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Finch Care

Finches are popular, hardy birds that are easy to maintain. They are generally quiet and have a pleasant, melodious song. Finches do not require the level of attention needed by parrot-type birds.

Line-breeding and in-breeding to achieve color or morphologic mutations produce a weaker bird with greater potential for genetic abnormalities. For example, a color mutation of the Gouldian finch will have a reduced life span in comparison to its wild-type conspecific. Depending on the climatic conditions and the durability of the species, many finches can be maintained in attractive, outdoor aviaries with nontoxic vegetation.

Is my Finch a Male or a Female?

In some finches, different genders have obvious or subtle appearance or behavioral differences. Males are generally more brightly colored or elaborately marked than females, particularly during the breeding season. Differences in singing, courtship, or nesting behavior may also provide clues. Males usually have melodious songs, perform a dance, hop in various postures, and build their nest during breeding seasons. The females often have more of a chirp or single-note call and are more passive in the courtship role. Finches are prolific breeders. The offspring are usually parent-raised, especially in insectivorous species. Society finches make good foster parents for young of other finch species.

What do Finches Do All Day?

Finches are less likely than parrot-type birds to develop a bond with family members. However, they are beautiful and interesting birds to observe. Because they may consume up to 30% of their body weight a day in food and may collapse from hypoglycemia if they are deprived of food for even short periods, finches spend a great deal of their time eating. Some of the more exotic finches enjoy live goods such as mealworms, but have been bred on vegetarian diets with some effort and training.

While finches may be small in size, some species are territorial in aviary situations and others have well developed pecking orders. Self-mutilation, poor body condition, and increased susceptibility to disease may be indirect results of aggression in birds that are psychologically stressed because of their low social position.

There is a tendency for clients to provide housing for finches that is narrow and tall in design. This restricts the birds' horizontal flying patterns. The finches tend to gather at the same level in the enclosure leading to overcrowded conditions and secondary aggression among the birds.

Are Finches Tame?

Finches prefer the company of other finches. They are considered skittish and will usually fly away when approached. However, some individuals can be finger trained. If capture of a finch is necessary, one useful approach is to remove all perches and turn off the lights before reaching into the enclosure.

How To Keep Your Finch Healthy, Happy, and Safe

Allow full flight in a well-protected enclosure.

Include vegetation or visual barriers (burlap sheets) in the enclosure to provide less dominant birds with an escape area and privacy.

Avoid introducing new birds into established collections.

Clip the wings or remove particularly aggressive individuals.
Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin free diet formulated specifically for finches.
Do not over-supplement the diet with vitamins and minerals.
Provide clean, fresh, uncontaminated water daily.
Provide ultraviolet (UV) light in indoor enclosures.

Housing for your finch should:

Be as large (wide) as possible with low housing density
Be clean, secure, safe, and easy to service
Be constructed of durable, nontoxic material
Be constructed of fine gauge wire in an outdoor aviary to prevent access by snakes
Contain multiple perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free tree branches
Provide multiple feeding locations and nesting sites
Avoid having perches located directly over food containers
Contain small squares of burlap or coconut fiber as safe nesting materials
Exclude accessibility of free-ranging birds to aviaries

It is important to prevent access to:

Sandpaper-covered perches
Tobacco and cigarette smoke
Chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
Toxic plants
Pesticides
Toxic fumes
Dogs, cats, and young children
Cedar, redwood, and pressure-treated wood cage substrates
Sources of lead or zinc
Fine thread in nest boxes
Ceiling fans
Hot cooking oil
Teflon-coated items (overheated)

Vital Statistics

Body Length: 3-8 in, (tail can be long in some species)
Body Weight: 10-30 g
Age at sexual maturity: 2 months
Maximum life span: 17 years

What your Veterinarian Looks For in a Healthy Finch

Smooth, bright feathers without color breaks, transparency, ragged edges, or bald spots
Even, reptilian pattern on the feet
Nails of appropriate length
Alert, erect posture
Body free of lumps and bumps
Clear, bright eyes (no discharge)
Smooth beak
Dry, open nares