



The Plumhead Finch

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Bruce Hockley interviewed by Stan Simons

Stan Simons **Bruce, could you give a brief introduction to this bird?**

Bruce Hockley I find this is one of the easiest to breed of the Australian finches that I keep. About 10 years ago I got my first pair and I had great success breeding them so they quickly became my favourite bird. I keep them in a mixed collection. They seem to live for a fair while and I don't seem to have a lot of losses other than from egg binding in the winter. For some reason, in my aviaries anyway, they try to breed all year round. Sexing is very easy. The cock bird has the plum colour on the top of his head and the bib underneath, but you will get a few hens that carry a bit of a bib underneath the throat but all hens always have a white stripe on the top of their eyes. So even if you get one of these marked hens, and I have a fair few of them, the reason I keep them is that they seem to produce better young. I always keep the hens that show the throat bib as well as the cocks.

I keep them in aviaries ranging from 20 feet square down to aviaries that are only 8 feet by 3 feet. They breed well in all of them. The main problem is that if you have too many people come around to your aviaries, like I do, they are a bird that as soon as you go near them in the nest, they desert it. They are very bad for this so that you have to keep your eye on them all the time. When I notice that one is not feeding I usually take the young out and put them under a [Bengalese](#).

They are not the prettiest of the Australian finches by any means but they are a bird that once they are sitting out on a perch they are beautiful if the sun is shining on them as it catches all their markings. In most cases I keep two pair. The larger aviaries are 30 feet by 10 feet and I have five pair in that. I prefer to let them pair up themselves. Each season if I have young that I want to begin breeding with I put all of them into aviary with split rings on them and let them pair up by themselves. Every time I have tried to pair them up the way that I thought was best they would not breed. They are a bird that really does like to find its own mate.

Stan Simons **What type of nest do you use and what do you feed them on?**

Bruce Hockley I just use a normal seed mixture with plenty of ripe seeding grasses. Up in Gosford we have plenty of Newcastle Grass and I find it is the best material you can find for any of the finches. I have a fairly big patch of it growing and they thrive on it. I have never used any nest box or any other tins or similar. They have always wanted to build their own nest.

Stan Simons **Do you give them any live food at all?**

Bruce Hockey Yes I always have live food available. As well I give them egg and biscuit because they are in a mixed collection with [Singers](#) and [Parrot finches](#), and a few [Wrens](#) or the like, so there is live food available for them. However I must say that I have never seen the Plumheads down at the [mealworm](#) dish. They may take the odd one on occasions but I have not seen it. One thing that they do seem to like is [Madeira cake](#). They seem to thrive on it.

Stan Simons **What is the normal nest size you would expect?**

Bruce Hockey Normally there are only two to three. In aviaries they do tend to have smaller nests but I did have four fly out of one nest yesterday, but this is a rarity as normally I would only have two to three.

Stan Simons **Do you find them pugnacious at all?**

Bruce Hockey Only if something goes close to their nest. They will attack anything within 3 feet of their nest. It doesn't matter what it is, Singers or [Siskins](#) - they will move them. Other than that they never worry about any other birds.

Stan Simons **Is canary seed alright for them?** (*from audience*)

Bruce Hockey Yes, I feed them a mixture of the three different millet seeds - [Pannicum](#), [Japanese](#) and [white millet](#) and to this I add some [canary](#). These are the four main seeds I feed them.

Stan Simons **Well that seems to cover everything. Thank you very much Bruce.**

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