



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

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

My Little Green Singer (*Serinus mozambicus*)

By an Unhappy Aviculturist

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Approximately three months ago a little plain finch was brought to me. It had a greenish grey body with pale yellow underneath. It was a [Little Green Singer](#) which I will refer to as a cock bird as the sexes are indistinguishable until six months of age - then the hen develops a distinct beading around the neck. He was found out of the nest and was very cold. He was not replaced as he was the only chick and based upon the owner's previous experiences its chances of survival were slim. Apparently these birds lay 1-3 eggs but the infertility rate is high and often only one egg will hatch, resulting in the chick dying of the cold.

The Little Singer was nearly fully feathered but the owner did not have the time to hand rear it and thought I might have foster parents. The only birds that had young of a similar age were Zebra finches. They had nested in a wire hanging basket filled with dried grasses and the nest could be observed from outside the aviary. The chick was placed in with the others and the parents came to feed their young, but the Little Singer did not respond like the Zebra babies with their wagging colourful spotted tongues and noisy voices and was neglected.

I brought him inside and placed him in an incubator my husband built and prepared a formula I had used with good success with previous finches, canaries and parrots. The Little Singer was force fed minute amounts of mixture from a 2cc syringe, every two hours during the day with the last feed being at 10:30 or 11:00pm at night. It took 11 force feeds before he decided to readily accept food from me. From then on, for the next 5 weeks, he was fed at least 6-8 times daily.

After the first week he graduated from the incubator to a wire bird cage covered with a warm blanket. The cage was placed on the top of a tropical fish tank with the viewing light on to provide warmth. At first he would sleep on the floor in a little nest, but then quickly progressed onto the top perch where he would sleep with his beak resting on a container of shellgrit. In the cage I provided finch mix, soaked seed, sand, shellgrit and some cake, but he could not crack seed. I put a hen canary in the cage with him to show him how to crack seed, but he was not impressed and chased her all over the cage until I removed her. So much for that idea.

On warm days, the cage was hung outside in the sun, on the front of our aviaries. The cage was always protected by a cover, on the back, top and sides.

One day the gentlemen who gave him to me came to visit and was surprised at how well he looked and friendly he was. He told me that he should be feeding himself by now - which I already knew. It was if the Little Singer knew what we were talking about as the next day he started to refuse the mixture. The problem being that he was still not eating seed, although would eat a little cake and some fresh toast every morning. I crushed roasted peanuts every day (which he enjoyed) and provided him with lettuce daily, which he never tired of. I was very worried that he was not eating enough, but the amount of droppings, on the paper towel that I changed daily, denied this.

One week later he was cracking and eating millet seed, which was a big relief to me. From then on he was able to keep himself warm at night without the artificial heat. I planned to put him into an aviary when the winter was over. His colour was improving, but he was still a plain little finch compared to the others. He was a very active and alert little fellow.

One day recently, on arriving home after taking my sons to school, I placed the Little Singer outside in the sun as usual and went about my housework. I observed him occasionally through the kitchen window. About 3:00pm I went outside to bring in the washing and then went over to bring the Little Singer inside as it was getting cool. I stared in disbelief at the empty cage and wildly looked about the yard, but there was no sign of him. I looked back in the cage, the only evidence of him being there were a few feathers on the floor. Stuck on the bars was a smear of blood and feathers. To my horror I realised that a [Butcherbird](#) or similar had speared him through the bars and forcibly pulled him out, unbelievable as it seems. I could not believe that this had happened without me hearing something and five days later I still have his cage hanging outside to remind me how careful I will have to be in the future.

I have written this story to show people, no matter how carefully you think you can care for your birds, something can always happen. I lost my Little Singer to a horrible death. He never lived long enough to sing his song, as these little finches can live up to 20 years.

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