



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

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

## **Bird of the Month**

### **The Red-faced Parrot Finch**

**(*Erythrura psittacea*)**

*(ASNSW Meeting – December 2012)*

**Paul Henry interviewed by Paul Menegazzo**

*The Red-faced Parrot finch was chosen as bird of the month in keeping with our last meeting for the year before Christmas and red and green being Christmas colours!*

**Paul Menegazzo:** What we are going to do tonight is talk about the Red-faced Parrot finch which is a favourite bird of both Paul and mine. We will start off Paul by asking where their origins are?

Paul Henry:



They are from New Caledonia and they are normally found on the edges of the rainforest. If you are go there you will see them in public parks, etc. They are a very adventurous type of bird. They are always jumping around all the time.

**Paul Menegazzo:** How long have you kept them?

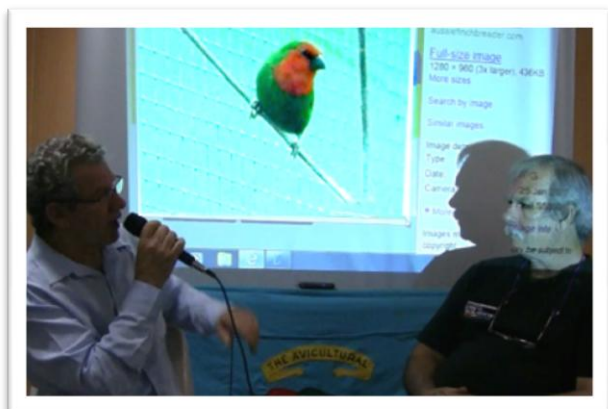
Paul Henry:

I got my first Red-faced Parrot finches in about 1999. I got two birds from two different people and they were a fantastic pair. Through the years I think I would have bred 15 or 16 birds a year until I left the door latch undone and the birds flew away.

**Paul Menegazzo:** Probably the biggest problem with Parrot finches is sexing them. Can you give us any tips on sexing Parrot finches?

Paul Henry:

They are hard. If you look at the photo at the back you will see this bird is a cock bird. They have got far more red behind the eye. I find that is probably the best way to tell. Also if you have the birds in the light the green on the cock bird is brighter. It is a bit more iridescent. Also hens often have a dark patch in-between the beak and the eye, they can be quite dark in there but they are hard to pick.



- Paul Menegazzo:** **I have heard Paul that you can sex them the same way that you sex canaries, by checking the vent?**
- Paul Henry: Yes you can. You have got to have them at the right time in the breeding season. There is no point in doing it in the winter; it has got to be coming up to the breeding season.
- Paul Menegazzo:** **What diet do you feed your birds on?**
- Paul Henry: I feed my birds a normal finch diet but Parrot finches always like lots of soft food. I find they like cucumber, corn on the cob and sprouted seed. When they are breeding their main diet will be sprouted seed, soft foods and egg food. So to get good numbers of young in the nest I find if you give them a good soft food that will help it.
- Paul Menegazzo:** **Aviary size and cohabits. Do you have other birds that you can keep them with or do you keep them on their own, or in colonies?**
- Paul Henry: All my birds are in a mixed collection. With the Parrot finches I find that you do the best with one pair to an aviary no matter what the size is. I have tried breeding them in cabinets with limited success. I get the birds to lay eggs, sit on the eggs for a week or so and then they leave them. But I do know people who have bred them in cabinets about 1 ½ metres long.
- Paul Menegazzo:** **Breeding Season. Do they have a set breeding season? Do they prefer the warmer months of the year or the colder months of the year or do they breed when they feel they want to?**
- Paul Henry: I think that established pairs will breed nearly all year. The best time to breed them is in spring. What I have found is that when they breed in winter the Parrot finch young often leave the nest quite early and in winter time you lose a lot, so in my opinion it is not advisable to breed them in winter.
- Paul Menegazzo:** **Nest facilities. Do they use brush? Do they nest in wicker baskets, or boxes? Or all of the above?**
- Paul Henry: I have had them breed in all of those but I think they mainly prefer a box, like a little finch box. I have had them breed in brush but nest boxes are the best. It allows you then to check the young. You can lift up the lid and just take a look and they don't mind too much.
- Paul Menegazzo:** **I notice with the Parrot finches that when they do use a box they really cramp it up tight with nest material. They use a lot of material and they build a good nest.**
- The next thing would be mutations. There are a few mutations in the Parrot finches so have you got any comments on this?**
- Paul Henry: I think that the main ones are Sea-greens. The Sea-green mutation is a sex-link and there is also a pied which is a dominant gene; but with the piers, when they are two or three years of age, they are nearly all yellow so be a bit careful when you buy birds because sometimes when you are buying a bird it is finished. They are nice and bright yellow with their red bib but they are about three years old. I find with Parrot finches they breed the best from about two to three years and after that they drop right off.

- Paul Menegazzo:** To add to that, probably one thing that I have noticed with the Parrot finches is that the cock bird does have a little high pitched song. Do you find that true?
- Paul Henry: I think it does but I am as deaf as a door nail so I wouldn't be too sure Paul.
- Paul Menegazzo:** Do the cock birds drive the hens pretty hard when they nest? Are they similar to the Blue-faced? I know the Blue-faced are pretty aggressive like that; they always hunt the hen down. Are the Red-faced pretty aggressive?
- Paul Henry: I don't find them that way. They chase the hen, that's just part of the normal mating part but they are not as aggressive as a Blue-face. You won't see them drive the hen to floor. They will chase around and she will go up to the branch or the boxes and settle down. No they are not too bad.
- Paul Menegazzo:** They are probably one our most popular foreign finches, the Red-faced Parrot finches. However I have found that a lot of people do have trouble breeding them. What we have just talked about tonight probably has some good indicators.
- Do you find it best to buy birds of a known age, uncoloured, or just on adult colour? Do you find that best? Or do you buy unrelated young birds and let them pick their own mate?
- Paul Henry: I think you are better to get young birds. One of the problems that you have is when you go to sales there are birds there that are nicely coloured up but they are two or three years old. They are often the left part of a pair where one has died and the birds don't really settle down all that well. So I think you are better to get two young birds and start from scratch.
- Paul Menegazzo:** Well I think that covers most of it, they are a good bird. I like to keep them in dry aviaries do you agree?
- Paul Henry: Yes.
- Paul Menegazzo:** They don't like damp conditions they seem to pick up any little worm problem or things like that, coccidia, if the aviaries get pretty wet.
- Is there anything you would like to ask me Paul?
- Paul Henry: No.
- Graeme Phipps:** Thank you for that. That was a great interview.

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