



## **The Golden-breasted Waxbill**

The Golden-breasted Waxbill (*Amandava subflava*) is sometimes known as the Zebra Waxbill. It is the smallest of the waxbills, and indeed is one of the smallest birds encountered in aviculture. It occurs in two races, the nominate race ranging in a band across Africa from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east. The larger and more southerly race *A.s.clarkei* ranges from Angola to Mozambique and down to South Africa. The latter is sometimes referred to as Giant or Clark's Goldbreasts on dealer's lists, on the rare occasion that it becomes available.

Adult males are an earthy brown colour above with a crimson stripe from the lores to over and behind the eye. The tail is virtually black except the outer edges of the underside which are almost white and the upper tail coverts are a reddish-crimson. The sides of the face are an olive hue. While the chin and throat are a golden yellow leading to a rich orange breast, which also contains some yellow. The flanks are barred olive and pale yellow. The bill is red with the ridge of the culmen and the underside of the lower mandible being black. Clark's Golden-breasted Waxbill differs in being slightly larger and being more extensively yellow with the orange colour being more confined to the chest. The female is a pale yellow below with the barring on the flaks being less distinct. There is no crimson eyestripe over the eye.

The basic diet comprises a good foreign finch seed mixture with millet sprays being much appreciated, as is greenfood. Oystershell grit and cuttlefish bone should also be provided. Alternatively a soluble Calcium additive could be put in the drinking water. Livefood should be provided if breeding is to be successfully accomplished, fruit flies being a favourite.

Goldbreasts are one of the waxbills that are easy to determine their sex, (most others cannot be sexed visually) and this is the first step to getting a pair together. They will go to nest readily and provided a sufficient supply of appropriate livefood is available, they should rear young without too much difficulty. A moistened proprietary eggfood should be given year round to increase protein levels. Although this is not always taken as readily as would be by other species.

They will build their own nest in a planted aviary, although it is best to provide a variety of nest receptacles in order that a selection of sites is available to them. Coconut fibre is an excellent nesting material to provide as they can easily interweave this. Like many waxbills the Goldbreast will often make a "cock nest" alongside the nesting chamber. This is often thought to be a device to fool potential predators. If breeding in indoor cages a degree of privacy should be given to the nesting area. Shielding the cage front with foliage or greenhouse shading fabric will give them a sense of security. It is not recommended that the novice breeder should attempt close-ringing of the chicks as the parents are likely to abandon the nest.

If housing them outside in a planted aviary during the short British summer, they should be brought in and provided with a dry, frost-free environment during the winter months and should not be subjected to cold and damp conditions during this time.

They make ideal subjects for a mixed collection of small finches and waxbills but of course, being so small, they should not be mixed with larger, more pugnacious species. Better breeding results may be achieved by providing them with their own accommodation. A cubic metre would be the minimum suggested. Moreover, they have the ability to squeeze through the tiniest of holes, and thus it is imperative that the fabric of the aviary is kept in good repair. However, they do make excellent aviary birds on account of their pretty colour, the ease of which they will breed and also their harmonious disposition.

Goldbreasts make good show exhibits, if shown in a cage with a front having appropriately spaced bars. Many is the time that an escapee Goldbreast has been chased around a show hall from being shown in an inappropriate cage. They are generally tight feathered and active, but not too panicky. Pairs will usually make better exhibits than a single bird, assuming that they are both equally smart.