



## CANARY BASIC CARE

Canaries need only a few things to keep them both healthy and happy:

- A clean, roomy, secure cage out of direct sunlight (too hot in the afternoon) or drafts (too cold)—a single bird requires a cage of about 12" x 12" x 10" at a minimum, and bigger is better! The cage needs to have at least 2 perches as well as food and water containers that the bird understands.
- Clean, fresh food and water—canaries are usually very open to new foods, but be sure to include a good, fortified seed mix (i.e.: with vitamins and calcium added by the maker) at the start. I also like to give LaFeber Finch granules for the bird to get the necessary nutrients. This is a lot like a canary's natural food and something it has had available at all times since fledging. My birds are fed seed and the LaFeber granules from the time they have fledged. For now, however, getting used to a new home will be as much change as the bird will want. If you do change foods, do so gradually, following the manufacturer's directions. Also provide a little fresh fruit (apple, a little orange, banana, berry, grape half) and vegetable (corn, a little spinach, dark leaf lettuce, broccoli, carrot, zucchini), both carefully washed. Water should be clean and changed daily. It sometimes takes more time than one would think for birds to find the food and water vessels in their new homes, so it is wise to sprinkle a little seed and offer a bit of moist fruit on the floor of the cage, just in case! If the bird looks droopy like it is half asleep, with lower eye lids half raised, and puffed up, a day or so after moving into its new home, it could mean it is dehydrated. Give it a small jar lid, etc. of water on the floor of the cage in plain view immediately! Once the bird finds its permanent source of water, this can be removed. Birds can also be given calcium blocks, cuttlebone, or oyster shell, and one of these is a must for breeding hens before and during nesting time. Breeding canaries can prove difficult, and you should read up on it before you start.
- A clean, fairly stable environment—rooms like small kitchens and bathrooms are not usually good locations to keep birds. Temperatures can vary greatly due to hot showers or baking, strong chemicals are often present, and fumes from these or from non-stick cookware can be deadly! Rooms such as well-lit bedrooms, family rooms, or living rooms are ideal. Especially for the first week or so, the bird should be in a calm location; if the bird must be housed in a noisy, high traffic area, get it used to it gradually (cover it when it seems to be stressed or over stimulated). You will notice that lots of activity, as long as the bird cage doesn't get bumped, will bother the bird less and less as time goes by, and a male will actually enjoy singing along with a radio, a loud conversation, or a vacuum once he is really settled in.

Health issues:

- Any kind of bird can become ill very quickly. They live at a much faster rate than people do, and things which could take years to hurt us could hurt them in days or even hours! In addition to the things mentioned above, the following can hurt your bird: cigarette smoke in an enclosed area, inconsistent diet or care, prolonged teasing by people or other pets, any stressful events, too much artificial light. Most of the items seem pretty obvious, but the item about light may not be. Birds' lives are virtually run by light; when day length is around 9 or 10 hours a day in late fall and winter, canary song is at its mellow best, and the birds are sort of on standby (they have finished their late-summer molt, but aren't ready for breeding—this is when song contests are held). When day length reaches about 11 or 12 hours, the song starts to sound a bit more strident, and hens may start carrying bits of string or even paper around. When days are about 13 hours long the song can sound downright harsh or desperate, and hens will lay eggs. At about 14 hours, canaries will begin to molt again. Birds kept at about 14 hours or more of light a day over a prolonged period may get stuck in molt; they will be constantly replacing a few feathers at a time until this wears them down and uses up all their energy. In rooms that get a lot of artificial light each day, be sure to cover the cage with a dark colored cloth once the bird has received more than about 12 hours of total light. You can, however, allow a naturally longer light period on the longest summer days to allow for a natural molt. Males will sing much less or not at all during the molt; this is natural. Right after the molt, however, every male canary sets his voice for the year. First he goes through a plastic

voice period when he experiments and forms his song (this is especially true for birds going through their first molt). It is said that canaries are excellent mimics, and it is at this stage that your bird could pick up stray sounds or wild bird calls. Some people play recordings of good canary singers at this time to help make their birds' songs the best they can be. However, unless a male canary has what is called song intelligence which he inherits from his parents, he will never be able to sing a complete typical song for his particular breed or variety. Each breed or variety (and sometimes even strain) will have its own proper song, and it will have an effect to expose a roller to a waterslager song or a waterslager to a timbrado song, etc. at the formative period. Later his song pattern will solidify into the notes and tours he will use for the next year. One should never attempt to train show birds or birds which will act as tutors with a recording as the song will never sound as good as one learned from a real bird which is related to the student.

- You should be on the lookout for the following signs of illness: puffy feathers, wheezing, sneezing, loose stool over a long period, and change of appetite. Illness can move very quickly, so consult a veterinarian, a knowledgeable bird professional, or good bird care book immediately.
- If given proper care, a canary may live for 10 to 15 years and continue to sing into old age.

### More than one bird?

- Even 2 males which have been raised together should not be housed in the same cage. Peace may reign for a while but eventually territorial instinct will come back and fighting will occur. The best way to enjoy 2 male canaries is to house them apart in such a way that they can hear, but not see, each other. This method will take full advantage of a canary's natural instinct to let competing male neighbors know that he is defending a territory. In the wild, songbirds sit within their territories calling to their rivals all day long, and by this method you can get much more singing from your birds.
- A male/female pair can be housed together all year once they have been properly acclimated to each other. Remember a bird that has been housed alone will think of its cage as a territory to be defended, so gentle introductions will be necessary when putting birds together. Start by housing the birds next to each other in separate cages until they are used to each other. This can be quick or take days and days to accomplish. **It should be noted that one of the reasons a bird sings is the need to find a mate; in this housing method that need is met, so the male may sing somewhat less than if housed alone.** The pair will eventually nest, so the male and female should be of the same breed or variety to ensure that any young are of good quality.
- Group housing will work with canaries as long as they are not crowded into too small a space. Any squabbles will usually be fairly minor and temporary. The social interaction of 3 or more birds will usually prevent any one bird picking on any other individual for long. In this situation only one dominant bird will sing most often (not necessarily your best singer either) unless song perches or other ways of blocking the birds' view are used. A song perch has many cardboard, plywood, or fiberboard dividers of about 4 or 5 inches square, through the centers of which a piece of doweling is run; the dividers are then set at about 3 or 4 inches apart. This will allow a number of birds to sit on the same perch and not be seen by each other. Be sure that the cage is large enough for the number of birds you are planning to keep in it.

## THE SPANISH TIMBRADO

When one begins to analyze the characteristics of this breed's song, one will immediately see that it is made up of three distinct styles of performance, each of which has its own charm. The three styles are known as *clasico*, *intermedio*, and *floreado*. Although these three styles can sound very different, they are thought of as 3 song lines of the one timbrado breed. The *clasico* songed birds are referred to by this term because their style of song was the first to be presented to the COM (Worldwide Ornithological Confederation) and was the one accepted by that group. However, the other 2 song lines are at least as old and just as well established. It should be noted here that often a Spaniard's preference for one song type over another is very strong and related to what region of Spain he lives in because the three lines were developed and promoted in different areas. I will come back to this somewhat sticky point after a little history.

The history of canary culture goes back further in Spain than anywhere else. Once the Spanish crown took over the Canary Islands in the late 1400's, the local song birds began to be imported to the mainland. Along with exotic products from a growing empire and American gold, these birds took their place among the things a truly sophisticated and wealthy Spaniard thought necessary for a satisfying life. Soon it became a popular fad to

present a singing canary in a bejeweled cage to one's lady love, both in Spain and throughout Europe, and enormous prices could be asked for the birds. Soon industrious religious in the convents and monasteries of Spain began breeding the birds in order to raise money for these houses. Once the first yellow or white feathers of domestication began to show among the original greenish-brown, the Spanish birds would have become even more popular than the wild-caught imported type. The Spanish continued to breed their birds for pleasant song over the centuries, until just before the Spanish Civil War. At that time, a group of breeders took what was called *el canario del pais* (the country's canary) and began to cross breed it with the *canario silvestre* (the original wild-caught type from the islands) in order to strengthen in their stock the character that had initially attracted their ancestors to the little birds in the first place. Although much of this work was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War, it was taken up with renewed enthusiasm in the 1950's. Because of this interesting history, one could make a case that the timbrado is both the oldest and newest of the major European song canary breeds!

According to some experts in timbrado song, one may hear distinct dialects in the voices of the wild birds on the different slopes of the Canary Islands. In some areas the birds sing with a distinctive continuous rolling ring, while in others the song is more heavily laced with disjointed notes and flutes, with little or no rolling. These experts go on to say that these dialects are the foundation for the 3 song lines of the timbrado. The rolling birds give us the *classico* line, the disjointed flute birds give us the *floreado* line, and the *intermedio* birds fall somewhere in between. It was noted earlier that the Spanish breeders tend to strongly favor some one line over the others, and arguments over which is best or most authentic happen regularly! Unfortunately, the disputes over what a great timbrado should sound like have spilled over to the US as well.

Until recently, the US National timbrado competition has been judged using the score sheet of Spain's FOE. This system strongly favors the *classico* lines, and many of our US birds fall into that category for this reason. On the other hand, international shows are usually judged using the FOCDE score sheet which allows a wider range of birds, from *classico* to *floreado*, to score well. In the US there is a new club called the United Spanish Timbrado Fanciers, to which I belong, which was founded to overcome some of the difficulties of the timbrado's past, including a score sheet which would be fair to all 3 lines of birds. This score sheet, which is being developed by the USTF with the help of Dr. Hurtado, is still in the formative phase but will probably look at 11 aspects of the timbrado's song. These are *timbres* (metallic roll—rrriii—it is said to be the sound of an old fashioned door bell—continuous), *variaciones rodadas* (hollow roll—rrrooo or rrruuu—continuous), *timbre de agua* (water roll—bli-bli-bli—semi-continuous), *cascabel* (jingle bells—lin-lin-lin—semi-continuous), *castañuela* (castanet—clak-clak-clak or cla-cla-cla—semi-continuous), *floreos* (flourishes or flutes—tuo tuo tuo or piau piau piau or due due due—disjointed), *agua lenta* and *agua semiligada* (slow water and semi-continuous water—slow: blub blub blub—semi-continuous: blu-blu-blu), *cloqueos* (glucks—clak-clok-clok or clo-clo-clo—semi-continuous), *campana* (bell—tong tong tong or te-lon te-lon te-lon—disjointed), *variaciones conjuntas* (joint variations—this is when a particularly talented bird sings any 2 of the above **at the same time!!!** It is a literal talking out of both sides of the mouth), *impresión* (impression—here the judge is allowed to give points for the overall effect of the song).

A timbrado can vary widely in appearance, and there are only a few things to look out for. A timbrado may have a crest and be of any color except red factor. Red factor birds have hooded skin blood, and this would be contrary to the timbrado's purity of lineage and song. Another thing to beware of is frilled or twisted feathers as this would show cross breeding with frilled canaries. Colors which are acceptable are dominant white, blue, cinnamon, yellow, variegated, and of course the wild bird's greenish brown. In fact, in some Spanish clubs this last color is preferred because it shows a direct link to the wild birds, and the greens are said to have the best voices.

