

RED-HEADED PARROT FINCH COPULATION

Little seems known about the mating displays and copulation of the Red-headed Parrot Finch (*Erythrura cyanovirens pealii*). Bahr (1911: 51) noted "vigorous pairing" by his captives but did not elaborate.

I have twice seen wild Red-headed Parrot Finches copulating in Suva, Viti Levu, Fiji.

At dusk on 11 December 1972 I saw one parrot finch, presumably the male, pursuing another in flight, the two birds breaking off the chase to perform an undulating display flight in which they rose and fell repeatedly in concert over a height of some 70-80 cm, at least one bird calling loudly. They then landed side by side on a branch 3 metres above the ground, locked bills for a second, then broke apart as the female swung to hang upside down beneath the branch, the male perching upright above her. She swung upright to perch on the branch again, whereupon the male mounted her, seizing her nape in his bill. After a brief copulation the birds fell off the branch, parting as they fell and flying back up, to perch 15 cm apart. The male sidled up to the female, calling "zip zip zip zip," and they locked bills violently once more, separating to let the female swing upside down beneath the branch again. When she swung upright they locked bills for a moment before flying off together.

A similar display followed by copulation was seen on 7 September 1975, but this time the female persisted in repeatedly hanging upside down from the branch, the male bending over and apparently attempting to seize her with his bill to pull her upright.

A preliminary pursuit followed by a copulation in which the male grasps in his bill the feathers of the back of the female's neck seems typical behaviour for the genus, this being recorded for *E. psittacea* (Morris 1958: 432) and *E. trichroa* (Immelmann 1971: 79).

Groups of up to eight Red-headed Parrot Finches are frequently seen performing the undulating display flight and pursuing one of their number, presumably female. This could well be involved in preliminary pair formation.

LITERATURE CITED

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FERGUS CLUNIE, *Fiji Museum, P.O. Box 2023, Suva, Fiji*