



Cutthroat Finch (Amadina Fasciata)

Although originally from Western Africa this extremely hardy finch, sometimes known as the Ribbon finch, will live in an outside aviary in the UK for many years. They are regularly bred in captivity, so should be relatively easy to obtain. They are sometimes inclined to become aggressive and should be kept alone or with larger sized birds. It is easy to manage in all other respects and can make a good addition to a mixed collection, if this is how you wish to house them. The size is approx 5" and the male is beige-brown dappled with dark greyish-black having a scale-like patterning. The beak is grey, the legs are dull pink and the Throat has it's distinctive scarlet stripe (after which they are named). The female is similar, but lacks the throat stripe. In recent years a colour variant has occurred, where the scarlet on the throat has been replaced with a yellowy-orange.

They are easy to manage as their diet is mainly mixed millets, canary seed and seeding grasses. Green food is appreciated and this is sometimes included in the nest. Oystershell grit and cuttlefish bone must always be available for this species as the hens are prone to egg binding. Alternatively, a liquid Calcium supplement can be added to the drinking water and in extreme instances a drop or two may be administered neat direct into the beak. In my experience this gives a boost to the muscles and allows the bird to pass the egg naturally. This bird may be kept out of doors all year-round and need only a dry, frost-proof shelter to which it can retire to in cold weather. A pair should have approximately 1 cubic metre. Cutthroats do equally well inside large cages, although will be more easily disturbed.

In breeding display, the Cutthroat cock sings quiet little song, ruffling his throat feathers as he sings. A nest is built from grasses, roots, hairs or any available material, preferably inside a nest box. This is generally lined with feathers, which I have observed being plucked from other aviary inhabitants.. I have had Cutthroats oust Splendid Parakeets and take over their nestbox. The hen lays four to six eggs which both parents take turns to incubate. The young are normally hatched after 12 days' incubation. Rearing food should consist of soaked and sprouted seeds, moistened eggfood, a few mealworms and fresh ants' eggs, if available. I always add mineral and vitamin supplements to this eggfood, which a scattering of finely ground chicken eggshell. I have had Cutthroats raise chicks with no form of livefood. Nest inspection is generally resented while the parents are sitting, so you should leave inspection until both parents are off the nest. Close ringing of the chicks is not normally recommended. My personal experience has been that Cutthroats will raise more hens than cocks (possibly a natural situation to counteract the hens proneness to dying of eggbinding?) In cold weather, mixing a little cod liver oil to the seed may be taken to ensure health and vitality. Another aid during the breeding season is sponge cake soaked in honey and a little fine grade insectivorous mix if you have this available for other birds in your collection.

Points to remember:-

While the bird is into the breeding session the bird is not to be kept with small sized birds like waxbills. Indeed it is advisable to house them one pair to each cage or aviary. Young hens can be left with the parents, but cocks should be removed as soon as they become independent as they will be attacked by the cock. Cocks can be sexed in the nest as they already have the throat stripe before fledging.

- The bird has the habit of establishing their command over the nests of less bold birds by throwing their eggs and chicks from the nests. If keeping several Cutthroats together they must be given ample space to take command of their own territory, so that they do not fight against one another while building up their nests during the breeding season.
- If keeping them inside you must provide your finches with proper full spectrum lighting as well as a quality diet as they are prone to a plumage disorder which induces melanism. This is where the plumage turns much darker, almost black. This will return almost to normal if better lighting is provided, but will not be complete until the next moult.

Cutthroats are an ideal exhibition bird as they are nearly always in tiptop condition with sleek, tight feathering and will be active, but not panic during judging. Birds can be shown singly or in pairs, but a good pair will nearly always beat a similar quality singleton.