

**THE WAXBILL FINCH SOCIETY**



**KEEPING & BREEDING**

**RED BILLED FIREFINCH**

*Lagonosticta senegala*

Issue 1 September 2009

© The Waxbill Finch Society

**WFS Sample Extract**



The Waxbill Finch Society was formed in June 1991 and is managed by an elected committee that is appointed every July at the A.G.M.

### THE AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

To share information about proven breeding and feeding methods.

To encourage the breeding of African and Asiatic Estrildid Finches (Waxbills, Munias etc.)

To help members locate, exchange, purchase or sell birds.

To build up stocks of captive bred birds.

To assist members in contacting one another, at meetings or by telephone.

The W.F.S. Magazine "The Waxbill" is issued quarterly to all members.

Members are encouraged to submit reports of successful breeding and those who do receive Breeding certificates.

Special Awards are made for exceptional breeding results.

The Society is affiliated to The Foreign Bird Federation & The National Council for Aviculture

## RED BILLED FIREFINCH

Lagonosticta senegala

This booklet has been compiled from items written by members of The Waxbill Finch Society and published in "The Waxbill"

Authors of published articles

John Doddridge

Bernie Hannen

Doug Freeman

R.A. Caw

Les Whaley

Terry Seddington

F. Baxter

Mark Danner

The General Information on Species taken from

"Estuarine Finches of the World"

by Derek Goodwin.

&

"Finches & Sparrows"

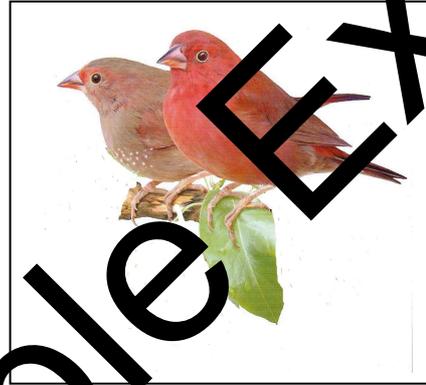
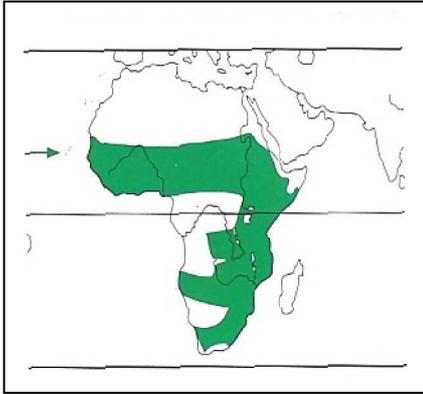
by Peter Clement, Alan Harris & John Davis.

New breeders advice section  
added to the back of this booklet.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### *Red Billed Firefinch*

*Lagonosticta senegala*



**Alternative names:-** Common Firefinch & Senegal Firefinch

**Length:-** 9-10 cm

**Description:-**

**Male:-**

Top of head, mantle and back a slightly reddish light earth brown strongly washed with red, carmine or scarlet. Red is most extensive on forehead and hind neck. Wings brown with a varying amount of red. Rump and all but the outermost tail feathers rose red. Sides of the breast spotted with small white spots to varying degrees. Iris brown and eye rims yellow and conspicuous. Bill red or pink.

**Female:-**

Buffish brown with red stripe from base of lower mandible to, and sometimes over, the eye. White spots on the breast larger and usually more profuse than on the male.

**Juvenile:-**

Like the female but with no red on the face and no white spots and an entirely black bill.

**Distribution & habitat:-** Tropical & southern sub-tropical Africa. Widely distributed but absent from some tropical forest & desert areas.

In the wild very tame and usually in pairs or small parties. The mainly red bill distinguishes it from the other Firefinches. Lives in Acacia woodland or in cultivated areas and villages around human dwellings. Feeds mainly on the ground on grass and other small seeds. Will take small insects but in the wild will rear young almost entirely on green seeds. Dry seed alone is not adequate unless some insect food is also available. Will nest in a variety of sites, in a hole in a building or bank, even on the ground and especially in thatched roofs of huts. Uses feathers preferably white, to line the nest. Usually only the male builds the nest. Both sexes brood and the incubation period is 11 to 12 days with young fledging at 18 days. They are fed by the parents for a further 8 to 10 days.

---

## BREEDING COMMON FIRE FINCHES

Written by John Doddridge  
Published in November 1992

I was lucky to find in our local pet shop some young Fire Finches. I bought four young birds. Two of them were obviously young males as they had blotches of red in their plumage but the others showed no red. As it turned out I was lucky and I ended up with two pairs but one of the cock birds died. I returned to the pet shop and was fortunate enough to buy an odd cock bird so once more I had two pairs.

These were released into one of my flights, which measures 18 ft. x 12 ft. They shared this flight with Red Ears, Red Avadavats, Green Avadavats, Gold Breasts, Red Cheeked Cordon Bleus and Azure Finches. There were no signs that the birds were going to breed but the males came into full colour, nearly all red with yellow rims round the eyes. The females looked greenish brown with a small amount of white spots on the lower chest around to the sides.

At the end of July a nest which was built in the house, from which three Red Avadavats had been hatched, was repaired and relined and more eggs were laid. I thought this was another Red Avadavats' nest but on the other hand I did not look in.

When the chicks were nearly ready to leave the nest I was able to look in. The chicks appeared to dark brown with white marks round the beak. When they left the nest one was left behind. This chick must have been hatched later than the rest as it was very poorly feathered. It made a lot of noise but the parents, after the other two chicks left the nest, never fed the lone chick. It never left the nest alive.

The young Fire Finches were very hard to find,  
The only thing that gave them away was the white around the  
base of the beak.

In September the parent birds relined the old nest and laid  
another clutch of eggs. Again three chicks hatched, the birds  
again proved to be good parents but when the chicks left the nest  
it was very cold and within a few hours all three had died.

The first clutch of chicks by now had started to moult into their  
adult plumage, one was coming out in red blotches the other I  
am sure is a hen as it is already the same as the other hens.

Mealworms were given but the parents were never seen to take  
any, although they appeared to be hunting for natural live food.

---

## WAXBILL FINCH SOCIETY BREEDERS ADVICE

The aim of this section is to give people who are new to this species a head start in keeping and breeding Red-billed Firefinches. This booklet will show five peoples views on how they achieved breeding success with each species. This booklet should be read as a guide and not a definitive answer to success.

- Basic diet used by breeders
- Cage/aviary size used
- Positions of nests
- Rearing food
- How many chicks where bred
- Questionnaire answers

## RED BILLED FIRE FINCH

Diets used by breeders consist of Probird African Waxbill Mix, Bucktons foreign finch with extra panicum, Versele-Laga Tropical Finch, charcoal, Johnson & Jeff foreign finch seed, Japanese millet, cattlesh, charcoal, oyster shell grit, softfood, millet sprays and grit mixture.

Enclosure successfully used for breeding:-

Cage(s):- 4'x2'x2', 3'x2'6"x20" & 36"x16"x16".

Aviary(s):- 9'x6'x7' indoor flight with access to 6'x6'x7' planted outside flight, 6'x4'x6' indoor flight with access to 10'x6'x6' outside flight. Various aviary sizes indoors and out between 3'x3'x3' to largest 18'x9'x7'.

The positions of nest boxes/baskets successfully used range from 3' to 6' from the ground. It seems that individual birds needs differ so hanging various nesting receptacles at varying heights may be necessary to encourage nesting. Cover was also offered by all breeders that completed the questionnaires.

Rearing food used to breed this species consist of combinations of the following:- Probird moist egg food, Cede tropical finch egg food, boiled eggs, breadcrumb, biscuit, boiled seed, soaked seed, sprouted seed, seeding grasses and red Anjou millet sprays, multi-vitamins, charcoal, frozen pinkies and buffalo worms (thawed), fruit flies, mini mealworms, bee pollen and various veg.

4 breeders bred 45 birds in total in 2007-08. Approximately 65% were parent reared.

## Questionnaire One

**1. What species did you breed**

Red Billed Fire Finches

**2. Where they kept as pairs or colony/mixed?**

In pairs and in colony

**3. If colony/mixed how many pairs and with what species were they kept with?**

Orange Cheeked Red Eared Red Avadavats Red Winged Pytilia

**4. What size cage WxHxD were they bred in? (if used)**

4 ft x 2 ft x 2 ft

**5. What size aviary LxWxH were they bred in? (if used)**

6ft x 9ft x 7ft indoor flight with 6 ft x 6 ft x 7ft planted outdoor flight

**6. What basic diet do you use?**

Probird African Waxbill Mix

**7. What rearing food do you use (ingredients)?**

Paul de Nils rearing food is offered but in fact they take very little and I know of people who've reared with none at all

1 part eggfood

2 parts seed boiled for 5/6 mins and rinsed several times under tap and drained off.

2 grams Paul's vitamins per Kg. Tiny spoon = 1 gram

5 grams charcoal

40gm pinkies also put a desert spoon pollen in each KG.

This rearing food to be given from one day after hatching till after the moult.

**8. How many pairs successfully bred?**

3 pairs

**9. How many were bred in each cage/aviary size?**

1 pair in a cage, 2 pair in the aviary

**10. What quantity did you breed?**

14 in 2008

**11. How many parent reared/fostered?**

7 were parent reared and 7 were fostered

**12. What nestbox type did you use?**

They built their own nests and also used large and small wicker baskets.

**13. What height was the nestbox at apx. position in cage?**

The nests were at different heights. The birds don't seem that fussy about it but often build their own about 3ft high. However this year 2009 I have a nest built 6 ft high in a hay bale.

**14. Do you offer cover for the nest positions?**

Lots of cover is essential. In the flights and cages I use artificial Ivy if the natural isn't thick enough.

15. Do you use a heater? If so what sort of heater and what temperature is it set at?

**I have a tubular heater on a thermostat set at 15 degC**

16. What type of lighting do you provide?

Lighting is 6ft full spectrum tube on a timer set at 10 hours for non-breeding and gradually increased to 14 once Spring is here. I also have a 15-watt Pygmy bulb that is a night-light. I leave it on 24/7 because I found leaving it on all the while it lasted months but when I switch it on when the main went out I was having to replace every couple of weeks.

**17. Any comments?**

When they fledge they all brown like the hen but within 4 weeks of fledging red feathers begin to appear in the cocks. So if a bird has none by 8 weeks it'll be a hen. My first Fins finches sat really tight and the only way I knew they were nesting was by the yellow eye circle looking at me from the nest. The ones I've had for a couple of years are very flighty, more like my Orange Cheek temperament, leaving the nest at the slightest noise. They seem easy to get to go to nest and if they're happy they will rear very well. Although rearing food is offered they don't seem to take so much as other species.

---