

THE GREY SINGING FINCH *Serinus leucopygius*

by John Santegoeds, Huub Vervest and Gaetan Vicentini

The Grey Singing Finch (or White-rumped Seed eater) *Serinus leucopygius* is a small grey bird with a beautiful song and a special character. In France it is called *Chanteur d'Afrique* and in Italy *Cantore d'Africa* - singer of Africa - while the Dutch, Belgians and Germans call it *Edelzanger* or *Edelsänger*.

In the early days there was a desire to breed good singing canaries by crossing a male Grey Singing Finch with a female domestic canary. It was not easy. The main problem was that most imported male Grey Singing Finches were not in breeding condition at the same time as the female canary. The male Grey Singing Finch's song was usually at its peak when the female canary was moulting and was no longer in breeding condition.

The Grey Singing Finch is, of course, closely related to the domestic varieties of canary, which are descended from the wild Canary *S. canaria* of Madeira, the Azores and Canary Islands. In Africa, where it is found across the continent from Senegal to Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Grey Singing Finch has, however, a different breeding season to that of the domestic canary. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to cross a male Grey Singing Finch with a female canary. Nowadays, of course, if we wish to maintain the Grey Singing Finch and other *Serinus* spp. in aviculture in Europe, it is vital that we concentrate on breeding only pure-bred birds and, to help promote the breeding of birds of the genus *Serinus*, we have set-up the European Society of *Serinus* Breeders (ESSB).

There are probably still many Grey Singing Finches in Belgium and the Netherlands that are kept in outside aviaries. Often they were acquired with the idea that they are peaceful birds (which they are unless housed with closely related species) and because of the male's song and the fact that Grey Singing Finches fit in well housed with more colourful birds. Unfortunately though, when housed outside and sharing an aviary with other birds, Grey Singing Finches very often do not breed successfully. One reason for this is that imported birds are usually not ready to breed until autumn, when here in western Europe the climate is often too cold and too wet for them to breed successfully in an outside aviary. It is far better to bring pairs inside at the end of July/beginning of August and house them in breeding cages (one pair per cage). This will greatly enhance the chances of success.

When the male Grey Singing Finch is ready to breed he begins to sing and chases the female with his wings hanging down and the two chase one another in a butterfly-like display flight. They prefer to build the nest in a

small basket or a nest box like the type shown in the photo (p.38). The inside diameter of the nest is only about 4cm (just over 1½in). The birds can be saved a lot of work by providing them with a pre-formed nest. If the (unheated) indoor breeding quarters are a reasonable temperature, it is possible to breed Grey Singing Finches in September, October or November and have a second opportunity to breed them in February, March and April.



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It is a small bird measuring about 11cm (4½in) in length with simple coloration.

Grey Singing Finches do not have any special dietary requirements. They can be given an enriched tropical finch mixture, by which we mean a tropical finch seed mix (containing mostly various types of millet), complemented with species of grass seed, lettuce seed, plain canary seed, niger and perilla. Greenfood and eggfood are regarded as standard. Using this fairly simple diet it is possible to breed the Grey Singing Finch and other *Serinus* spp.

The opportunity to bathe several times a week will guarantee that Grey Singing Finches remain in good condition. Fourteen hours of light per day is not excessive in indoor breeding quarters. Breeders can use their breeding cages in spring and summer to breed canaries or European seed-eating species and in autumn and early spring use the same cages for breeding African *Serinus* spp.

Often one looks for points that may help visually distinguish between male and female Grey Singing Finches. It may perhaps be possible to see that males are somewhat whiter around the area of the throat and on the belly, whereas females are more of a dirty white and a little more streaked on the throat and belly, but one needs to have a good knowledge of this species



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The eggs are incubated by the female for 12-14 days.



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On becoming independent young birds are best kept caged for several days.



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A type of nest box favoured in Europe, in this instance being used by a pair of Black-throated Seed eaters or Yellow-rumped Serins *S. atrogularis*.

and an experienced eye to pick this out. A better way of sexing them is to listen for males singing and when this happens place a coloured, split ring (band) on one leg and keep a record of the number. Sometimes months may pass during which none of the birds are heard singing. If they are moved to a different location, another Grey Singing Finch is placed in with them or a bird is placed in a cage by itself, this may induce them to burst into song. Once a bird sings strongly you can be sure that it is a male. A bird that has been moved to several different locations and/or has been placed on its own for several days and has not sung can be assumed to be a female and should be ringed (banded) accordingly.

Young Grey Singing Finches on becoming independent of their parents are best kept for several days in a show cage or box cage. At about six weeks of age males are already beginning to practise their singing skills.

To learn more about the European Society of Serinus Breeders (ESSB) you can visit its Website: www.Serinus-Society.eu

BREEDING THE GREEN JAY *Cyanocorax yncas* AT BARCELONA ZOO

by Miguel Sierra and Rosana Gallego

The Green Jay *Cyanocorax yncas* is a relatively small forest jay with green to bluish green upperparts and yellow or green underparts and has a relatively long and narrow tail with yellow outer tail feathers. The lores, ear-coverts, face and throat are black. The nominate subspecies has a small tuft of ultramarine coloured feathers on the forehead, an ultramarine spot above the eye and a large patch the same colour below the eye. The crown and nape are pale yellow, or in some individuals, these are white.

The Green Jay has a complex taxonomy with 13 subspecies recognised by del Hoyo et al. (2009). These can be divided into two groups, which have sometimes been treated as two (or more) species. The Andean (nominate) group (Inca Jay) is found from Venezuela and Colombia, south to Bolivia. The subspecies in this group are slightly larger than the Central American subspecies and have a larger frontal crest (on the forehead) and yellow underparts. The upperparts are darker green or bluish and they have a whitish or blue nape. The Central American (*luxuosus*) group (Green Jay) is found from Texas to Honduras. The subspecies in this group are smaller and have a short and inconspicuous frontal tuft (on the forehead) and a blue crown and nape. The northern subspecies have green underparts and the southern subspecies have yellow underparts.

All have a black bill. The colour of the iris varies from brown to yellow depending on the subspecies. Likewise, the colour of the legs and feet vary from reddish-brown to brown or greyish/blackish, again depending on the subspecies. Many of the subspecies intergrade. The sexes look alike.

The Green Jay is strangely absent from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

Green Jays measure 25cm-27cm (approx. 10in-10½in) in length. The males at Barcelona Zoo weigh 70g-83g (n=8) and the females weigh 68g-78g (n=4).

Housing

Here at Barcelona Zoo our breeding pairs of Green Jays are kept in an indoor exhibit. The exhibit covers an area of 70sq m (approx. 750sq ft) and has a 10sq m (approx. 108sq ft) pond. During the winter the temperature in the exhibit is maintained at 20°C-24°C (68°F -75.2°F). One side and half of the rear wall are decorated to resemble a rock cliff and the other half of the back of the exhibit has a photo poster. The exhibit has seven skylights,



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