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The spice finch

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THE Spiced Finch (Lonchura punctulata) is also known as Nutmeg Finch or Mannikin, Spice bird, Spotted Munia, Common Munia, Ricebird and Scaly-breasted Munia.

It is an east and south east Asian species inhabiting Malaya, Singapore, Penang, India, Ceylon, Burma, Indo-China, Yunnan, Formosa and the Philippines. Outside these areas introductions have occurred on all the main islands of the Hawaiian group, Palau Archipelago, Mauritius, Reunion, Seychelles and in eastern Australia.

The Spice Finch was apparently first noted established in Brisbane, Queensland in 1937, but did not gain much attention.
or publicity until the 1950's. In 1950 it was established at Townsville, in 1955-56 at Innisfail and Esk, in 1959 at Mackay and in 1961 at Cooktown, Airlie and Noosaville. It is not known whether the different populations at these various centres are linked, but it seems certain that they have been established for some time.

Description

Four and a half inches in length, the Spice finch has a chocolate-brown coloured head and throat, the wings are chestnut brown but varying to greyish brown. The rump is greyish brown and the tail feathers are greyish-yellow, undertail coverts are white. The undersurface is white but is speckled with black or very dark brown, giving a scaly appearance. Bill and legs are grey. Both sexes are alike and may be found much paler in colour when not breeding.

This bird is now one of the commonest species in northern Queensland towns. It has spread into the sugar cane fields and cultivated areas where it has become a serious competitor of the Chestnut-breasted Finch. In other areas it is displacing other species of native finch, such as the Red-browed, Double-bar and Zebra finches. Because of its vitality, feeding methods and breeding, the Spice Finch soon displaces the native species and plays a role similar to that of the House Sparrow in the larger cities of eastern Australia.

An extremely social species, the Spice Finch occurs in flocks of several dozens or even hundreds of birds all the year round. It is more tolerant of human surroundings than other native species and, like the Goldfinch in Western Australia, is seldom seen in the bush away from habitation. They are capable of exploiting every available food source and, apart from grass seeds, will eat all sorts of human waste such as breadcrumbs and potatoes. A clutch of from four to eight eggs is laid and two or three broods may be reared in succession. It is also possible that they breed nearly all the year round.

Crop damage

In the Philippines this species and others are a nuisance to the country's rice growers. They relish the milky stage of the crop and sometimes denude entire stalks of heads. Although there is no record of the extent of the damage on the island of Luzon, it is said to be serious. In Thailand they invade ripening grain fields in hundreds and, in India, commonly feed on ripening paddy in flocks of hundreds. Although doing a certain amount of damage in both India and Thailand, it is said that a large proportion of the diet is grass seeds and much of the grain eaten is consumed from the ground after harvest. The introduction of the Spice Finch to the Hawaiian Islands provides an interesting example of a pest species which has become harmless due to a change in agricultural pursuits. After introduction, the species became numerous and was a serious pest in rice fields, but now, little rice is grown in the Hawaiian Islands and the species has become a wayside bird of little economic consequence.

The dangers associated with such a species being introduced to Western Australia are great particularly if rice is cultivated in the northern regions of the State. The Spice Finch has shown in the eastern States that it is more adaptable and will displace the native species. The introduction of such a species here must be constantly guarded against, especially as the introduction to the eastern States probably resulted from escapees from aviaries.
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<th>AGRAN 28-14 SUPER+UREA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 cwt. (112 lb.) = 122 lb. + 58 lb.</td>
<td>1 cwt. (112 lb.) = 71 lb. + 68 lb.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1½ cwt. (140 lb.) = 152 lb. + 73 lb.</td>
<td>1½ cwt. (140 lb.) = 89 lb. + 85 lb.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1¾ cwt. (168 lb.) = 183 lb. + 88 lb.</td>
<td>1¾ cwt. (168 lb.) = 107 lb. + 102 lb.</td>
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<td>1½ cwt. (196 lb.) = 213 lb. + 102 lb.</td>
<td>1½ cwt. (196 lb.) = 125 lb. + 119 lb.</td>
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<td>2 cwt. (224 lb.) = 244 lb. + 117 lb.</td>
<td>2 cwt. (224 lb.) = 143 lb. + 136 lb.</td>
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