



Weavers and Whydahs (Part II)

(Avicultural Review October 1980 Vol. 2 No. 10)

(Continued from [Part I](#) - Avicultural Review October 1980 Vol. 2 No. 9)

By David Holmes



Madagascar Weaver (Red Fody) (Male)
File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Madagascar Weaver:

The [Madagascar Weaver](#) and its close relative the [Comoro Weaver](#) originally came from the island off the coast of Africa. Sadly we have very few pure breeds of either type; in fact, I feel we should call the hybrids we have as *Foudier Australis*, as we have enough to create a new species. The hybrid came about possibly by ignorance, mating a coloured Madagascar cock bird to a Comoro hen.

The difference between these birds are the Madagascar Weaver is the smaller bird with the scarlet going right to the vent and scarlet

across the saddle, with brown coloured wings. On the other hand the Comoro is bigger, particularly its beak, the brown is more toward olive green and the

scarlet stops midway from the chest to the vent, the remaining area is buff coloured. There is no red present on the back.

The hybrids you will find vary greatly, but most loose the red closer to the vent area or are a very washy red on the chest. In regard to management, I will cover all as one. Their nature varies greatly; some birds can be kept quite safely with smaller finches, but in general I have found them pugnacious and in some cases killers. These birds are easily cared for with standard finch seed, but during the breeding season live food should be fed. If possible run one cock with at least two hens; this helps eliminate the cock bird worrying the brooding hen. They are good breeders and the hens will be kept nesting, while the cock remains in colour. The nest is a rather untidy dome with a large entrance. You can generally see the blue eggs without disturbing the nest. Chicks fledge in 16-18 days and are independent in a further 14 days by which time the hen is generally brooding again.

The Red-shouldered Whydah:

The [Red-shouldered Whydah](#) is the only Whydah which we have left in our aviaries in any numbers. During the breeding season the cock bird turns black with a red/orange shoulder patch. While it doesn't grow a very long tail, the tail is approximately half as long again as the weavers!

As in the wild the majority of Red-shoulders build in long grass or low growth. These birds breed better with one cock bird and at least two hens. Unlike the weavers, the whydah lays a blue/green egg with grey and brown stripes. The clutch numbers three - with the incubation period 14-16 days and the chicks fledge in 18-20 days looking like short tailed hens.

When the cock bird displays to his hen he spreads his tail like a fan then spreads his wings showing the red shoulder patches to their fullest. The diet is a normal seed mixture but live food is definitely required when young are in the nest. The sitting hens do not like people poking around their nests and should be left alone.



Comoro Weaver (Red-headed Fody) (Male). File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Red-shouldered Whydah (Female or Juvenile)
File Courtesy
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



Grenadier Weaver (Southern Red Bishop) (Male) File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Grenadier Weaver:

In the breeding season the predominant colours of the cock [Grenadier Weaver](#) are orange and black. The areas of black near or around the bill are the easiest way of identifying this weaver from its two other close orange and black coloured relatives. Before I go into the Grenadier in more detail, I shall point out the colour difference that I just mentioned. The Grenadier Weaver has black feathers on top and below the bill; the Orange Bishop has orange below the bill but black on top. There are other differences, but this method is the quickest way I know of distinguishing them.

The Grenadier is reasonably common in Australia and in my opinion has actually increased in numbers over the last five years. This is mainly because people are showing a lot more interest in breeding this bird. To

breed this weaver a reasonable sized aviary is required and at least one privet type tree is required for the cock to weave his numerous nests. Like most weavers we have, one cock bird with at least two hens is required. If you have four hens, put them all with the one good cock bird as you will have quite good success in this way. The nest unlike the Madagascar is quite a neatly woven dome nest with quite a large entrance. The eggs are aqua coloured and the clutch numbers 3-4 hatching in 14-15 days with the chicks fledging 21-22 days later looking like hens but slightly darker with short tails.

The cock bird is very active during the breeding season. Their display is quite spectacular with cocks puffing themselves up into orange and black balls, buzzing and chasing the hens around the aviary. Once the hen is incubating, no more interest is shown by the cock bird; he is far more interested in finding another hen. These birds manage quite well on the normal finch seed mixture, but require green food and a lot of live food when young are in the nest.

There are two points I would like to stress in regard to this bird. Firstly, no matter how many hens you have you must have a young vigorous cock to weave the nest; and, secondly, when purchasing Grenadiers, buy them from a reputable place as the cock birds will not colour up until their second spring. Because of this, you may buy an adult fully coloured cock bird and a first year cock bird which looks like a hen, but won't colour until the following season.



Bishop Weaver (Northern Red Bishop) (Male) File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Orange Bishop Weaver:

The [Orange Bishop Weaver](#), like the Grenadier, is orange and black in colour, but smaller in size and in my opinion, a more beautiful bird. It mixes reasonably well with the smaller finches but until stocks are built up to a larger level, I feel they should have an aviary to themselves, therefore eliminating any competition for the live food they require. They require the normal finch type grain as well as seeding grasses.

The display of the cock bird to his harem is similar to the Grenadier, possibly a little more aggressive though. I have found that once the cock bird has put the two or three hens to nest, it is better to move him away from this aviary. This allows the hens to get on with raising the chicks.

Nesting details are very similar to the Grenadier, but the nests seem to spread around the aviary rather than in one close area and the clutch is generally 2-3 eggs with two chicks fledging normally.

It is beautiful bird worth gracing an aviary giving striking colour and constant activity in the breeding season.

Napoleon Weaver:

The [Napoleon Weaver](#) is the only yellow and black weaver we have in any numbers. While most books class it with the Bishops, I find it has a lot of differences. The feeding is similar to all weavers including the much needed live food while chicks are in the nest.

The eggs unlike the typical blue colour are white with small black spots. The clutch numbers 2-3 but due to the small size of the nest even if the third egg hatches the hen does not feed it at all just letting it die. When two chicks have feathered, generally one chick virtually sits on top of the other as they fill the nest completely. Fledging is very quick taking only 12-14 days, but the young are still begging for food four weeks later. Because of this you would be lucky to get three successful clutches from a hen per season.



Napoleon Weaver (Yellow-crowned Bishop) (Male) File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

I have found that the aviary layout is important with three main requirements - water, longish grass and reeds. The grass is required for nesting sites with the majority of nests built 12 inches from the ground and all nests face surface water. Therefore I have found that a pool is required in the aviary. Also in the pool reeds should be planted giving the cock bird a platform to display from, but more importantly to give him material to build the initial entrance circle of the nest. This circle is made from strips of reed. To obtain these strips, the cock bird nips into the blade of the reed to a depth of a match head. Then by holding the reed blade just above the nipped section, he flies away with a fine strip of reed sometimes 25cm long. Once the chicks have fledged, the cock bird demolishes the nest. You can leave the cock bird in the aviary at all times as he doesn't worry the sitting hen at all. Once again if you are lucky enough to have more than one hen, you should run a harem system. It is a shame we have let this beautiful bird get so scarce, but numbers are gradually increasing at the moment.

General Comments

I have covered five species which we have in breeding numbers in our Australian aviaries. Their numbers are increasing because there are quite a few breeders specialising in them or spending a lot of time in breeding them. Hopefully in the near future more will become available. There are a few other types in aviaries around Australia and with work these may even build up to become available some day. These include Quelias, Baya, Masked, Half-masked, Golden and Red-collared Whydahs, plus a few of the long tailed Whydahs, these will become common as well.

Summary

To summarise, my interests are manifold; they are long lived birds with a matching fertility, and tough for the Melbourne climate. They are beautifully coloured, but mostly their activity and character combine to complete this family. Their less redeeming features are the pugnacity of some and their sparrow like appearance in the non breeding season.

Conclusion

In conclusion, now that the weavers and whydahs are rare and expensive, they are in great demand. But prior to the import ban when they were reasonably common and inexpensive, most neglected to study or breed them. That is why we have this shortage now. With this in mind I stress to you not to let this happen to the birds we have left, either foreign finches, parrots or our own beautiful Australian species. Work together, if you help each other we all benefit, including most of all the birds. Write about your observations, especially breeding details as Australian aviculturists are in general, breeders of birds. Maybe in the future we will be able to boast a plentiful supply of all bird species now available in our wonderful hobby with detailed reports for field and aviary. Think of tomorrow.

The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW): <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org>

Contact Us: <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org/contactUs.php>

Join us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AviculturalSocietyNSW>

Follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/#!/AvicultureNSW>

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the Avicultural Review and/or on this website do not necessarily represent those of the Avicultural Society of NSW. No responsibility is accepted by the Society, the Editor, the author/s, Webmaster and/or Administrator/s for the statements, opinions and advice contained herein. Readers should rely upon their own inquiries in making any decisions relating to their own interests.