

# Redpolls reinvented

Leading Belgian fancier **RUDI VAN DER SIJPE** shares the excitement of establishing a new redpoll colour – the phaeo

## FINCHES

**A**LTHOUGH I have always been a breeder of the European finches such as the goldfinch, my favourite species for breeding purposes is the redpoll. And a few years ago I had the chance to obtain a phaeo redpoll from a breeder who had had no success breeding with it.

From the outset I knew it would be really difficult to produce young from this bird, but I relished the challenge – just as I had done

previously with other birds such the opal mutation Mexican house finch.

That first phaeo redpoll of mine turned out to be a hen, so I knew already that it

would take me several years before I could produce my first phaeo offspring.

For the first breeding season, I put a lesser redpoll male with the phaeo hen and was able to breed seven youngsters from them. All the young were wild-type in colour, but were carriers of the phaeo factor: both cocks and hens.

In the second year, by putting a son to the visual phaeo mother, I began to produce visual phaeos. So it went on until

last year I was able to breed, from eight hens and four cocks, about 30 visual phaeo birds and 50 phaeo carriers – a total of 80 redpolls. So now a new

colour of redpoll, the phaeo, has its future assured. After the moult, birds from my stud went to breeders in Italy, Spain and the Netherlands to form part of their



Full phaeo: one of Rudi's redpolls, showing the enhanced orange-brown pigment



Normal: a wild-type lesser redpoll cock

**66 My advice to finch breeders is, don't miss out on enjoying these wonderful birds!**

breeding programmes.

What's the best way to breed the phaeo redpoll? The young have red eyes from the day they hatch, so you will need to supplement their drinking water with vitamins A, D3 and K, and take care to refresh it every day.

It's important not to put red-eyed birds in direct sunlight too much, as it's not good for their eyes or for the brown colour of their plumage. In winter, provide a good finch seed food, and for raising the youngsters a good eggfood will do wonders, as will some live insects.

The birds are kept in breeding cages that measure 1m x 1m (3ft 3in square).

Pairs are kept individually, for instance phaeo redpoll cock with carrier hen. A typical clutch is four or five, and you can detect phaeos from day one by their red eye. After five days the birds are marked with the appropriate size of ring.

I haven't experienced any problems with the moult. The cocks have a beautiful red chest and are a treat to look at. My advice to finch breeders is, don't miss out on enjoying these wonderful birds!

This year I am breeding with 10 hens and four cocks and if I succeed my plan is to exhibit these birds at the World Show at Hasselt, here in Belgium, in 2013.

I would very much like to see you there, and pass on best wishes to readers of *Cage & Aviary Birds*.

To contact Rudi Van der Sijpe, email: [rudi.vandersype@telenet.be](mailto:rudi.vandersype@telenet.be)

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