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THE JAVA SPARROW

The natural form of the Java sparrow has immaculate grey, white and black plumage.

This pure white form with pink legs and beak has been bred in captivity and is fairly common in Australian aviaries.
THE JAVA SPARROW

By J. L. LONG, M.D.A., Research Technician, Agriculture Protection Board

THE attractive Java Sparrow (Padda oryzivora) with its immaculate grey, white and black plumage is a favourite caged bird both in Australia and abroad.

It represents, however, a species of considerable pest potential to the agricultural interests of this State.

Description

This bird is about five and a half inches long, the head and tail are black and there is a white patch on the cheeks. The grey on the lower breast has a mauvish tinge and the belly and undertail coverts are white. The massive beak and legs are pink and around the eyes is a circle of extremely small red feathers. A pure white form with the pink legs and beak has been bred in captivity and is fairly common in aviaries in Australia. Both sexes are alike, but in the breeding season males are usually a deeper pink at the base of the upper mandible of the bill.

The Java Sparrow, often known as Rice or Paddy Bird and Javan Finch, is in no way similar to the native Zebra Finch which is often erroneously referred to as "Java Sparrow."

Range

Originally native to Java and Bali and possibly Sumatra, the Java Sparrow has so frequently been introduced into new areas that it is now extremely difficult to define its original range. It has long been a favourite caged bird in Southern Asia and is often employed by fortune tellers to pick out slips of paper and other tokens bearing symbols which relate to one's fortune. The bird's wide appeal as a caged bird has probably been instrumental in determining its present extensive range.

The Java Sparrow is now established on the Malay Peninsula, Thailand, Burma, Borneo, Indo-China, southern China and the Philippines. It has been introduced on the east coast of Africa in Tanganyika, the nearby islands of Pemba and Zanzibar and on the Cocos-Kelling Islands, Christmas Island, Seychelles and St. Helena Islands, where they are now established. Luckily for the authorities concerned, introductions to New Zealand, Hawaiian Islands and India have failed. In 1863-64, three hundred of these birds were liberated in the eastern States of Australia. In 1872 a further two hundred and thirty-five were liberated, but, as was the case with the first release, none survived in the wild and the species failed to become established in Australia.

Habits

Within its present range the Java Sparrow forms large flocks which congregate on feeding areas usually rice fields. It is in these rice fields that the species becomes a serious pest. It feeds on the ripening grain and does a considerable amount of damage to the crop. With such a large and powerful beak, it is easy to imagine what damage this species might do if it became established in our wheat growing areas. In Malaya it mixes freely with the Tree Sparrow and builds its bulky Weaver-type nest in similar situations.

The Java Sparrow has proven its ability to colonize new areas, often escaping from captivity, and there is therefore much danger associated with the keeping of the species in captivity in Australia.

Under the present legislation, this bird cannot be kept in captivity, nor can it be imported into Western Australia.
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