

Bloedel Bird of the Month – The Blue-Faced Parrot Finch (Lutino)



Blue Faced Parrot Finch (Lutino)
Erythrura trichroa Lutino



Blue Faced Parrot Finch
Erythrura trichroa

The Blue-faced Parrot Finch with the lutino mutation has no blue! Most Blue-faced Parrot Finches have a blue head, green body and a red rump. The ‘lutino’ has a white face, yellow body and a pink rump.

Some feather colours are due to pigments. No bird feathers have blue pigment. The appearance of blue is due to the structure of the feather. The only bird with a green pigment is the Turaco.¹

Feathers are made of keratin (your hair and fingernails are different forms of keratin). The keratin in blue feathers has little air pockets. These pockets scatter blue light while other colours pass through or are absorbed. If you look at white light through a blue feather, the feather will appear dark brown.²

As befits a bird with a mask, it has many identities! Whatever you call it, someone will say you are wrong. Common names are worst, as there are so many options. The Blue-faced Parrot Finch is also called the Blue-faced Parrotfinch, Blue-faced Finch, Blue-headed Parrotfinch, Green-backed Finch, Three-coloured Parrotfinch and Tri-coloured Parrotfinch,³ (Avoid the last two as they better describe another bird). It is usually best to use the ‘official’ Latin name for a bird. Even here, the preferred name is *Erythrura trichroa*, but another Latin name, *Amblynura trichroa* is sometimes used.⁴

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/punctuated-equilibrium/2007/oct/16/birds-physics>

“This pigment is known as turacoverdin in honor of the birds that produce it. All other bird species make green feathers by relying on a combination of both structural and pigment colors.”

² The sky is blue during the day because blue light is scattered back to you by the air, red light passes through to space. At sunrise and sunset, the blue is lost (scattered out) and only red light reaches you.

³ <http://www.hawkesburyfinchclub.com/blue-faced-parrotfinch/>

⁴ http://www.finchinfo.com/birds/finches/species/blue_faced_parrot_finch.php



Common Blue-faced Parrot Finch. The green body feathers are due to a yellow pigment and ‘structural’ blue.



Blue-faced Parrot Finch with the lutino mutation. The colours are in the same places, but without blue.

Apart from the obvious differences in feather colour, the lutino mutation also has an ivory pink beak. They may have eye problems as the original lutino mutation has redder eyes and is more sensitive to light.⁵ The lutino mutation with black eyes, as above, has no eyesight problems⁶ and is a hardier bird.⁷ Only male birds can give the lutino mutation to their offspring.⁸

Females and juveniles are duller in colour than the males. The blue on the head of males extends further back than it does on females.⁹ The differences are so slight that it is often difficult to distinguish males from females using colours alone.

Blue-Faced Parrot Finches are native to Northern Australia, eastern Indonesia, New Guinea and the surrounding islands. They live in grasslands edged by rainforest.¹⁰ Their diet in the wild is mainly grass seeds, with the addition of insects such as termites and grubs, ants and fruit.

Statistics¹¹

Average clutch	3-6 Eggs
Days to hatch	12-14 days from incubation
Fledge date	Generally 21-22 days old
Wean date	5-6 weeks
First molt	2 months
Sexual maturity	Adult plumage shows maturity, but should not be bred under 9 months
Status in wild	Secure
Lifespan	7-8 years

⁵ <https://journals.tdl.org/watchbird/index.php/watchbird/article/view/2751>

⁶ http://www.parrot-finches.com/blue_faced/blue-faced-1.htm

⁷ <http://www.thefinchfarm.com/lutino-parrotfinch/>

⁸ <http://www.avizandum.co.za/the-blue-faced-parrot-finch-erythrura-trichroa/>

⁹ http://aviculturalsocietynsw.org/articles/blue-face_parrotfinch.htm#.W6aRaPIReUn

¹⁰ <http://www.australianwildlife.org/wildlife/blue-faced-parrot-finch.aspx>

¹¹ <http://australianfinches.com/blue-faced-parrot-finch-erythrura-trichroa/>