



## *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

### **The Cordon Bleu Finch**

*(The Avicultural Review June 1978 Number 5 Page 27)*

**By Bruce Read**

The Cordon Bleu or Crimson-eared Waxbill (*Uraeginthus bengalus*) is a native of Africa, where it is widely distributed over the whole of the Dark Continent, with the exception of the desert areas. It is a very beautiful little finch, about the size of our common [Redhead](#), but has a longer tail. The fawn colour of the back and wings becomes lighter on the underparts of the centre of the breast. The face, flanks and tail are blue. The cock displays a bright crimson patch on each ear. They are easily sexed, the blue colouring in the hen being perceptibly lighter than that of the cock, and she also lacks the crimson ear patches. The beak of both sexes is pale red. The young cocks also lack the distinctive ear-markings of the older birds, but may be distinguished from the hens (young or mature) by the deeper colour of the blue areas, which in the cock spreads further back on the face.



Red Cheeked Cordon Bleu Finch File  
Courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

### **Easily acclimatised**

The Cordon Bleu has always been one of our most popular foreign finches, and with its colour and sprightly habits it is an adornment in any collection.

Some fanciers are inclined to give this bird a reputation of being delicate, but this is quite contrary to my own experience. I have found them to be the most ready to breed of all the African Waxbills. From one pair alone I raised 22 youngsters in one season, although the average is from 9-12 per pair per season. I have had some pairs breed all year round, but usually they take a rest during the hot months, from the end of November to early March.

### **Feeding and nesting**

The Cordon Bleu usually elects to build its own nest but will sometimes accept a jam tin or renovate an old nest of another bird. It prefers green grass for building material as it bends easily and may be woven into shape better than dry grass. Long couch or summer grass is ideal. The nest is a small oval shaped affair, in which 3-5 white eggs are laid, four being the usual number. Incubation is completed in about 12 days and 2-4 young may be reared. I have had five in some nests.

Food consists of the usual [millet](#) diet, with a little [canary seed](#) for adult birds. When feeding young, however, their diet needs to be supplemented with some form of live insect food and plenty of seeding grasses.

For insect food I have used [termites](#), [mealworms](#), [maggots \(gentles\)](#) and [aphis](#). The aphis may be collected from rose bushes, and any of your garden friends will welcome you with open arms, or by growing rape or turnips and allowing them to seed. This will attract the aphis. If feeding maggots, they should be cleaned off in dry bran or sand for 12 hours before supplying to the birds.

A supply of mealworms can always be kept on hand, and anyone living near bush areas should have no difficulty in collecting termites. I give only a few, each morning, of whatever kind of insect is available.

## A good mixer

The beaks of the young birds when they leave the nest are dark blue and change to a red colour in about six weeks. The cocks do not show the red cheek patches until about 3-6 months old, according to the time of year they are reared. If hatched in September the young cocks will be fully coloured by December, but if they are hatched in March or later, they will not come into colour till the weather warms - about August or September.

I have always found the Cordon Bleu a most delightful bird in a mixed collection, being amicable and friendly towards the other birds. It will also agree with its own kind should one wish to house several pairs in the same aviary. But whilst it never looks for trouble and does not interfere with other nesting birds, it is eminently capable of defending itself and its own nest, and I have seen it put much larger attacking birds to rout.

The size of the quarters doesn't seem to worry it very much. I've housed and bred it successfully in all sizes of aviaries, from a small one 4ft x 5ft x 6ft high, to a large enclosure 14ft x 10ft x 6ft. The main thing with the smaller enclosures is to avoid overcrowding.

All in all, the dainty Cordon Blue is an ideal foreigner for the beginner in this fascinating branch of the fancy.

---

**The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW):** <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org>

**Contact Us:** <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org/contactUs.php>

**Join us on Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/AviculturalSocietyNSW>

**Follow us on Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/#!/AvicultureNSW>

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in the Avicultural Review and/or on this website do not necessarily represent those of the Avicultural Society of NSW. No responsibility is accepted by the Society, the Editor, the author/s, Webmaster and/or Administrator/s for the statements, opinions and advice contained herein. Readers should rely upon their own inquiries in making any decisions relating to their own interests.