



## Jacarini Finch

### *Volatinia jacarina (Blue-black grassquit)*

*(ASNSW Meeting - April 2013)*

**Paul Menegazzo interviewed by Alex Saleeby**

**The Blue-black grassquit** (from [Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)):

"The blue-black grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*) is a small bird in the [tanager](#) family, Thraupidae. It was previously classified in the [bunting](#) and [American sparrow](#) family, [Emberizidae](#). It breeds from southern [Mexico](#) through [Central America](#), and [South America](#) as far as northern [Chile](#), [Argentina](#) and [Paraguay](#), and on [Trinidad and Tobago](#). It is the only member of the genus *Volatinia*."

#### **Alex Saleeby**

How long have you been keeping Jacarini finches Paul and what surprises you the most about them?

#### **Paul Menegazzo**

I have kept Jacarini finches for about the past 15 years. What surprises me the most is the plain colourings of the birds but when you get them in the right surroundings they are really handsome birds. This is especially so when you see the male birds in the sunshine. They are beautiful birds.

#### **Alex Saleeby**

What do you like most about Jacarini finches?

#### **Paul Menegazzo**

The main thing I like about the Jacarini finch is the way the cock bird displays.

I made a few notes in anticipation of this interview this evening and I have described the male Jacarini finch as "the finch breeders' Satin bowerbird". The cock bird is a lot like the male Satin bowerbird, with the blue/black colouring. The hen bird is brown with striated bars on the breast and the bowerbird has the little scallops.

The main reason that I took a fancy to them was when I first saw the display of the cock bird.

The cock bird has his own little perch which is way down low or on a rock and when he is displaying he will flutter his wings, fly 60cm to a metre high and he will either chuck a summersault or he will free fall and drop to the ground. It is magnificent to watch.



Jacarini Finch (Cock)  
File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository](#)



Jacarini Finch (Hen)  
File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository](#)

## **Alex Saleeby**

How easy are Jacarini finches to keep?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

I was talking to a few of the blokes here tonight about their longevity.

They are very easy to sex once the cock bird is mature - they stay black. In the non-breeding season during the cooler months of the year the cock birds lose a bit of their colour in that they get a little bit of brown in their colouration and the hen birds stay the same.

They are very easy to breed and they are good fun.

They use a little cup nest which is probably about 50mm across. I find that nearly all of mine either build in brush containers or thick grasses and they build pretty low to the ground. They use light grasses and coconut fibre, however light grasses are the main thing that they use. They line the nest with spider webs and things like that.

They are a bird that is very active in the low part of the aviary and they keep their nest quite clean and breed pretty well.

They fledge two to three young birds, their eggs are blue with red spots on them and their incubation is 11 to 13 days. The young ones leave the nest at a very tiny size. They'll be only about one inch long and they'll be flying around on the floor; and that is about 14 days after they hatch that they fledge.

## **Alex Saleeby**

You mentioned that the cock bird is very easy to sex once mature. How long does it take the cock to mature?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

I have got young cock birds that I have bred this year. The first indication that they are a cock bird is that they have a bit of colour and usually the tail goes dark. The hen bird's tail goes dark brown the cock bird's tail goes nearly black and a couple of flight feathers go black, so you can usually pick them out. If you leave them in with the parents the fathers will start chasing them around.

## **Alex Saleeby**

What challenges do they present?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

They have very few challenges.

- They are one of the best birds for a novice finch breeder to have.
- They are pretty resilient to a lot of the diseases that the finches are prone to even though they are a ground dwelling bird.
- As I indicated before, they live for a long time. I have some birds that are 10 years old which for a finch is very long lived.

- They are a very reliable breeder. As long as you have only one cock bird in an aviary with one or two hens they breed quite well. They are just an easy bird to breed.
- They mix well with other birds. The only bird that I don't do well having in with them is the Cuban finch which comes from where they come from in South America. The Cubans come from around Cuba (as the name suggests) and the Jacarinis come from Mexico right down through South America.

**Alex Saleeby**

Does the cock bird display to all the hens.

**Paul Menegazzo**

Yes he does.

**Alex Saleeby**

Does he help out with feeding the young?

**Paul Menegazzo**

Yes he does. The thing with the Jacarinis is that the cock bird is very active when he is displaying and when the hen bird is nesting she's very hard to see, it is just about impossible to see her. You are looking down on the nest made out of reddish brown material and the hen bird's colours are the same, you wouldn't even know she is there, but when the young birds hatch there is a hive of activity. The cock bird feeds them more than the hen and he will be hunting everything around the aviary whether it is spiders or anything that is moving on the floor. I give mine [mealworms](#) and bush fly maggots, that's the live food that I feed them and they love seeding grass heads.

The other thing that they like is the little compost heap that I've got. They like the little vinegar flies that come to the compost heap. It is all enclosed because I don't like the birds to get to that sort of thing but when they land on the wire at the top the little vinegar flies fly up and the Jacarinis just take them out of the air.

The minute that the young hatch you think... gees, look at that cock bird, he has gone mad, he is looking in every corner of the aviary, for spiders or anything he can find.

**Alex Saleeby**

What type of aviaries do you keep them in?

**Paul Menegazzo**

They suit a small to medium lightly brushed aviary to a large heavily brushed and planted aviary. The largest aviary that I have got mine in is probably about 6 metres by 2 metres. My smallest aviary would be just over 3 metres long by 1 metre. They do like a little bit of cover and one of the things that goes against them is that if they don't want to be seen they'll hide. If you're going to go in there and catch birds, you won't be able to find them. They are very hard to catch because they hide (both the Jacarinis and the Cubans hide).

**Alex Saleeby**

I actually haven't ever kept finches but many who have tell me they can be quite flighty. Do you find that Jacarini finches are like that?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

They are not flighty at all. If you are going in there and they have got young birds and they see you walking in with a container of live food they will just about come down to the container and eat it; so they can become quite tame. However as I said before, if it is out of the breeding season they will hide. You can go there and look and you can't see them. They will find a little corner or whatever and hide there.

## **Alex Saleeby**

Do many people keep them and what other birds can you keep them with?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

They are one of the most common finches that are kept. They are represented in most collections.

I have kept them with most finches except for the larger more aggressive birds; weavers and that sort of thing, you can't keep them with them. They are good in a mixed collection of African finches and Australian finches; they mix in well with them. The [Cuban finch](#), I have had problems with them, they also come from the same region as the Cubans and they can be a very aggressive bird. It depends on the birds.

## **Alex Saleeby**

What is there breeding season?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

Breeding season is all the warmer months of the year. They are so domesticated now that they will breed almost all months of the year except for the coldest months. They have just stopped now (April) and they will probably start again in about July or as soon as the weather starts to warm up. A bit of live food comes into the air and they will start to think about breeding.

## **Alex Saleeby**

So they are really good breeders?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

They are. They are one of the most reliable birds that anybody could breed. They have two to three young. The most I have ever had is two but they do lay three eggs. If you can provide enough live food they should raise the three.

## **Alex Saleeby**

Is there anything else that you would like to say about the Jacarinis?

## **Paul Menegazzo**

My final comments would be that:

- They are better off kept as a single pair but you can have extra hens.
- The Cuban finch is a bird that I wouldn't keep with them but you might get a Cuban and Jacarini that do get on very well.

- They look lovely in a planted aviary where the males can display their blue/black iridescent colour. They will find a nice little sunny spot to display and like I said, they are very much like a Satin bowerbird.
- I highly recommend them for a novice and an experienced breeder.
- I simply regard them as being a tough little finch.

### **Alex Saleeby**

Thank you for allowing me to interview you about the Jacarini finch.

### **Paul Menegazzo**

No problem. Thank you very much.

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