

Red-browed Finch

Robyn Howard

It seems that every time I go to the sanctuary lately, there are Red-browed Finches in several habitats. They are along the roadsides as I drive up Sports Road, in the gardens around the Information Centre, in the Mangrove Ferns, amongst the casuarinas, occasionally in the Mangrove Forest, and then along the river. Even when they are not visible, they announce their presence with their soft “tseee, tseee” calls.

The Red-browed Finch is found along the whole of the east coast of Australia around to Adelaide in the south. They prefer wetter areas, and especially select a habitat where they have open ground or seeding grasses to feed on, but have protective vegetation very close by. Foraging is mostly on grass seeds along with some insects, but in some parts of the sanctuary, they are feeding on the fallen seeds from ripe cones of the casuarina (*Allocasuarina glauca*). They are also able to utilise fruits of the lantana. At about 11 cm long, these olive-brown little birds with red rumps and red beaks and strong red eyebrow marks are so light that they can alight on grass stems which simply bend while they feed.

They are basically sedentary, but with a large territory over which they range as food sources vary. They have been able to adapt to human habitation, and can live in urban situations if food and protection are available. Cats are a threat in the wild and in suburbia.

Nesting generally occurs from September to December, but can occur at any time when conditions are favourable. Red-browed Finches are able to nest as a colony, with a bulky globular grass nest being constructed in prickly foliage. At the sanctuary, they seem to prefer bunched mistletoe. Commonly, 4 to 5 eggs are laid, but sometimes as many as 8, with both male and female incubating for 13 days. After a further 2 weeks during which the nestlings are fed mainly on insects, they fledge but remain dependent on the parents for 2 more weeks. The juveniles lack the red bill and eyebrows.



Photo: Robyn Howard



Photo: Internet (Wikipedia)