

Finch Bizz



*The monthly magazine of the
Hawkesbury Finch Club
A Branch of the Finch Society
of Australia Inc.*

Finch Bizz

February 2016

The Hawkesbury Finch Club A branch of The Finch Society of Australia

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During last month I wrote the following 'editorial' because of how moved people were at the Christmas meeting when Ken Smith tried to speak about leaving our club.

As we now know, Ken arrived at our January '16 meeting to tell us that things had changed dramatically and he is with us for '4-5 years'!

Nevertheless I think the editorial is still valid as too often people are not around to hear the good things said about them --- and following that Ken's own contribution which I received on 2/2/16

A tribute to a really great club member

In September 1976, the members of the club at that time welcomed a new member Ken Smith.

At that time no one had any idea what a valuable, respected and much-loved member he would become. Apart from his friendly nature, Ken became recognised as a member who might at any meeting contributed an idea, demonstrate a gadget or talk about his birds.

Who can forget the 'electric blankets' under the Gouldian nest boxes? Or the 'mystery' prizes (what's in the box ?? a pair of Zebra, or long-tails, or painteds, or ??) we never knew what to expect, but we all enjoyed the novelty of the prize.

We have several very generous club members who regularly donate birds for the raffle or an award (particularly for young members who present articles or talks). Special among these is Ken who many times was the source of birds which were presented as an encouragement to one of our young members.

Our club loses something whenever we farewell someone* (for whatever reason)

*Alf Watts, Les Sinclair, John Davis, Nick Susanjara, Bill Longford, Bob Sneddon, etc, etc ---- **but none more than Ken Smith**

Ken, we wish you well as you re-establish at Bonnie Hills. We hope you meet some interesting 'birdos' in the area, and you never know, some of us may well call in for a 'cuppa' and to see your new aviary (surely there will be one in time!) *(Ken Now we can substitute 'your daughter's place' for Bonnie Hills)*

.... *And now a word or two from Ken himself*

Friends, Romans and Finch Club Members, lend me your eyes.

I am sorry I could not complete what I was attempting to portray about my time at our great friendly and informative club at our Xmas meeting last year as emotions got in the way. I was going "OK" until I stood up and the lump in the throat took over and Glen had to rescue me (thanks Glen).

I believe I have been a member for about 30 years now and have enjoyed every one of them. My interest in bird keeping came from my Grandmother when I was young (about 9 or 10) who used to keep canaries. Since then I have always had a cage or aviary of some kind.

I have attempted to look into the way I built my cages or aviaries and implemented some 'outside the box', ideas like measuring temperature during winter (using a thermo-hydrograph) and having an old electric blanket (striped of the covering) inserted under the Gouldian Finch nest boxes, or mixing 'GO Cat Kitten', charcoal and meal-worms as a winter protein booster.

I was proud of my Zebra breeding program attempting to breed out the spots in their tails (does anyone still have any?). I have been fortunate to have made some great friends within the membership, which this club seems to excel in.

My wife and I were supposed to have been in Port Macquarie by now in our new over '50's resort', downsizing to make life a little easier and free up some traveling time, but not all things go according to plan as we found out. There was a family discussion (without our knowledge) that led to an offer that was too good to turn down, and after much deliberation we decided to stay in the district. This now allows me to continue being an active member of the Hawkesbury Finch Club and contribute to the entertainment in the coming months.

My new aviary will not require "wire or safety doors" to stop the escapee', as we now live in the big outdoor aviary called Wilberforce and my nest boxes are up in the trees secured to the trunks and visible from our front deck. The old bird seed will not need to be sorted or the build-up on the floor removed if it gets wet, and the National Parks won't need to check the records every year.

The only thing I will miss about not having the aviary is the fantastic "WHAT WAS THIS BIRD CROSSED WITH?" guessing competitions.

Looking forward to many more years of "Birding"

Thanks and Kind Regards

Ken Smith

Those of us fortunate enough to be at our January meeting enjoyed another of Jim Clark's great slide shows of photos of birds – this time an amazing array of birds that Jim has photographed in and around his back yard. He really has a skill at bird photography and we are the lucky beneficiaries!

Debbie and Amelia didn't make it to our January meeting and so there isn't a full record of our raffle. I tried to note who won each prize but have no idea who donated them – but many thanks to those generous people.

<u>Prize</u>	<u>Winner</u>
Java 'sparrow'	Ron James
Palm grass	Peter Berry
Bromeliad	Peter Baldry
Decorated dish	John Rauchenberger
Hand lotion/wash	Glenn Johnston
Calendar	Peter Baldry

News from the January 2016 meeting

- Rennie Schmid has purchased a new computer on behalf of the club – and managed to get it for several hundred dollars less than we had allocated
- Glenn Johnston will be scaling down his 'bird shop' activities because of the prohibitive cost of 'up-grading' his shop facilities to meet new government regulations – very sad after so many years of trading as Gardwood Aviaries.
- Some of you may remember back as far as when Glenn's parents lived next door and sold plants from their garage while 'minding the bird shop' to give Glenn a bit of a break during the weekend.

As a first major article for my early issues of *Finch Bizz*, I have decided to highlight our **club emblem** – the **Diamond Firetail**. The article which begins this month and will be concluded next month is a combination of an article by Doug Hill and Marcus Pollard, articles by Glenn Johnson and added details from Klaus Immelmann's book '*Australian Finches*'.

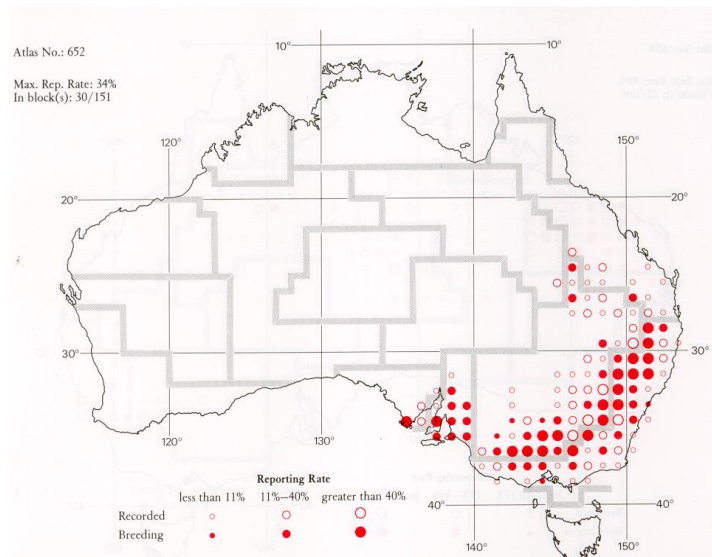
The Hill/Pollard article has been edited to take out repeated references to 'I' as the article was seemingly written by two people, and is here blended with others.

Diamond Firetailed Finch

Alternative names – Diamond ; Diamond Finch ; Diamond Sparrow ; Spot-sided Finch

Scientific name -- *Stagonopleura guttata* ; previously *Zonaeginthus guttatus*

Distribution -- Diamonds can be found in savannah woodland and mallee from just south of Adelaide, throughout Victoria, eastern New South Wales to just over the Great Dividing Range as far west as Yeoval, and north to about the Dawson River in lower central Queensland.



Description -- The Diamond is a large finch being about 4¾" (12 cm) long and very bulky (20g). It has a grey head and white throat. The back and wings are a greyish brown. The underside, extending to the flanks, is white with a black chest band. The flanks are spotted white and the rump is crimson. The beak is maroon and the lores black. The legs are dull grey and the eyes red.

In the Wild – Diamonds in the wild inhabit open forests, mallee scrub and bushy grasslands. They never venture far from water, so can be observed near dams, creeks and watercourses. They are often seen feeding in flocks of up to 30 birds, however, family groups of up to a dozen are more common. In the wild they will nest in boxthorn bushes, blackberries, and even bunches of mistletoe hanging in gum trees. One of their favourites is the fruit trees near farmhouses.

Availability -- Diamond Firetail Finches are available at most times of the year whether they are sold from bird outlets or from private breeders.

Purchasing your bird -- These days you can come across Diamonds in bird outlets but you may have to travel far and wide to find them. You would be much better off finding a specialist breeder and obtaining your birds from them. Try to always buy younger birds to start your collection.

Sexing -- Sexing Diamond Firetail Finches can at times be a bit difficult – especially if you encounter a well-bred hen and a poorly bred male. Some of the methods that I use are the size and shape of the head – where the male's head is squarer than the females and is also broader across the top. The tail is another indicator of the sexes with the male's tail being black and the hen's tail having a brownish appearance to it. Some say that the hens have browner lores (area between the beak and the eye) while those of the male are darker. During the breeding season the hens develop a pinker beak but usually when the bird is around 3-4 years of age!

If you are really troubled by sexing these you might like to try the following: place the birds you want sexed into cabinets where they can't see each other but can still hear each other. Within 30 minutes you should be able to sex them by their voices as they will call to each other making your job easier. How do you tell? If you have ever heard male Diamonds call then you will be in no doubt

.....but for the novice the female's call is a scratchy version of the males call. If still confused pick the two birds that sound the most 'different'!

Compatibility -- Diamonds can at times be a real pain in the aviary and at other times they can be real sweethearts. The aggressive Diamonds should be housed with birds of equal size such as the Chestnuts, Javas, Aberdeens, Golden Song Sparrows and Cutthroats. If they are put with the smaller waxbills and seedeaters then it is a case of watching them very closely as they may stress the smaller birds to keep them from breeding, or harass them to the point of dying. Fortunately such birds are rare! After having said that, a single pair of Diamonds have been kept with Red-cheeked Cordon Bleus, Strawberrys, Orange-breasts, Red-faced Pytilias and St Helenas without any problems.

Good points to look for -- Diamonds are birds that are very neat and tidy and appear that way just about all of the time, if the bird you are looking at does not appear that way then, *don't buy it!* The feathers must be clean and tight. It is important that the vent is clean and not wet, if it is *get outta there quick!* The feet and mandible must be clean and free of any type of scaling. The overall colour of the bird is strong. The size of the bird is an important factor. The eyes must be clear and bright with no weeping.

Faults to look for -- As noted a sick Diamond is easy to spot: if you see a bird that is not in good tight feather, that is at all fluffed up on the perch or floor with its eyes closed, not bothering to open them when you touch the cage, don't take it !! Scaly legs, beak and overgrown toenails are also a definite no, no. Watery eyes and a soiled vent would be a problem (these birds stress very easily when moved), but MOST birds with soiled vents will recover rapidly when treated with a good electrolyte mix and vitamins. However, if the feathers around the vent are matted then you have a real problem.

Aviary or breeding cabinet ? -- It is not recommend to keep Diamonds in breeding cabinets or small aviaries. They tend to stress out when in confined spaces and that is when you get all types of problems with your birds. They also have a tendency to over-eat and will get fat very quickly if allowed to overindulge in energy-rich foods. Exercise in a well-planted (grevillia, bottlebrush, melaleuca etc) aviary, with one breeding pair (unless you are fortunate and have a LARGE aviary; which can house a colony of 3 or 4 pairs) is said to be the best arrangement, and a dust bath and pond will be very popular.

Breeding season -- Diamonds will regulate themselves for breeding; here in Sydney, their season ranges from September to the end of April or just before the cold weather restarts. However, because of their large warm nests they will often successfully rear young even in the Tasmanian winter if kept in fully enclosed aviaries. They generally do not breed in the hottest months of January and February, and some breeders actively discourage them from breeding in those particular months if they are prone to going to nest.

Ease of breeding (1 easy-10 difficult) -- When fed a diet that consists of plenty of fresh green seeding grasses and a splattering of live food your chances of breeding Diamond is very good. Not a bird for the novice, but for someone with a bit of experience: probably a rating for Diamonds of 5 out of 10.

..... to be continued next month

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<p><i>We are happy to sponsor</i> <i>The Finch Society of Australia Hawkesbury Branch</i></p>	

The taxonomy of Australian grass (*Estrildid*) finches

<u>Genus</u>	<u>Common name</u>	<u>Species name</u>
<i>Emblema</i>	Painted finch	<i>Emblema pictum</i>
<i>Stagonopleura</i>	Beautiful firetail	<i>Stagonopleura bella</i>
	Red-eared firetail	<i>Stagonopleura oculata</i>
	Diamond firetail	<i>Stagonopleura guttata</i>
<i>Neochmia</i>	Red-browed finch	<i>Neochmia temporalis</i>
	Crimson finch	<i>Neochmia phaeton</i>
	Star finch	<i>Neochmia ruficauda</i>
	Plum-headed finch	<i>Neochmia modesta</i>
<i>Taeniopygia</i>	Zebra finch	<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>
	Double-barred finch	<i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>
<i>Poephila</i>	Masked finch	<i>Poephila personata</i>
	Long-tailed finch	<i>Poephila acuticauda</i>
	Black-throated finch	<i>Poephila cincta</i>
<i>Erythrura</i>	Blue-faced parrotfinch	<i>Erythrura trichroa</i>
	Gouldian finch	<i>Erythrura gouldiae</i>
<i>Lonchura</i>	Yellow-rumped finch	<i>Lonchura flaviprymna</i>
	Chestnut-breasted finch	<i>Lonchura castaneothorax</i>
<i>Heteromunia</i>	Pictorella finch	<i>Heteromunia pectoralis</i>

Sydney Royal Finch Show – 17th and 18th March 2016

The FSA is again coordinating the finch sections at the Sydney Royal. This year we are having a major push for entries, using two main new incentives. We are able to assist with transport of birds to and/or from the showground. The second major initiative is cash! Yes, cash prizes and vouchers. The total value of the finch classes prize pool is \$1050 larger than last year. As well as the bird show the FSA will have a stand, together with display aviary, rolling PowerPoint presentation and live food display. The Sydney Royal is a fantastic opportunity to show off aviculture to the public. The more entries in the finch classes the better the spectacle – you never know you may just win Grand Champion!

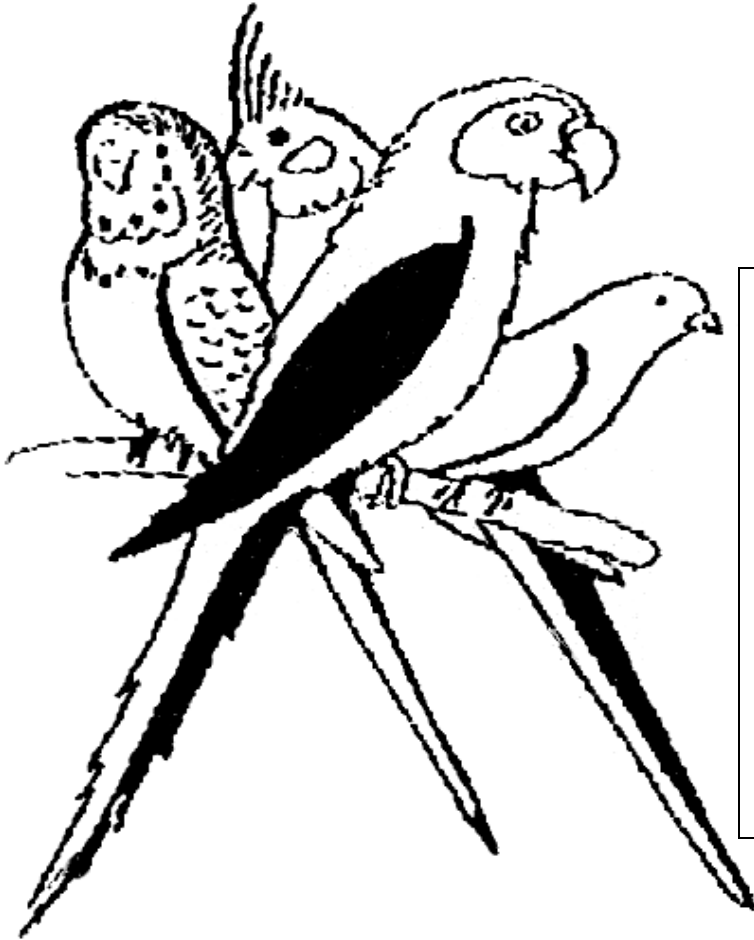
Bird medications and products

NOTE: Neville Simmons will have the following products available in his car whenever he is at a meeting (nearly always!) ---- just see him during supertime to make a purchase

Cydetin Plus	\$15.00	100ml
Baycox	\$30.00	100ml
Coopex	\$10.00	25grams
Small finch rings	\$3.00	per 10
Large finch rings	\$3.00	per 10
<i>Neophema</i> rings	\$3.00	per 10
Bi-colour rings	\$7.00	per 10
Coconut fibre	\$4.00	per pack
Flock	\$4.00	per pack

Next Meeting *Wednesday 27th March 7.30 pm*

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