

Plum-headed Finch

FAMILY: *Estrildidae*

GENUS: *Aidemosyne*

SPECIES: *modesta*

OTHER NAMES: Cherry Finch, Diadem Finch, Modest Grass Finch, Plain-coloured Finch, Plum-capped Finch, Plumhead.

Description:

Upper parts olive-brown, rump and upper tail coverts olive-brown with white bars. Tail is black. Top of head, forehead and chin deep red. Lores black, ear coverts white streaked with brown. Cheeks white, eyes brown, bill black and legs pink-brown.

Females are duller than males and lack the red colouration on the chin. They also have a white line above the eye.

The Plum-headed Finch resembles the Star Finch *Neochmia ruficauda* in its ecology and lives in groups of around 20-50 individuals. These groups often merge into larger flocks during winter months. They are mainly terrestrial in their foraging habits, and pairs form permanent bonds.

Length: 100-110mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Status:

In the wild - secure **In aviculture** -

Distribution:

Western slopes and tablelands of the Great Dividing Range from the Atherton Tableland south to Canberra.

Habitat:

Tall grass in dry temperate eucalypt woodlands.

Diet:

Seeds and insects.

Breeding:

September-January.

The nest is usually located close to the ground in a dense shrub. The nest is spherical in shape with a side entrance and is constructed of green grass. Its dimensions are 110mm long x 165mm high x 75mm wide and it is lined with feathers.

Only the female builds the nest, but the male assists in fetching construction material. Both the parents incubate the eggs and rear the young.

In captivity Plum-headed Finches prefer to nest in bundles of grass rather than boxes, although both are known to be acceptable. Because they like to nest close to the ground, it would be advantageous to provide suitably small bushes (or some sort of artificial substitute) for nesting.

Courtship Display:

Males position themselves beside the female and performs a bobbing dance with the body held erect and feathers ruffed. Like the Crimson Finch, Plum-headed Finches may hold a length of grass in the mandibles during this process. Cockbirds also usually crow during courtship.

Sexual Maturity:

Maturity is attained at about 9 months, but these birds are most productive after their second year.

Clutch:

5 or 6 pure white eggs (17mm x 12mm). Incubation period: 12-14 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days. Fledged birds should not be removed from the parents until at least 4 weeks after fledging.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Fawn mutations have been reported for this species. In this case the brown is replaced by fawn.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

For breeding purposes Plum-headed 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