

# Long-tailed Finch

**FAMILY:** *Estreldidae*

**GENUS:** *Poephila*

**SPECIES:** *acuticauda*

**OTHER NAMES:** Black Heart Finch, Heck's Finch, Heck's Grassfinch, Long-tailed Grassfinch, Orange-billed Grassfinch, Shafttail Finch, Yellow-billed Longtail, Red-billed Longtail, Orange-billed Grassfinch.

## Description:

Medium sized finch which displays little or no sexual dimorphism. The male's crown is blue-grey with the back and wings fawn-brown. The rump is black, the upper tail coverts white and the tail black. The throat and upper breast are black, the lower breast and belly fawn.

Lower belly and undertail coverts are white with black band from rump to lower flanks. The eyes are brown, the bill yellow and the legs orange-red.

Females resemble males closely, but are identified by a smaller throat patch. Immature birds resemble adults, but have duller plumage and black bills and legs.

This finch is highly social and is usually encountered in small flocks of up to 15 pairs. Like the Black-throated Finch, the Long-tailed Finch forms the strongest pair bonds of all the Australian finches. Males and females are always to be found close together (never more than a metre apart on the ground). Where one bird goes, the other always follows.

Long-tailed Finches feed mainly on the ground but at night it roosts high in the tree tops in purpose-built nests.

Length: 150mm.

## Subspecies:

Although not formally recognised, *P. a. hecki* is considered by aviculturalists as a separate and distinct subspecies. Found in the east of the distribution this race is identified by its red bill (as opposed to yellow in the western race). Between these races there are a number of intermediate bill colourations.

## Status:

In the wild - common.

In captivity - common.

## Threatening Processes:

No direct threatening processes.

## Distribution:

Across tropical Australia from the Kimberley to the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

## Habitat:

Tropical savannah woodland.

## Diet:

Seeds and insects (especially when breeding).

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-May. The nest is a globular structure with a side entrance (tunnel). Its dimensions are approx. 130mm high x 110mm wide. Tunnel length 75mm. It is constructed from grass and lined with white plant fibre and feathers. The nest is usually located among fine branches in the top of a eucalypt. Occasionally in a pandanus palm.

Both sexes are involved in constructing the nest. Incubation of the eggs and care for the young is also shared.

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

### **Courtship Display:**

The male's display is preceded by head bobbing by both sexes. The male then begins to perform a bobbing and bowing dance. During this process the feathers on the head and throat are ruffed.

### **Sexual Maturity:**

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

### **Clutch:**

4-5 pure 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 3-5 weeks after fledging.

### **Mutations and Hybrids:**

There are several colour mutations known for the Long-tailed Finch. These include: Fawn, White, Cream and Pied.

The Long-tailed Finch is known to have hybridised with the Black-throated Finch, Masked Finch, Zebra Finch, Double-barred Finches and Plum-headed Finches. There are also reports of hybrids having been produced with the Diamond firetail, Crimson Finch, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin and Bengalese Finch.

### **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 Coccidia and gastrointestinal worms. Some hens are reported to experience problems with egg binding in their first breeding season