

“Keeping it interesting”

BREAD AND BUTTER FINCH MUTATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

By Dr Danny Brown

I am not, by normal standards, a mutation lover. I have a great deal of respect for birds in their natural form but I am also aware of how much work can go into establishing a mutation from scratch, regardless of how spectacular or ugly it is (I can't wait for the white breasted, white headed, white backed Gouldian !!!!). Where I do find interest in mutations is in the bread and butter finch species (those species that form the starting point for every finch breeder). After 25 years, there is only so much thrill that can be gained from a healthy nest of cordons, orange breasts or ruddies. The elitist snobs I hang with would therefore say “lose the rubbish and get yourself something decent”. Fortunately I am far too stubborn and sentimental for that. This article aims to introduce primarily the cinnamon Ruddy (African Firefinch) and discuss its breeding and possibilities for the future. I will also introduce some projects in the pipeline.

The Cinnamon Ruddy (African Firefinch.)

In the 1999-2000 breeding season I was asked to comment on some pale coloured firefinch hens in the collection of Warren Dickfos of Woodridge, QLD. Once I saw these birds I realised they were certainly different and that they resembled some odd birds I had been sold several years before. I was able to procure two of these hens and from this started my current population. This colour mutation has appeared in a number of collections throughout Australia but the unusually slow moult in cocks has led to many giving up on this species before seeing what they actually had.

The two hens were mated to unrelated normal cocks and every cinnamon bird was subsequently outcrossed. This mutation revealed itself to be a sex linked recessive mutation and therefore outcrossing is simple in every generation.

The breeding expectations and preferred matings for this mutation are as follows:

Normal cock x Cinnamon hen

= 50% Normal (split cinnamon) cocks

50% Normal hens

Normal split Cinnamon cock x Cinnamon hen

= 25% cinnamon cocks

25% Normal (split Cinnamon) cocks

25% cinnamon hens

25% normal hens

Cinnamon cock x Normal hen

= 50% Normal (split Cinnamon) cocks

50% cinnamon hens

The mating of Normal split Cinnamon cock x normal hen is not recommended as it results in the possibility of both normal and split cocks within a single clutch. This creates uncertainty as to the further use for these cocks. All other combinations allow all splits to be recognised and marked as such.

As can be seen by the photographs, the cinnamon cock retains the normal red colouration but the dilution of the chocolate brown “undercolour” to cinnamon means that the red appears brighter. The cinnamon colour is also evident in the wing flights, undertail coverts and belly feathers. The moulting procedure to develop full cinnamon colour is unusual. A normal ruddy cock will go from fledgling to full colour in 3-5 months. A cinnamon cock fledgling will not reveal its true cinnamon colour until its second moult at 8-10 months of age. This means that it can be difficult to tell if a cock is a split or a colour in the first 4 months unless it was marked when identified as a paler fledgling (all cinnamon fledglings are pale cream).

Cinnamon hens vary in colour from 2-5 shades lighter than a normal hen. The majority of hens are a pale tan in colour. Unique to this mutation is a red flush that these hens have on their faces, extending from behind the eyestripe and over the ear coverts. The eyestripe remains a normal red.

For a while I have toyed with the idea of combining this Cinnamon mutation with the other established Ruddy mutation, the autosomal recessive Pink Ruddy. The expected outcome is a cock with a slightly paler pink body with cinnamon underparts and a hen with a cinnamon body, pink eyestripe and pink facial flush.

This all sounds good in theory BUT the combination requires the careful breeding of a sex linked recessive with an autosomal recessive which is an absolute nightmare from the point of view of indistinguishable multiple split birds. My issue with this is that unless one is willing to retain lifelong or cull all possible splits that the

“contamination” of the normal ruddy bloodline is really not worth it. I would dread the day when it is not possible to buy a normal ruddy because of this.

For those that may be interested in this, the breeding expectations and preferred matings to create the least mess are as follows:

Cinnamon cock x Pink hen

= 50% Normal (split Cinnamon split Pink) cocks

50% Cinnamon (split Pink) hens

Normal (split Cinnamon split Pink) cocks x Cinnamon (split Pink) hens

= 12.5% Normal (split Cinnamon split Pink) cocks

6.25% Normal (split Cinnamon) cocks

6.25% Normal hens

12.5% Normal (split Pink) hens

12.5% Cinnamon (split Pink) cocks

6.25% Cinnamon cocks

12.5% Cinnamon (split Pink) hens

6.25% Cinnamon hens

6.25% Pink hens

6.25% Pink (split Cinnamon) cocks

6.25% **Cinnamon-Pink** cocks

6.25% **Cinnamon-Pink** hens

Other projects in the pipeline:

Yellow Cheeked Cordon Bleu (Yellow Cordons)

These have popped up from time to time and the pictures are self explanatory. I currently have two cocks with chicks in the nest and anticipate the outcome. It has been suggested that this is a autosomal dominant mutation although I suspect it is more likely to be an autosomal recessive mutation. Breeding outcomes will clarify this.

Cinnamon (Isabel) Cutthroat Finch

I am hoping Dr Terry Martin can comment on an appropriate name for this little gem. In British avicultural texts it is referred to as an Isabel but I am uncertain as to the criteria which is used to determine this. At the present time I have one cock and three hens all bred from a single pair of birds (and unbelievably all appeared in the same clutch) owned by my next door neighbour, Jim Osbourne. As coloured birds of both sexes appeared from a single clutch it would suggest an autosomal recessive inheritance with both parents being splits. This would, by my thinking, make the term "Cinnamon" inappropriate for this mutation. These are currently being outcrossed.