



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

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

## **Black-breasted Buttonquail** *(Turnix melanogaster)*

*(ASNSW Meeting - November 2013)*

**Joshua Allen interviewed by Sarah Evett**



Black-breasted Buttonquail  
File courtesy of [Wikimedia](#)

## **Introduction**

### **Sarah Evett**

I will start by introducing myself. My name is Sarah and I am the Species Co-ordinator for the Koala at [Featherdale Wildlife Park](#). However I do have quite an interest in learning about bird species and other species as well. At Featherdale we have the largest collection of Australian Animals in the world and a fair amount of that is made up of birds. The last meeting of the ASNSW here at Ermington was my first meeting and WOW that was the beginning for me. It was a pretty good introduction of what you do at your meetings here.

### **Joshua Allen**

My name is Joshua. I have been interested in birds for as long as I can remember - keeping them, bird watching, and I have also been working at Featherdale Wildlife Park for the last four years.

## **Interview**

**Sarah Evett**

**Well that is my first question out of the way as to how long you have actually been keeping birds Joshua. Do you remember what your first bird was?**

Joshua Allen

A Budgie!

**Sarah Evett**

**A Budgie - well there you go!**

**What have you got in your collection at the moment? I know that it is fairly extensive but if you could give us a quick rundown just so people can get an overall idea of where you are up to at the moment?**

Joshua Allen Everything from finches to parrots, quails, pigeons and doves.

**Sarah Evett Do you have a particular favourite?**

Joshua Allen I have a few I guess. Black Cockatoos, Brush Bronzewing, Black-breasted Buttonquail and some Firetails.

**Sarah Evett You have a few there. Just on the Black-breasted Buttonquail, what interests you most about this bird?**

Joshua Allen Just that they are a very interesting bird. The male looks after the young and how it all works.

**Sarah Evett How many actual Black-breasted specimens do you have?**

Joshua Allen Well at the moment I have two young that hatched about a month and a half ago and I have a male that is on eggs at the moment.

**Sarah Evett That is quite unusual isn't it, it is not for all bird species, I mean the male looking after them?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett Do you find that your males make quite good parents?**

Joshua Allen Yes. The females are not much good but the males are good parents.

**Sarah Evett Do you house them in a social or solitary situation?**

Joshua Allen Off season it is alright to house them all together, it doesn't really matter if you have males and females together. When it comes into breeding time it is better to have a pair per aviary. When the female lays her eggs take her away and the male will look after them.

**Sarah Evett Thinking of housing requirements, I am not familiar with them and if I was to look at doing it at home myself, what sort of area do I need, substrates, that sort of thing? Is it fairly extensive or is it a basic setup that you require?**

Joshua Allen They are not that fussy. In my aviary I have rockery and mulch, leaf litter, lots of tussocks and some sand.

**Sarah Evett And that would encourage live insects and assist with the feeding?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett How long have you actually been looking after the Black-breasted Buttonquails?**

Joshua Allen From the beginning of this year.

**Sarah Evett Are you finding them fairly easy to keep? Or have you met with any challenges with them yet?**

Joshua Allen Breeding. The first time they laid eggs I didn't really expect it. The male built a nest in the corner, a big oval shaped nest, sort of like a finch nest, and she laid her eggs in there. Then I let him go and got another male and put him in with her and then she would lay the eggs but if I didn't get her within an hour of when she laid the third egg she would just kick all the eggs out and crush them all up.

**Sarah Evett** **Is that the general clutch size?**

Joshua Allen Yes. Three to four eggs.

**Sarah Evett** **We talked about diet a bit before when we mentioned encouraging live insects, but what else do you provide in their diet for them, and is that for the breeding season, etc?**

Joshua Allen Mealworms. I put crickets in there for them but they can't really get them so I put them in a bowl so they can't jump out. Seed (budgie mix) and chicken starter.

**Sarah Evett** **So fairly standard for the everyday keeper, nothing really exotic in there?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett** **How successful have you been with breeding them? You mentioned before that you have had two hatch.**

Joshua Allen Yes I have had two hatch and I have had three more since then. Unfortunately the Musk Lorikeets got to them before I could do anything.

**Sarah Evett** **So you have a mixed aviary?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett** **Just the Musk Lorikeets or do you have other species in there as well?**

Joshua Allen I have a lot of Neophemas and Mulga Parrots as well.

**Sarah Evett** **Are you finding that you have any problems with them or is it just with the Musk Lorikeets?**

Joshua Allen Just with the Musk Lorikeets.

**Sarah Evett** **Okay, so we are talking about a three or four eggs per clutch size?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett** **How long does the season run for?**

Joshua Allen The breeding season starts at the beginning of October and continues through to the end of January.

**Sarah Evett** **How many clutches would you want your female to have without running her down?**

Joshua Allen In the wild she will go and mate with one male and lay her eggs and go off and find another male. So in the wild they will have multiple clutches but I really only want mine to have three or four.

**Sarah Evett** **By driving her too hard, that would lessen her life expectancy?**

Joshua Allen Yes.

**Sarah Evett** **What is the average life expectancy of the Black-breasted Buttonquail?**

Joshua Allen About four to five years old.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Seeing as have just started are you familiar with successful hand rearing and just leave it to the males to feed the maggots, etc., to them?**

Joshua Allen                    I haven't really tried. It is very fiddly. They are very small birds.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Have you encountered any other problems with disease for instance?**

Joshua Allen                    Because they are ground dwellers worms can be a problem. So I need to worm them with a worming gel.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Just for those looking to keep them at home what would be something that was appealing to encourage someone to keep them? What would you say to them?**

**Are they are good display bird?**

Joshua Allen                    Yes.

**Sarah Evett**                    **And the initial cost, what sort of price range are we looking at? Are they expensive birds?**

Joshua Allen                    Around \$250AU to \$300AU for a pair.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Okay, and then the upkeep and the food that we discussed, there is nothing too exotic there that we need, so they are quite affordable birds?**

Joshua Allen                    Yes.

**Sarah Evett**                    **So we pretty much need everybody to start keeping them?**

Joshua Allen                    Yes. They are a pretty hard bird to get hold of though.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Why? Because they are "vulnerable"? Do they have issues such as "endangered" or "vulnerable"?**

Joshua Allen                    Yes. They are listed as "Vulnerable". Most people don't have them.

**Sarah Evett**                    **Okay so we need to get their numbers up. Everyone go out and buy some Buttonquails!**

## Questions

*(Sarah asked the members and visitors who were present at the meeting if anyone else had any further questions for Joshua about Black-breasted Buttonquails.)*

**Neil**                                **I have a question Josh. I can never understand that with parrots and finches, with their young, they are parent fed; but with quails, they just fend for themselves straight away.**

Joshua Allen                    Yes with quails. But with all Buttonquails, the father rears them.

**Duncan Macpherson**        **The Musk Lorikeets attack them do they?**

Joshua Allen                    Yes. I just went in there one day and they had them all.

Graeme Phipps                    They are not quails, they just look like quails. They are in the order of cranes. They are not in the order of quails and pheasants and game birds. They are insectivores. They do eat a lot of seed and I think that is where people make the mistake, they think they are quails, so they think they can just give them some starter mash and they will be right, but they are not. They need to be looked after by dad and fed from his beak.

You can rear them. I have reared them. They are very fiddly. You have got to have tweezers and give them insects or whatever you have out of the tweezers because they are looking up to eat not down to eat. With quail you can just get a bright pen and go tap, tap, tap on the ground and the quail will come and eat. But not this lot.

**Colin Morgan                    What are the licensing requirements?**

Joshua Allen                    You need a Class 1 licence.

**Paul Solomon                    Are they flighty?**

Joshua Allen                    They can be flighty. When I first introduce them or introduce a new bird into the aviary, I clip their wings so that they don't hit their heads or injure themselves. But after that when they know their way around I can just leave them.

**Janet Macpherson                What is their natural habitat and distribution in the wild?**

Joshua Allen                    Southeast Queensland. They are mainly found on the edges of the rainforest.

**Janet Macpherson                Right down the eastern coast as far down as Victoria?**

Joshua Allen                    No. They are mainly in Queensland.

**Janet Macpherson                So they are a tropical bird.**

Joshua Allen                    Yes.

**Graeme Phipps                    What a ripper of an interview!**

**Sarah Evett                        Thank you very much. I learned something as well. Thank you Josh.**

**Graeme Phipps                    Thank you very much!!**

*(Graeme thanked both Sarah and Joshua for their very informative and enlightening interview.)*

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