

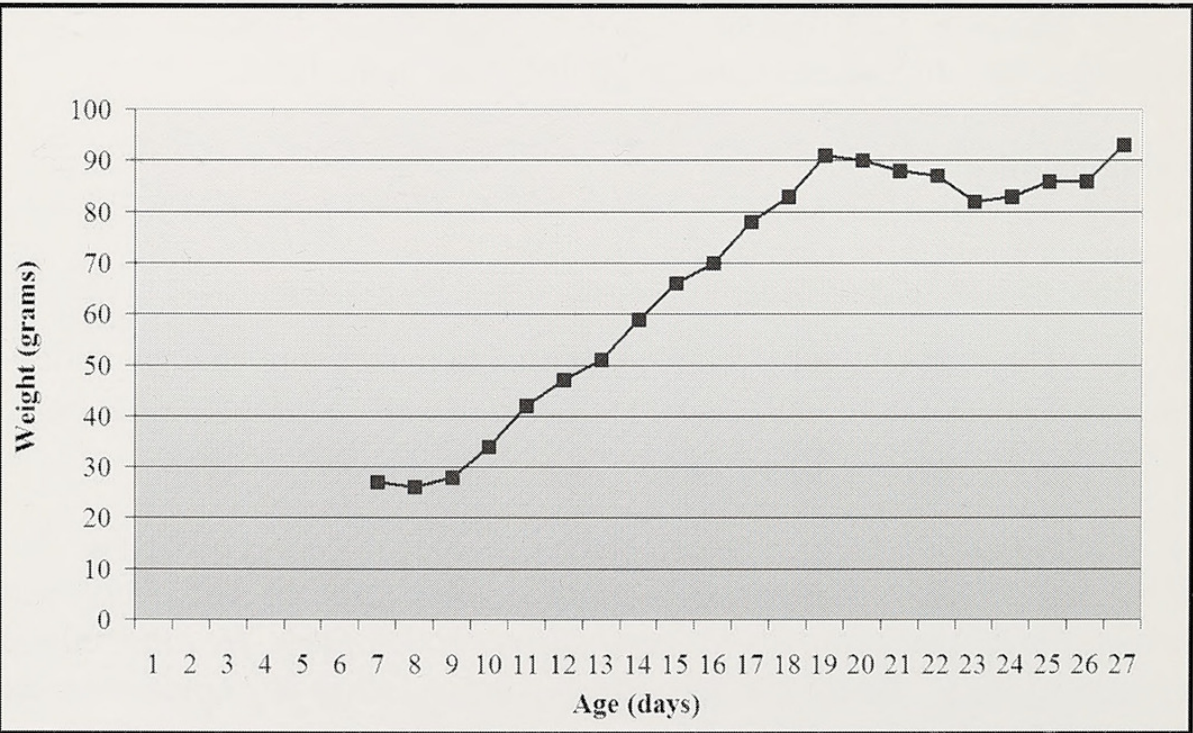
**HAND-REARING A WHITE-BROWED COUCAL**  
*Centropus superciliosus* AT EXMOOR ZOO

by Derek Gibson

Our White-browed Coucals having successfully parent-reared their offspring over the past two years (see *Avicultural Magazine* Vol.112, No.2, pp.49-52 (2006)), it came as somewhat of a surprise when we found a three or four day old chick lying dead on the aviary floor. Up until then we had found the coucals most obliging parents that took great care of their young. When we inspected the nest, however, we found a further two chicks, very cold, but still alive, a clear egg and a second dead chick. The two surviving chicks were transferred to the zoo's Incubation and Rearing Station.

The first chick weighed 27g whereas the second chick weighed only 7g. Both were placed in a small pot lined with kitchen towel and small twigs to prevent any problems with splayed legs, and then placed in a brooder set at 33°C (91.4°F). The larger chick's eyes had started to open. We quickly pooled ideas with staff at the Cotswold Wildlife Park, where the White-browed Coucal had previously been successfully hand-reared. The chicks were offered pinkie mice, rat pups, waxmoth larvae, mealworms and papaya, plus a vitamin supplement, Ace-High, a Vetarc product that has been used at the zoo over the past three years.

Fig. 1. Growth rate of hand-reared coucal.





Unfortunately, the second chick died almost immediately, but the first chick went from strength to strength (as can be seen from the accompanying growth rate graph and hand-rearing record) and by day 21 was observed feeding itself and by day 27 was weaned

Table 1. Hand-rearing record days seven to 27.

Age (days)	Date	Weight	Observations
7	04.05.07	27g	Placed in brooder set at 33°C (91.4°F), along with a bowl of water to increase the humidity.
8	05.05.07	26g	From 7.30am – 5.30pm fed on pinkie mice soaked and cut into quarters and waxworm larvae (killed).
9	06.05.07	29g	Eyes three-quarters open.
10	07.05.07	34g	Fed crickets and mealworms.
11	08.05.07	42g	"
12	09.05.07	46g	"
13	10.05.07	51g	"
14	11.05.07	59g	"
15	12.05.07	65g	"
16	13.05.07	70g	Rat pups and minced (ground) meat added to diet. Feathers developing on the breast.
17	14.05.07	77g	Stopped continual begging and started to make more characteristic coucal sound.
18	15.5.07	83g	Transferred to exercise cage and given fruit, insectivorous food and minced (ground) meat.





*Derek Gibson*

Eleven days old.

Age (days)	Date	Weight	Observations
19	16.05.07	91g	Food no longer placed in chick's mouth, instead we wait for the chick to make the first move.
20	17.05.07	90g	Soaked Zoo A given at feed.
21	18.05.07	88g	Started to feed itself, taking mealworms and locusts.
22	19.05.07	87g	"
23	20.05.07	82g	"
24	21.05.07	83g	"
25	22.05.07	85g	"
26	23.05.07	85g	"
27	24.05.07	93g	Weaned.



*Derek Gibson*

**Fifty days old.**

Upon being weaned it was housed in a large flight cage and upon determination of its sex will, it is hoped, go to make up a second pair here at Exmoor. At the time of writing (summer 2007), the breeding pair is incubating a further three eggs and, hopefully, this time will successfully rear the young and take us a few steps further forward in establishing a self-sustaining captive-breeding population of White-browed Coucals.

*Derek Gibson is Head Keeper at Exmoor Zoological Park, South Stowford, Bratton Fleming, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 4SG, UK. Tel: 01598 76335/E-mail:Derek.r.gibson@btinternet.com. It was the first collection in the UK to breed the White-browed Coucal.*



## THE ORIOLE FINCH IS A STRANGE FINCH

by Simon Espley

The Oriole Finch *Linurgus olivaceus* is a secretive and seldom seen species from the forests of west, central and east Africa. I have spent days craning my neck staring up into the gloom of central African equatorial forest canopies, during my many birdwatching trips to that part of the world, hoping in vain to catch a glimpse of this elusive species. Although so far I have had no luck, I intend to keep trying.

Imagine my interest therefore when during 2006 I heard that a few pairs were to be imported into South Africa, and that I had secured one of these pairs. I could barely conceal my excitement as I made my way to the airport to pick up my prized pair.

The male Oriole Finch is a really stunning looking bird that does indeed resemble a miniature black-headed oriole *Oriolus* spp. The female Oriole Finch is a more sober coloured bird. The large head and sturdy looking beak of the Oriole Finch appear to be an adaptation for a specific diet, but reference books do not shed much light on this subject. As a matter of fact, reference books do not have much to say about this species. Its body is marginally smaller than that of our Bully or Brimstone Canary *Serinus sulphuratus* but, unlike most Fringillidae, the Oriole Finch is mostly silent.

It has a large range, estimated at 180,000sq km (approx. 70,000sq miles), covering a large area of west, central and east Africa. The size of the global population has not been quantified, but it is believed to be substantial, as the species is described as locally common in at least parts of its range. Its preference is for tropical, subtropical and moist montane forests.

I set off for home with my two birds, which sadly were the only two to survive the importation. There I set about settling them down in my Cape Town aviaries in the hope that the pair would breed. I housed them on their own and left them pretty much to their own devices in a thickly planted aviary measuring 2m x 5m x 2.5m high (approx. 6ft 6in x 16ft x 8ft high). Clear fibreglass sheeting covers 80% of the aviary roof. The sides consist of 80% shade cloth to prevent visual contact with birds in neighbouring aviaries. All my aviaries are covered externally with 6mm x 6mm (approx. ¼in x ¼in) welded mesh and are therefore mouse-proof. Food is provided through a door, without the need to enter the aviary. Fresh drinking water is dispensed into a shallow baking tray four times a day via a timer. A twice daily fine mist spray that keeps the plants happy in summer is also on a timer. The plants include tall reeds, wild grasses, herbs and various weeds. The Oriole Finches remain very secretive and spend much of their time in the





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#### **Chicks at 10 days old.**

depths of the reeds or hiding in the slangbos.

They have interesting dietary requirements and have settled on the following: a seed mix including oily seeds (niger, linseed, canary and rape), shelled sunflower seeds, papaya, cucumber, fresh and soaked dried figs, grated broccoli and corn, fresh seeding grasses, sprouting seeds, wild flowers such as dandelions, thistles and daisies, mealworms, termites, soaked softbill pellets with Pro Nutra added. The seed gets a weekly dose of cod liver oil and wheatgerm oil and powdered calcium, before being discarded the next day. My birds ignore all the usual finch seeds such as millet and manna.

Much to my delight, within three months, the pair produced three chicks. As far as I am aware, this is the first recorded captive breeding in South Africa and possibly anywhere in the world. (In his *First Breeding Records for Birds Reared to Independence under Controlled Conditions in the United Kingdom*, Dave Coles lists it as having been bred by Peter Paris in 1974. To the best of my knowledge though Simon Espley's is the first published account of breeding the Oriole Finch. - Ed.) Neville Brickell of the Indigenous Bird Breeders' Group (Southern African Region) recalls Oriole Finches being brought into South Africa in the mid-1900s on boats that came down the east African coast, but cannot recall any breeding claims. I know of no data on captive breeding and very little is available on





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**Juvenile at 24 days.**



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**Juvenile Oriole Finch aged 47 days old. This is the bird hatched in November 2007.  
Note that it still has a black bill.**





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**Male Oriole Finch.** The coloration of the male varies slightly from subspecies to subspecies.



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**Male Oriole Finch (right) and female (left).**



its breeding habits in the wild. My birds' cup-shaped nest was made from coconut fibres, hessian and various plant fibres gleaned from plants in the aviary. The nest was placed in hanging slangbos. Three eggs were laid on consecutive days. They were white, shaded with light blue/green, and had reddish brown pinprick sized speckles to blotches 2mm in diameter. The young left the nest 21 days after hatching.

A further pair of Oriole Finches found its way into South Africa earlier this year and I was lucky enough to secure this pair. I have paired the two with my youngsters and now have three unrelated pairs and a spare bird. At the time of writing (June 2007) these are the only Oriole Finches in South Africa, but I hear some more may arrive later this year.

### Postscript

The same pair subsequently produced a further chick in November 2007, that at the time of Simon's recent e-mail (December 18th 2007) was independent and "learning about life" in a nursery aviary along with recently-bred Red-faced Crimsonwings *Cryptospiza reichenovii*, Lavender Waxbills *Estrilda caerulescens* and Red Siskins *Carduelis cucullata*. Simon confirmed that a number of wild-caught Oriole Finches found their way from Tanzania to South Africa in early 2007, but so far as he is aware, no successful breedings have resulted from the importation of that batch of birds.

*Simon Espley, the author of the above article, which was published first in the South African magazine Avizandum (June 2007), is a founder-member of the Rare Finch Conservation Group (website: [www.rarefinch.co.za](http://www.rarefinch.co.za)). The postscript was sent just after Simon had returned from a trip to south-west Uganda to search for Shelley's Crimsonwing *C. shelleyi* and visit the Rare Finch Conservation Groups's Crimsonwing Project in Uganda. He can be contacted by e-mail at: [simon@africageographic.com](mailto:simon@africageographic.com)*

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## ORNITHEA 2007 - A SHOW OF SUPERLATIVES

by Tony Pittman

The beginning of November each year is for me Ornitheia time. This unique show organised by the aviculturists' club in Cologne, Germany, never ceases to amaze me and this year's show - open to the public from Thursday, November 1st-Sunday, November 4th - was no exception; in fact the club members surpassed themselves.

The club was formed in 1961 and has some 50 members. It has a clubhouse in a suburb of Cologne and the members meet there regularly to exchange information on keeping and breeding all types of birds, have a communal meal and drink the popular local beer. Sometimes they invite a speaker, which is how I got to know about the club and later became a member.

The show is held in the hall of a local secondary school, which the club takes over for two weeks for a peppercorn rent. The lay-out is carefully planned and all the members are involved in the build-up to the show and help clear everything away at the end.

This year, some 500 birds of 182 species and subspecies, bred locally and in perfect condition, were displayed in 123 decorated aviaries for larger birds and large exhibition cages for smaller birds. All the cages and aviaries were planted and some had water features and rock formations. Also, every cage and aviary had detailed information about the occupants.

The centrepiece of this year's show was an astonishing swamp landscape with a painted background, rock face, waterfall, pool, shrubs, grasses, boulders and a large tree. Housed in it were seven species of birds, including egrets, avocets, plovers, gulls and two species of ibis, with no wire netting or any other form of barrier between the birds and the public.

Ornithea 2007 attracted some 6,000 visitors, including many from neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. Among them were many children, who were thrilled to have such a great opportunity to see close-up in naturalistic settings, native birds such as the Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrelli*, Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*.

There were 57 species of parrots, ranging from hanging parrots through to conures and lorries, Amazons, cockatoos, macaws and the Kea *Nestor notabilis*. There were 10 species of owls, as well as a wide range of finches and softbills. Bali Starlings *Leucopsar rothschildi* were on show again this





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