

Blue-faced Parrotfinch

FAMILY: *Estreldidae*

GENUS: *Erythrura*

SPECIES: *trichroa*

OTHER NAMES: Blue-faced Finch, Blue-headed Parrotfinch, Green-backed Finch, Three-coloured Parrotfinch Tri-coloured Parrotfinch.

Description:

Medium sized finch with striking green body plumage. Males body plumage is bright green with dull scarlet upper tail coverts and rump. Tail is olive brown edged with dull scarlet. The face and forehead is bright blue. The eyes and feet are brown, and the bill is black.

Females resemble males, but are generally duller in plumage colour. Only males sing.

Immatures are a dull green all over, with a grey bill.

This shy and elusive bird has only a small population in Australia despite being widespread elsewhere. It is not often seen, but occurs in small groups which generally forage on or near the ground. It is very fond of seeding bamboos and is known to synchronise its movements with the flowering cycles of these.

Length: 120mm.

Subspecies:

There are no formally recognised Australian sub-species. However, there are a number of extralimital subspecies which include: *E. t. clara*, *E. t. cyanofrons*, *E. t. eighorni*, *E. t. modesta*, *E. t. pelewensis*, *E. t. pinaiae*, *E. t. sanfordi*, *E. t. sigillifera* and *E. t. woodfordi*.

Distribution:

East Cape York Peninsula. Extralimital distribution: many of the islands north of Australia including New Guinea. The extremities of its range include the Caroline Islands in the north, Celebes in the west and the New Hebrides in the east.

Habitat:

Tropical rainforests, including ecotones between rainforest and grasslands, cultivations and plantations.

Diet:

Ripe and half-ripe seeds of grasses, Casuarinas and fruits (eg figs). This is also substituted with a variety of insects from time to time.

In captivity, a good quality finch seed mix is 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 aviculturalists 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:

November to April. The nest is usually made of moss and vines and lined with dead grass. It is often located in the branches of a tree and dome shaped. The dome's diameter is about 150mm and has an entrance tunnel of approx. 100mm.

In captivity Blue-faced Parrotfinches will accept a nesting box or other receptacle and will attempt to nest at almost any time of the year as long as it is warm enough.

Courtship Display:

Males basically pursue females until copulation is achieved, although they may occasionally perform a short bobbing dance before commencing the chase. When ready, the female will crouch on a perch whilst quivering her tail.

Sexual Maturity:

Blue-faced Finches become sexually mature and capable of breeding shortly after 9 months of age.

Clutch:

4-6 white eggs (15mm x 10mm). Incubation period: 13 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days. In captivity, juvenile birds should not be removed from their parents until about 4 weeks after fledging.

Mutations and Hybrids:

There are several known mutations for this species: Most members of the parrotfinch family will crossbreed under the right circumstances. Some known hybrids include: Blue-faced x Red-faced Parrotfinch, Blue-faced x Pin-tailed Parrotfinch and Blue-faced Parrotfinch x Gouldian Finch.

There are several colour mutations available: Lutino (green replaced with yellow, blue with white; Pied (green splashed with yellow); and Grizzle Pied (each feather is partly yellow and partly green, blue face usually replaced with white).

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

For breeding purposes Blue-faced Parrotfinches 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. Keeping in mind that these are rainforest species, the Blue-faced Parrotfinches like to have shrubs and tall grasses or bamboos in their aviary.

Blue-faced Parrotfinches 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 viral and fungal infections