

Double-barred Finch

FAMILY: *Estreldidae*

GENUS: *Poephila*

SPECIES: *bichenovii*

OTHER NAMES: Banded Finch, Bicheno Finch, Black-ringed Finch, Black-rumped Double-bar, Double-bar Finch, Owl-faced Finch, Ringed Finch.

Description:

Small agile finch with little sexual dimorphism. Males' head, back and upper wings are brown-black with white spots. Upper rump and tail are black with white lower rump and undertail. Underparts and face cream. A black ring around the face and a black bar across the lower breast (from one shoulder to another). Eyes brown, bill and legs grey.

Females are similar to males but have narrower black barring. Immature birds are duller forms of the adults but with only faint barring.

This finch is found in a variety of habitats and is usually encountered in tight flocks of around 20 birds. Never found far from water, these birds feed on or near the ground. In general behaviour and ecology it closely resembles the Zebra Finch.

Length: 100-110mm.

Subspecies:

Two forms occur: a white-rumped (nominate) form and a black-rumped form (race *annulosa*). The latter is found in northern Australia west of Burketown (QLD).

Distribution:

Northern and eastern Australia. It has expanded southward across a broad front from the coast of southern NSW to the Murray-Darling river system.

Habitat:

Temperate and subtropical eucalypt woodland and acacia scrub with a grassy understorey, agricultural land and suburban parks and gardens.

Diet:

Seeds and insects.

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:

January-March in the northwest and mainly July-November elsewhere in its distribution. The nest is globular with a side entrance and measures 140mm long x 120mm wide x 90mm high. The male alone collects the nest material, but both sexes are involved in constructing the nest, incubating the eggs and rearing the young.

In captivity Double-barred Finches will accept a variety of nesting receptacles ranging including woven baskets and boxes.

Courtship Display:

Contrary to other grassfinches, the Double-barred Finch has a fairly non-elaborate courtship display. Males side up to females with feathers ruffed. He leans forward and turns the head toward the female and wipes his beak on the perch repeatedly. This may be accompanied by an almost inaudible chatter.

Sexual Maturity:

Becomes sexually mature at the age of about 9 months, but most birds are most productive from their second year to their fourth year.

Clutch:

4-5 white eggs (16mm x 12mm). Incubation period: 12-14 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days. In warm climates these birds produce multiple broods.

Independent young should not be removed from the parents until about 4 weeks after fledging.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Two colour mutations are reported for this species: a black-breasted form (solid black between bars) and a fawn form.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

Double-barred 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 Coccidiosis and gastrointestinal worms