I. INTRODUCTION

There are approximately one hundred species of Estrildine Finches (Subfamily Estrildinae of the Ploceidae). All the members of this exclusively Old World group are extremely small and many are comparatively easy to...
maintain in captivity. These and other considerations led to the selection of this sub-family as material for a detailed comparative behaviour study. Twenty-eight species have been acquired to date and their behaviour investigated in the laboratory. Of these, however, many have only been studied briefly, whereas a few have been selected for more detailed scrutiny. When a sufficient number have been added to this latter category it will be possible to compile a report on the comparative ethology of the group, but, in the interim, reports on particular species will be presented from time to time. It is hoped that this will assist in preventing the final analysis from becoming too cumbersome. Papers have already appeared on a small number of species (Morris 1954a, 1954b, 1955a, 1955b; Moynihan and Hall 1954) and to this list the present species is now added.

The Bronze Mannikin is an extremely common African species, with a wide distribution. Like most Estrildines, it is a bird of the grasslands, where it is encountered in large flocks, feeding on the ground or direct from the grasses. (For an analysis of its seed preferences, see Morris 1955c.) Observers in Africa (e.g. Holman in Bannerman 1949) report that it is seldom or never to be seen in a solitary state, and the way in which this strong communal tendency interacts with certain incompatible reproductive tendencies will be discussed below. The species breeds throughout the rainy season in the wild state and, in captivity, will show reproductive behaviour at any time of the year.

The adult plumage colour is predominantly dark brown and white, arranged in the following way: back and wings dark brown; head, neck, throat and tail brownish-black; flanks, rump and tail coverts barred brown and white; lower breast and belly pure white. In addition, there are dark patches in the scapular region and on the anterior section of the flank region. When they catch the light, these patches glisten with a metallic green sheen. The head region also glistens in this way. The eyes, legs and feet are dark brown. The beak is distinctively two-coloured, the upper mandible being brownish-black whilst the lower is off-white. There is no sexual dimorphism. The general size of the bird is small, even for an Estrildine Finch; of eight birds which were weighed, all were under ten grams, the average weight being 9.2 grams.

The present study is based on observations of twenty-nine individuals. Twenty-five of these were wild-caught imported birds, which were purchased from bird-dealers, and four were bred in the laboratory.

In order to avoid confusion, it should be pointed out that this species is better known by its earlier generic name of Spermestes, especially in the avicultural world. This was changed to Lonchura by Delacour (1943) in