

Black-throated Finch

FAMILY: *Estreldidae*

GENUS: *Poephila*

SPECIES: *cincta*

OTHER NAMES: Banded Grass Finch, Black-rumped Finch, Black-rumped Grass Finch, Black Throat, Parson Finch, Diggle's Finch.

Description:

Medium to large grassfinch which resembles the Long-tailed Finch closely. Males have blue-grey heads with a blue-white ear patch. Throat and upper breast is black. Flanks, belly and lower breast light brown, back fawn- brown. Black bar on rump, black patch between eye and bill. Bill is black , legs orange-red.

Females resemble males, but are identified by having a comparatively smaller throat patch.

Immature birds resemble adults but have duller plumage still.

Length: 100mm.

Subspecies:

Aviculturists recognise a form found in northern Cape York Peninsula (*P.c. nigrotecta*) and is often referred to as the Chocolate Parson Finch or Chocolate Diggle's Finch. The essential difference between this and the nominate form is that it is darker brown in colour overall.

Distribution:

North-eastern Australia from Cape York southwards to northern New South Wales. Diggles occurs north of Cairns-Normanton (QLD).

Habitat:

Undergrowth in tropical and warm temperate savannah woodland - rarely far from water.

Diet:

Ripe and half-ripe seeds of grasses, substituted with small insects, ants and spiders.

In captivity, a good quality finch seed mix should be the mainstay of the diet. This should be supplemented with greenfood (eg half ripened seed heads of grasses or most other herbs from the garden such as Shepherd's Purse, Dandelion and Chickweed, or any vegetables such as silverbeet, lettuce, etc.).

Many aviculturists provide live food (often mealworms) during the breeding season although others have had good results without it. Lastly, it is important to provide birds with ample grit (fine) and perhaps cuttle-fish where possible.

Breeding:

All year round, but mainly autumn in the north and spring in the south.

The nest is woven of dead grass and is flask-shaped (250mm long x 140mm high and 110mm wide). Usually placed in eucalypt twigs, but also hollows , termite mounds and even foundations of hawk nests.

Both sexes participate in construction of the nest and in the incubation of the eggs. At night, both birds may share the nest.

In captivity Black-throated Finches will accept a variety of nesting receptacles. For convenience and cost reduction it is probably best to provide them with woven cane baskets. Good pairs may produce as many as four broods a year.

Courtship Display:

Males approach females with a series of bobbing movements. The feathers on the head and chest are often ruffed. Females may also bob to some extent.

Sexual Maturity:

Most birds do not breed until second year.

Clutch:

4-5 white eggs (18-7mm x 12mm). Incubation period: 14 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

There are several known mutations for this species: The chocolate form is a naturally occurring mutation. In captivity, the following colour mutations occur: Pied, White, Cream and Fawn.

Black-throated Finches are known to have hybridised with the Zebra Finch, Double-barred Finch, Masked Finch, Long-tailed Finch, Spice Finch, Cut-throat Finch, Red-headed Parrot-finch, Bengalese Finch and White-headed Munia.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

For breeding purposes Black-throated Finches will be quite happy in suspended cages or breeding cabinets. These should have at least the following dimensions: 700mm(long) x 400mm x 400mm. These birds are at their best in larger planted aviaries. Such an aviary should provide plenty of shelter and should probably have a roof over at least half its area. Black-throated finches will readily share an aviary with most other finches (eg. zebra, painted, parrot, etc etc), quail, doves and even neophema parrots.

Species Specific Problems

This species tends to be prone to infestation with endoparasites such as intestinal worms, and to Coccidiosis.