



## Parson Finches

The Black-throated Finch *Poephila cincta* is one species from a family of Grassfinches from Australian. There are 2 races, both coming from Queensland. These are the White-rumped and the Black-rumped. Other than the rump, the two subspecies have similar colouring. The White-Rumped subspecies is the one found in captivity in the UK and these are known to us as Parson Finches. There are two similar Grassfinches found in our aviaries – these are the Long-tailed Grassfinch and the Heck's Grassfinch. Both species are closely related and will interbreed with the Parson Finch and therefore should not be housed with them. The Parson is a slightly larger, cobbier bird than either of these finches and does not have the long central tail feathers. Parson Finches with long tail feathers are hybrids and should be avoided.

Parson Finches should not be considered as a bird for beginners, as they can be a little more tricky than other Grassfinches. However, the naturally coloured birds are readily available and therefore reasonably priced. The Parson Finch has been bred in Europe and the UK for several decades. There are a few colour variants occasionally available such as whites, creams and fawns. These are more highly prized by some keepers and therefore command a higher price.

Sexing Parsons can be difficult. Outwardly, the two sexes are very similar. The cock bird will normally be slightly darker, have a bigger, broader head and the throat patch be wider and darker, this difference will become more distinct as the bird gets older (Parsons can live for 6-8 years). Having said this, selective breeding of the Parson Finch means that cocks from one strain may be indistinguishable from females of another.

Parsons should only be kept with seed-eating birds of a similar or larger size, as they can be quarrelsome towards smaller birds. They are quite inquisitive and are not beyond inspecting other bird's nests and nicking some of the nesting material, although they will not harm the eggs or chicks.

Parson Finches are primarily seed-eaters, although a diet solely comprised of hard seed is not enough to keep and breed them well on. A small amount of Dandelion leaves, from a good clean source, will be appreciated. As will a few mini-mealworms fed once or twice a week. During the summer half-ripe seeding grass heads can be fed and will be relished. When approaching the breeding period, start to include some moistened eggfood over which a mineral and vitamin supplement should be lightly sprinkled. To help with building good strong eggs, and subsequently well formed chicks, a cuttlefish bone, some crushed oystershell grit or a liquid Calcium supplement should also be provided.

If given enough room and an adequate diet, Parsons should not be difficult to persuade to nest. We bred ours in a small aviary furnished with a variety of nest boxes and baskets. A six inch cube half open-fronted plywood box will be adequate. The Parsons will take Coconut fibre, soft grasses, hay and feathers into the nest box and build their own nest within it. There was never any interest shown in the aviary planting as potential nest sites.

Adult Parsons (ie more than 12 months old) start to breed in the Spring when the days start to lengthen and it starts to get warmer. The male will pay more attention to the hen and start to do a little dance (sometimes with a small piece of nesting material in his beak) and sing to her whilst he fluffs himself up to look larger. After successful mating, a typical clutch will comprise of 5 or 6 white eggs laid on consecutive days. The hen will start to brood them after the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> is laid. Once brooding is commenced, a further 14 days should see the eggs start to hatch. The chicks will start to fledge after a further 3 weeks and can be removed when they are all feeding themselves and are completely independent (up to 6 weeks after fledging). Hopefully, the parents will potentially carry on with their season and have a new clutch of eggs within a week or two of the chicks being removed.

As with any bird being exhibited, the following probably applies.

The bird must be in good feather and not be showing any pinfeathers.

The bird must be alert and active in the showcage.

The beak and legs must be free of any sign of flaking (usually only a problem with older birds) and no missing claws.

The show cage should be in good condition – white on the inside and black on the outside. The bars should be black.

The throat patch must be of a good size and the overall colour of the bird should be consistent. The ear holes should not be visible through the feathering.

Parson Finches with their smart and neat lines are a bird that will take the notice of any judge!

