



Java Sparrow Care

The Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) is a commonly available cage bird. Originally from the islands of Indonesia, it is now found in feral populations throughout the world – usually due to escapees. In its homeland it is now becoming very scarce due to farmers protecting their crops of Rice. In the UK, this species is quite hardy and may live perfectly well in outside aviaries all year round, as long as they have shelter from wind and rain.

Java Sparrows are popular exhibition birds as they nearly always look smart. On the rare occasion that they look untidy or ruffled, this indicates that they are not being kept in ideal conditions and/or indicates illness. Javas also are on the whole nice and steady in the show cage and this allows them to show themselves off to the optimum.

After many generations of intense selective breeding and there are now several colour variants – the most common of these is the White where the whole feathering of the bird is a brilliant white. Pied and Fawn birds are also becoming more popular. However the original “wild type” is the most attractive to me – it has a head and tail that is black, the cheeks are white and the body is a grey with a lovely silky finish. Around the eye there is an ring of red, bare skin. This can appear more intense and larger in a breeding cock bird. The Beak is quite large and bulky and is coloured mainly pink with some pale white. Javas have long, pinkish-beige legs. Sexes are alike, although as mentioned earlier there can be a minor difference to the size, colour and shape of the beak during the breeding season.

Javas are quite a large finch at about 6” (15cm) and with the large beak, which they are not to afraid of using, they can be quite intimidating to other small birds. Therefore it is advisable to keep Java Sparrows with birds of a similar or larger size. In a spacious aviary they may feel comfortable enough to share their accommodation without any trouble. Cut-throat and Red-headed Finches, Zebras and Bengalese should be ok, but not Waxbills. A cage of one cubic metre in volume, per pair, should be considered the minimum for Java Sparrows.

As indicated above the Java is primarily a seed-eating bird, which has given it its alternative name of Rice Bird. They will thrive on a diet of mixed millets and plain canary seed forming the basis. Paddy rice can be given, but is not essential. Hempseed is also appreciated. Crushed Oystershell grit and either Cuttlefish bone or a calcium supplement must always be available. Extra protein in the breeding season can be given via a commercial eggfood that is slightly moistened. A few mealworms each day are relished. If well-washed wild greenwood is given in the form of Dandelion leaves or chickweed, this will provide extra minerals and vitamins.

If a true pair is given an opportunity, breeding is quite easy to accomplish. A large nestbox or basket should be provided as they can have large clutches of 8 or more eggs and in my experience they all hatch! The adults will be a nest themselves of any material provided, but they prefer Coconut fibre, soft grasses and pieces of shredded paper. It is rare for Javas to line the nest and any feathers or animal hair provided will be ignored. The hardiness of Javas, and a lack of a natural breeding season, means that they are unlikely to be affected as much by colder weather and can breed all year round. Only very cold or very hot weather will dissuade their activities.

Both adults will incubate the eggs in turn and you will find that both birds will roost together in the nest at night. The incubation period is just less than 3 weeks and that the chicks will grow very quickly. They will be leaving the nest, fully grown, at 4 weeks old. All the chicks and the parents will roost together in the nest and this is why the advice is to provide a large nest. A further 2-3 weeks later the chicks will be feeding themselves and can be removed as soon as you are confident that they are completely independent.