear that either incubation had not progressed very much or that they were clear.

We then had a run of warm and dry weather during which all nesting activity was ceased. Only when we had a few cooler rainy days did the hen start showing interest in the nestpans. She eventually chose the second nestpan

under slightly more cover. On 21st June I could not see her in the flight, so fearing the worst I went in. When they had nested previously they had removed virtually all the felt from this second nestpan and exposed the thread that I had used to sew the felt in place. Somehow this thread had got wrapped around the hens legs and she was trapped.

All three eggs had been broken and she was very tired and was lying still in the bottom of the nestpan. I managed to free her, but her leg was very red and some feathers had been dislodged. For a few days she hopped around very gingerly and by the end of the week she was back to normal. From now on I will be gluing the felts in place.

The hen laid the occasional egg over the next few weeks until mid September when they both went into the moult. When they had feathered up they were caught up and transferred into a heated shed with artificial lighting for the winter. They shared this accommodation with the second hen and a couple of Java Sparrows.

As the spring days started to lengthen the pair had to be separated from the others as they had started to pluck the spare hen again. On May Day Monday the pair were released into the same flight as last year.

I left the pair well alone from this point on hoping that by not disturbing them they may be more successful. I had intended to install a small webcam so that I could view their chosen nest site from a computer, but by the time I noticed which nestpan they had chosen, the hen was already sitting tight.

Reviewing my notes from 2004 I concluded that the birds may have been disturbed by mice during the night and as a consequence of this I set a few traps in the feeding corridor. Within a week I had caught four, but from then on I caught no more.

During the summer the hen laid several clutches of eggs. Although the pair were regularly seen mating each clutch turned out to be clear. The hen sat very tightly, eventually realising that they



The Hen on one of the nestpans (not the one she eventually chose).

weren't going to hatch after approximately five weeks. The nest was then cleaned out and remade and a new clutch was started.

Eventually, on the 5th August they presented me with a fully formed, half-hatched, but dead chick in the seed dish. At least this proved that the cock was not firing blanks!

For the next week or so the cock was desperate to get to the food each morning. On a couple of occasions he fed and then went to the nest and seemed to be looking down the side of the hen, so hopes were high. I removed the bath at this point as I regularly read of chicks fledging and subsequently drowning in the merest bit of water.

On the morning of the 16th August the hen could not be seen on the nest and I couldn't pick her out amongst the now

well overgrown foliage. Fearing that she was laid in the bottom of the nest, I went and got a mirror and went into the flight. This was only the second time I had entered the flight since they were released in May and the Cock did not like it. The hen appeared from somewhere, but seeing as though I had already disturbed them I had a quick look in the nest and found 2 mucky eggs and a nearly fully feathered chick.

The chick left the nest the following morning. I was alerted to this as soon as I entered the garden, due to the alarm calls from the parents. It was evident from it's faint facial stripes that the chick was a male. The chick was similarly marked, but paler, as it's parents, although the beak was a pale yellow colour rather than black. I managed to take a photo whilst it was perched on the edge of an old nest basket that had fallen into the bottom of a Blackcurrant bush.



The following day the weather turned a little colder and I was pleased to find that the chick had returned to the nest and was still being fed by the parents. A couple of days passed before the chick left the nest again, this time it's flight was a lot stronger. The chick had not been very vocal up to this point and this is probably why I had not been aware of its existence, however as it grew stronger, so did its voice. The chick was seen feeding itself on a number of occasions, preferring the eggfood.

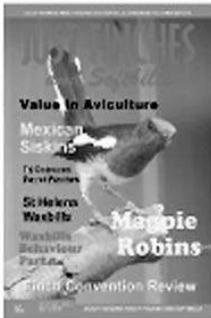
The Cock was not aggressive towards its son, but this may have been due to the parents going into the moult and not attempting to nest again.

Some weeks later, after a storm during the night, the dead chick was found wet through on the floor in the only part of the aviary open to the elements. As you can imagine I was very upset.

Author Biography

Darren Sefton is the new editor of *Foreign Birds*, the magazine of the Foreign Bird League (UK). He may be e-mailed at FBL.Editor@googlemail.com. Learn more about the FBL at www.foreignbirdleague.com.

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The Penguin Zebra Finches of Huub Janssen

In this issue, we are pleased to reprint an article (see JNFSS, Vol 24, No. 2) on the prize winning penguin zebra finch stock of Huub Janssen of The Netherlands. I hope that the photos in the Journal do justice to these stunning birds. The birds shown here are from the Veenendaal show in 2006, but Huub continues to win top awards on the show bench in Europe. In addition to individual birds placing in the top 3, one of Huub's collections of four birds not only won its class at this year's show, but was also the best collection of the show (out of 156 collections). Seeing these birds posing together makes you wonder if NFSS should start a collection section at our own shows!

NFSS member Richard Renshaw has graciously acted as a liaison with Huub to obtain a revised article for this month's Journal, and has provided the following introduction.

Tom Keegan
Issue Editor
NFSS 2nd Vice President

INTRODUCTION TO HUUB JANSSEN

by Richard Renshaw

Huub Janssen

Nederweert, The Netherlands

Some Background Information on Huub's Home

The Netherlands is a small country (approx 170 mi. x 200 mi.) The population of The Netherlands is about 16 million. The big national Dutch Zebra Club (N.Z.C.) has approximately 700 members. The Regional (local district) Zebra club meets 5 times a year. There are approximately 20 Zebra breeders that Huub knows that live within a 30 miles radius of him. He also said Germany is only 30 miles from where he lives.

Huub attends about 2-3 Zebra shows each year. There are more available, and he said he could attend a show every weekend, but because of the amount time involved (preparing, training, and time away from home) he does not choose to. Huub says; "I prefer the big shows, like Veenendaal and Lummen (Belgium) with over 1000 birds. Next September I will attend the Zebra finch show in England to promote the Penguin mutation."

The biggest Zebra finch show is the Dutch Veenendaal. The date of the Veenendaal show is the beginning of October each year. There are well over 2000 Zebras entered by well over 100 exhibitors. In 2007 and 2008, there were over 2300 Zebras, and they hope to get 2500 in 2009 because it's the 25th anniversary of the show.

Huub has kept Penguin Zebras since 1982. Huub's Penguins have won at the Veenendaal show in 1999, 2002, 2006, and 2008. Huub told me that his Penguin size breakthrough came from German stock. First there was size limit factor that had to be overcome, then there was the crossing over of the size limit and the Penguin mutation. After that the Germans used selection. For the Germans big size, in those days, was the most important issue. But, without the size limit, crossing over the rest would have been impossible.

Huub said; "I do not know what will happen this year, but I've bred many very nice Penguins. More than I ever did before, but that's no certainty to win the show again. On average the cheeks on the hens are more white, the same for the breasts of the males. The heads are better for both male and female. Also more birds have that really big size. So I hope I can enter about 25 birds in very good condition, and then let's see what happens."



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The Penguin Grey Zebra Finch

by Huub Janssen, The Netherlands



2006 Veenendaal Show winner.

Getting Started with Penguin Greys

First I want to tell you all some history about my experiences with this beautiful mutation. The first penguins I bred in 1982. I wanted to start with zebra finches that year and, from a friend, I got a pair of normal greys, which were split to penguin. I bred three penguins from that pair and I right away loved the mutation. The contrast between the dark grey and the white was very attractive to me.

This became my start with the penguin grey, and although penguins did not have the same physical characteristics as a normal grey can have, I still was very successful at the shows. This was because of the good colour and design they had, and they were not small

but just not that big as a normal grey can be.

In about 1993, I decided to stop with penguins. I wanted to try something else. One of the reasons was because it had been very hard to keep up the physical characteristics, and often it was hard to compete against other mutations because they didn't have that problem. Then in 1998 I heard from friends, who had been in Germany, that there were some very nice penguin greys over there, which had a extremely nice body type. So I contacted the German breeders of these large penguins, and they sold me some nice birds to start over again.

These birds were genetically different

than those we had before in the Netherlands. The "old type" did have some sort of size limiter coupled with the penguin factor. These new type birds didn't have that anymore because of a crossing over from genes. So now we could pair penguin x penguin (generation after generation) without the size getting smaller, and I experienced that the grey/penguin did in fact get smaller after pairing them together, which proves the crossing over.

Now over here the penguin is a more popular mutation because people don't have to deal with smaller birds anymore, and because there have been many good show results with penguin grey since 1999, which stimulates other people to also give breeding the penguin grey a try.

Important Characteristics of a Penguin Grey

First of all, physically they have to be like a good normal grey, with a nice head and short beak. They must have a nice dark colour, and nice deep-coloured cheeks and flanks. The breast of a male must be as white as possible, but to me some stripes are allowed when getting started because, in my opinion, the dark colour is more important. And when you have a strong dark bloodline, you can select to the desired white breast. It is impossible to do it otherwise; thus, pale birds with white breasts getting darker. So again, first you have to concentrate on the nice dark colour and deep-coloured cheek and flanks, and then select to the wanted white breasts.

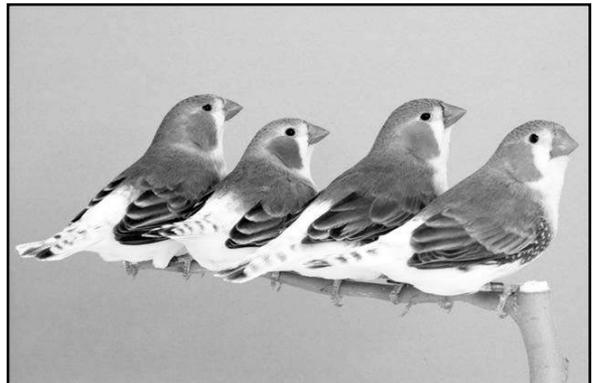
The same goes for the desired wing lacings. This also you can get by selection after you first get a strong dark bloodline of penguin grey. A judge also can help in this, to understand the difficulties of the mutation, and judge those birds with some feeling for the mutation. This did work very well in the Netherlands, so people did go further with the mutation because judges did also see the positive issues of the bird, not only that little bit of breast markings the bird still had.

What to Look For when Selecting Your Breeding Birds:

- Males and females with a nice type
- Males and females with a nice dark colour
- Males with some breast markings was no problem to me

Some males and females with tear-drops also was no problem to me, and the same for females with a little grey in their cheeks, because they were that dark. In the beginning they didn't have enough of the necessary wing lacings also because I selected only the darkest birds. This, and also the white breasts of the male, improves by pairing penguin with penguin.

2006 Best Collection, Veenendaal Show.





Veenendaal Show, 2006.



Huub (far right) at the Veenendaal Show.

I didn't use very much normal grey or grey/penguin since the restart in 1999. In average about 3-4 birds every 20 pairs, but that also was a result of selecting only the darkest birds to breed with. The normal greys I use all come from a good friend of mine, Mr. Bart Houben. He has the best normal greys over here in continental Europe for many years. I select for nice typed birds, with a very nice dark colour and who don't have much faults. A male may not have faults like markings above the eye and behind the cheeks like split BC's often show, and their teardrops may not be washed out. Nice teardrops (even a bit wide) is no problem but not washed

out. A normal breast bar is also allowed, they don't have to be very small because if the penguin mutation does his job in the right way, the normal breast bar will disappear as easy as a smaller one.

Some Final Hints

Try first to get a strong bloodline of dark coloured penguins and, after that, concentrate on the white breast of the male, the white cheeks of the female, the teardrops which must be selected away, and the lacings on the wings. Never pair birds together

who have too wide wing lacings or too much white behind the cheeks.

Also, a note about young penguins. A young penguin has a totally white belly and vent, a grey or split has not a pure white belly and the vent is even more cream. Often the tail bars also show a difference: grey birds show black bars on the tail, penguins show mostly lighter bars.

I wish you all good luck with this beautiful mutation!

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Finches & Softbills in Science: THE SINGING GENOME

by Tom Keegan, NFSS 2nd Vice President

For a zebra finch, hearing the song of another of its kind triggers changes in gene expression in unexpected ways, a paper in June's Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences reports.¹ The switching on and off of thousands of genes after a bird hears a new song offers a new picture of memory in the songbird brain. But not only that, these findings offer new insight into how the biology of the brain is affected by experience, particularly social experience.



In 1992, David Clayton, a professor of cell and developmental biology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, discovered that when a male zebra finch hears a new song from another male, this stimulus activates a specific gene in the brain.² This was one of the earliest discoveries showing that social interactions can turn genes on and off in the brain. Now, the genes involved in these social responses to bird song are being mapped. His new research was aimed at furthering our understanding of how gene activation occurs in response to song and how these genes affect the brain.

The new research has provided three distinct profiles of gene expression in the avian brain. One profile exists in the "control" condition, when the bird is not exposed to other birds' song. A second profile is associated with having recently heard another zebra finch song that is new to the subject. A third profile is associated with hearing an already-familiar song. This third profile is typical after a bird has been hearing

a particular song for 24 hours or more. And these are not particularly subtle differences in the brain. "I can tell you whether the bird has heard a particular song before or not just by looking at the molecular assay," Clayton said.³

Brain activity was measured using DNA microarray analysis and the researchers found that some genes were being up-regulated ("switched on") or down-regulated ("switched off") within 30 minutes of exposure to a new song. The researchers focused their attention on the auditory forebrain, an area of the brain known to be important in processing incoming auditory information, such as song. The researchers were surprised at the amount of gene activity stimulated by exposure to a new song. It appears that some genes are activating processes important to the formation of new memories while others are helping the brain not to become overwhelmed by the new auditory input.

Twenty-four hours after this initial exposure to the new song, the profile of

gene activation is completely different in response to the song. The genes that had initially been up- or down-regulated now return to baseline, and an entirely new group of genes are engaged. Although the bird is no longer responding as it would to a new song, a lot is still going on in that little brain!

Zebra finches have become the “white rats” of avian research subjects because of their hardiness and free breeding in captivity. Countless zebra finches now find their homes in research labs across the world, especially where researchers are interested in neurobiology and behavior. For example, at the University of Illinois’s Beckman Institute, psychologists are tracking brain patterns in zebra finches by gearing them with tiny, wired-up helmets! In addition to being interesting basic science, research on birds has proven important to human welfare. For instance, songbirds were important to research showing that adult humans can create new neurons in their brains,⁴ something that was previously thought to be impossible.

Zebra finches are not only good subjects because of how easy it is to keep colonies in a lab, however. They are good research subjects because of a number of features. They are sexually dimorphic not only in their appearance, but

also in their behavior. For example, zebra finch cocks sing while hens do not. This makes them interesting subjects for studies into the genetic and hormonal bases of sex differences in behavior. In addition, much is known already about zebra finch song from decades of behavioral research examining the genetic vs. learned aspects of its song structure. Together, these facts made the zebra finch a prime lab model in the growing field of “neurogenomics.”

While mapping entire species genomes was once rare, it has become increasingly common as the costs associated with gene sequencing have dropped. Once costs became reasonable, researchers were lining up to map the genome of the inauspicious *Taeniopygia guttata*. Clayton was one of four leaders on the steering committee of the zebra finch genome mapping project, funded by the National Human Genome Research Institute in 2005. Where research once looked at one gene at a time, scientists may now examine the interactions of thousands of genes in a single experiment. Mapping a genome is just the first step in completely understanding what genes do and how they affect the body and behavior. It is certain that research on the zebra finch will keep bringing us new, surprising findings for decades to come.

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- ² Mello, C., Vicario, D.S. and Clayton, D.F. (1992). Song presentation induces gene expression in the songbird forebrain. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (USA)* 89, 6818-6822.
- ³ InSciences.org, 27 June 2009, 12:21.
- ⁴ Eriksson, P.S., Perfilieva, E., Bjork-Eriksson, T., Alborn, A.M., Nordborg, C., Peterson, D.A., & Gage, F.H. (1998). Neurogenesis in the adult human hippocampus. *Nature Medicine*, 4, 1313-1317.

NFSS Affiliated Clubs/Events

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Note: Events may be held in states other than the home state of the club. Regional affiliates are those with no steady location, but should be checked for events near you.

Alabama

Central Alabama Aviculture Society, Montgomery, tedsexton@bellsouth.net, www.caasociety.com, 256-892-3072. Events: Show & Bird Fair, September 5-6, 2009, Quality Inn & Suites, 2705 East South Blvd, Montgomery. Judge: Paul Williams. Other Divisions: Two day NCS Cockatiel Show, Two day SPBE Show. Event Contact: Ted Sexton, tedsexton@bellsouth.net, 256-892-3072.

California

Central California Cage Bird Club, Modesto, chryse95320@yahoo.com, www.myccbc.org, 209-838-2466. Events: 56th Annual Finch & Canary Show, October 31, 2009, S.O.S. Club, Modesto. Judge: Sally Huntington. Event Contact: Chryse Seeman, chryse95320@yahoo.com.

Finch Society of San Diego, sbodde@ucsd.edu, www.finchsocietysandiego.org, 858-452-9423.

Santa Clara Valley Canary & Exotic Bird Club, Santa Clara, santaclarabirdclub@gmail.com, www.santaclarabirdclub.org, 408-716-7776. Events: 48th Annual Cage Bird Show, December 12, 2009, Temple Emanu-El, 1010 University Ave., San Jose. Judge: TBA. Other Divisions: Type, Colorbred, & American Singer Canaries, ABS, NCS. Event Contact: Barry Cohen, cohenbarry@aol.com.

Florida

Treasure Coast Exotic Bird Club, Stuart, FL, tm50et@yahoo.com, 772-380-9882 www.tcexoticbirdclub.com. Events: TBA.

Tri State Avian Society, Tallahassee, BarryL7523@comcast.net, www.tristateaviansociety.org, 850-364-4666. Events: Spring Exotic Bird Fair, May 30-31, 2009, North Florida Fairgrounds, 441 Paul Russell Rd., Tallahassee. Event Contact: Barry Laster, BarryL7523@comcast.net, 850-364-4666.

Illinois

Finch & Softbill Breeders & Exhibitors Club, Palatine, gailsgouldians@comcast.net, www.fsbec.finchfiles.com, 847-963-1926. Events: Annual Finch & Softbill Show, September 26, 2009. Location: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Mundelein, IL. Judge: Laura Tinker. Event Contact: Gail Benson, gailsgouldians@comcast.net, 847-963-1926.

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club. Club website: www.gccbc.org. Meeting Schedule: 3rd Friday of the month. Location: 215 S. Riverside, Lombard, IL. Show: October 31, 2009. Location: DuPage Expo Center, St. Charles, IL. Judge: Cecil Gunby. Info contact: president@gccbc.org.

Illini Bird Fanciers, Springfield, illini-bird-fanciers@yahoogroups.com. Event: Bird Fair, Oct 24, Church of the Little Flower, Springfield.

The Avicultural Society of Chicagoland, Lombard, IL, tascchicago@aol.com, www.tasc-chicago.org. Event: Midwest Bird Expo, April 25, DuPage County Fairgrounds.

Iowa

Mid America Cage Bird Society, Des Moines, thielking@iowalink.com, www.MACBS.org, 239-851-8132, Events: Bird Fair, March 22, 2009, Des Moines Botanical Center. Event Contact: John Thielking, thielking@iowalink.com, 239-851-8132. Bird Fair, May 17, 2009, Des Moines Botanical Center. Bird Fair, August 23, 2009, Des Moines Botanical Center. MACBS Show, October 3, 2009, Best Western Airport Hotel, 1810 Army Post Rd, Des Moines, Martha Wigmore, Hookbills, Budgerigars, Type & Colorbred Canaries, Lovebirds, John Thielking, Thielking@lowalink.com, 239-851-8132.

Maryland

Baltimore Bird Fanciers, Baltimore, robertmehl@aol.com, www.baltimorebirdfanciers.org, 443-834-3224. Events: Spring Mart, May 16, 2009, Tall Cedars Hall, Parkville, MD. Event Contact: Robert Mehl, RobertMehl@aol.com, 443-834-3224. Annual Fall Bird Show, October 17, 2009, Tall Cedars Hall, Parkville. Judge: TBA. Other divisions: Lovebirds, Cockateils, Hookbills. Event contact: Robert Mehl, robertmehl@aol.com, 443-834-3224.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Cage Bird Association, So. Foxboro, AUDREYO2@msn.com, www.masscagebird.org, 781-335-3927. Events: Annual Show, October 17, 2009, Weymouth Elks Club, Event Contact: Tom Keegan, thomkeegan@aol.com, 781-335-3927.

Michigan

Great Lakes Zebra & Society Club, Livonia, tielnmore@aol.com.

Michigan Society of Canary & Finch Breeders, Detroit Area, tielnmore@aol.com, 313-247-5900. Events: Bird Fair, September 19, 2009, Quality Inn, Plymouth Rd, Livonia. Bird Show, October 17, 2009, Quality Inn, Plymouth Rd., Livonia. Judge: TBA. Events Contact: Jim Heffernan, tielnmore@aol.com, 313-247-5900.

Minnesota

Canary & Finch Club of Minnesota. Events: Bird Show Expo, October 18, 2009, River Heights Motel, 1020 US Hwy 10 Prescott, WI (Tel: 1-715-262-3266). Event contact: Darlene Witt, 507-645-8984.

Missouri

Gateway Parrot Club, St. Louis, president@gatewayparrotclub.org, www.gatewayparrotclub.org. Event: All-American Hookbill Fair & Seminar, August 29-30, Machinests' Hall, 12365 St. Charles Rock Rd, Bridgeton.

Greater Kansas City Avicultural Society, Grandview, dayforthebirds@aol.com, www.gkcas.org, 816-252-1120. Events: The GKCAS Fundraiser, April 19, 2009; GKCAS Spring Bird Fair & Bazaar, April 25, 2009; The GKCAS Summer Bird Fair & Bazaar, June 27, 2009; The GKCAS Spaghetti & Casino Fundraiser, August 9, 2009; The GKCAS All Bird Show (All Birds), October 17, 2009. Judge: Dr. Al Decoteau. Events Contact: Anthony or Shiela, dayforthebirds@aol.com, 816-252-4120 (for April Fundraiser, contact Maria 816-763-5935 or 816-803-1874, mcmbirdsetcmichel@kc.rr.com). All events at Coronation of Our Lady Church, 13000 Bennington, Grandview.

New Hampshire

Birds of a Feather Avicultural Society, Manchester, President@BOAF.com, www.boaf.com, 603-362-6106. Events: Spring Bird Mart, April 19, 2009, Nashua National Guard Armory; 22nd Annual Fall Bird Show & Mart, September 26, 2009, Sheraton Wayfarer Convention Center, Bedford, NH. Judge: TBA. Events Contact: Ray Schwartz, prismsdad@aol.com, 603-362-6106.

New York

Empire Finch & Canary Club, West Hempstead, irmanperez@aol.com, 516-593-2841, Events: Empire Finch

& Canary Club Show, November 14, 2009, St. Mark's Church, 200 Hempstead Ave, Rockville Center. Judge: Manuel Popa. Other Divisions: Color-bred, Type, Gloster, Fife Fancy.
Event Contact: John Lund, irmanperez@aol.com.

New York Finch & Type Canary Club, NYC, barstand@aaahawk.com, 718-967-6899. Events: Feather Show, June 28, 2009, Averill Blvd Park Meeting Hall, Elmont (Long Island),
Event Contact: Stan Kulak, barstand@aaahawk.com, Annual Show, Sept. 26, 2009, St. Jude Church (Coyne Hall), 1677 Canarsie Rd, Brooklyn.

North Carolina

Raleigh Durham Caged Bird Society, Raleigh, www.rdcbb.org. Event: 21st Annual Pet Bird Show (no finch show), May 23, NC State Fairgrounds / 2 Kerr-Scott Building.

Oregon

Columbia Canary Club. Events: Show, November 7 & 8, 2009, Tigard National Guard Armory, 6700 SW Oak Street, Tigard, OR 97223. Judge: Ken Gunby. Other Divisions: Type & Colorbred Canaries Club/Event
Contact: Linda Brown, jeepeerspeepers55@aol.com, 503-266-7606.

Pennsylvania

Chester County Bird Club, Frazer, PA. info@ccbirdclub.com, www.CCBirdClub.com, 610-647-4632, Events: 21st Annual Show & Mart, October 31, 2009, Church Farm School, Exton. Event Contact: Doris Rickards, rickards@quixnet.net. Cockatiel, Lovebirds, Parrots & Finches. Zebra & society finches again under separate judge, Double Points shows for cockatiels, lovebirds & parrots.

Puerto Rico

Asociacion de Criadores de Finches del Este, Caguas, Puerto Rico, acfeinc@onelinkpr.net, 787-633-1215. Events: Summer National Show, June 5-7, 2009, Centro Comunal, Alturas de Villas del Rey, Caguas. Judge: Ken Gunby
Event Contact: Orlando Rivera, riverao1@wyeth.com, 787-485-1810; 2009 Winter Regional Show, Nov 6-8, 2009, Centro Comunal, Alturas de Villas del Rey, Caguas, Judge Cecil Gunby,
Contact: Orlando Rivera 787-485-1810 riverao1@wyeth.com.

Tennessee

Southeast Tennessee Aviculture Society, Niota, TN, www.stasbirdclub.com.

Texas

Canary & Finch Society, Houston, TX. lisashepholmes@verizon.net, <http://canaryfinchsociety.tripod.com>, 281-576-0574. Events: 14th Annual Show, October 10, 2009, The Baymont Inn, Bush Intercontinental Airport, 500 N Sam Houston Parkway, Houston, TX 77060. Judge: Cecil Gunby. Contact: Lisa Holmes, lisashepholmes@verizon.net, 281-576-0574.

Fort Worth Bird Club, Fort Worth, TX, www.fwbc.org, coculwell@wccs.net, 817-220-5568. Events: All Bird Show, October 4, 2013, Azle Community Center. Contact: Clarence Culwell, coculwell@wccs.net, 817-220-5568.

Texas Bird Breeders & Fanciers Association, Fort Worth, www.texasbirdbreeders.org. Event: Show, Nov 7, Mayborn Convention Center.

Washington

Cascade Canary Breeders, Issaquah, www.cascadecanary.com, Annual Canary & Finch Show, Oct 24-25, Monroe Fairgrounds.

Wisconsin

Central Wisconsin Cage & Wild Bird Connection, Pittsville, mminor@tds.net, www.cwwcbc.us/bc/. Event: Annual Bird & Garden Fair, May 16, 2009.

Foreign

Canadian Finch & Softbill Society, Ontario, Canada. Events: 3rd Annual Canadian Finch and Softbill Society Show, November 7 & 8, 2009, Brampton Fairgrounds, 12942 Heart Lake Rd, Brampton Ontario. Judge: Rick Crook (England). Contact: Vince Moase, vmoase@rogers.com, 905-723-1978.

Durham Avicultural Society of Ontario, Durham, ONT, secretary@birdclub.ca, www.birdclub.ca. Event: Fund Raising Auction, April 14, 2009, Rotary Park Pavilion, Ajax.

Essex-Kent Cage Bird Society, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, julianne@mnsi.net, www.essexkentcbs.com, 519-948-6398. Events: Young Feather Show, May 31, 2009, Colasanti's Tropical Gardens, Ruthven, Ontario, Event Contact: Julianne Mion, julianne@mnsi.net; 34th Annual Eastern Canadian Classic, Sept. 26-27, 2009, Foglar Furlan Club, 1800 E. C. Row, North Service Rd, Windsor, Ontario. Judge: Ken Gunby. Other divisions: Type Canaries, Colorbred, Hookbills, Budgerigars. Contact: Dave Sylvester, 519-727-3766, d.sylvestr@gmail.com.

Regional/National

American Dove Association, dennyjoyce@aol.com, www.doveline.com, 812-923-3483. Events: Nat'l Young Bird Show (pigeons & doves), October 31, 2009, KY State Fairgrounds, Louisville. Event Contact: Denny Stapp, secretary@doveline.com.

National Institute of Red Orange Canaries, Chicago, www.freewebs.com/niroccanaries/. Event: NIROC Annual Show, November 28, Waterford Banquet & Conference Center, Elmhurst, IL.

West Coast Zebra & Society Finch Show, chryse95320@yahoo.com, www.efinch.com/show, 209-838-2466. Events: WCZSF Show, July 24 (mart & speaker) & 25 (show, mart, awards), 2009, La Quinta Downtown, Sacramento. Judge: Clarence Culwell, Event Contact: Chryse Seeman, chryse95320@yahoo.com. For reservations, call the motel directly 916-448-8100 (specify "bird show" for special rate).



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