

# FINCHES

*F*ree-ranging finches can be found in most areas of the world, although many species are critically endangered because of habitat destruction and human interference. Most finches intended for exhibit or as companion animals are native to Australia or Africa. Field guides of free-ranging species may be helpful to owners wanting to learn more about their finch. The zebra finch is the most popular, while the Lady Gouldian (see front cover) finch is considered the most beautiful. Bengalese (society) finches, which have been domesticated for centuries, are friendly, easy to care for and breed well in captivity. Java, zebra and Lady Gouldian finches also breed intensively in captivity, and many mutations have occurred. These mutations bear little resemblance to their free-ranging ancestors.

## Most Common Disorders of Finches

- Air sac mites
- Bacterial infections
- Egg binding
- Viral diseases
- Malnutrition
- Intraspecific aggression
- Toe or foot necrosis
- Fungal infections
- Chlamydiosis
- Mycoplasmosis
- Fatty liver disease
- Fractures
- Toxicosis

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery. For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting [www.AAV.org](http://www.AAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet near you" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).



Companion Bird Care  
**SERIES**

# What to Expect from Your Finch

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 parrots. Linebreeding and in-breeding to achieve color or morphologic mutations produce a weaker bird with greater potential for genetic abnormalities. A color mutation Lady Gouldian finch, for example, 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 planted with nontoxic vegetation.

Is Your Finch a Male or a Female?  
In some finches, there are obvious or subtle appearance or behavioral differences between the genders. 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 to gender. Males usually have melodious songs, perform a dance, hop in various postures and build the nest. The females often have more of a chirp or single-note call and are more passive in the courtship role. Alternatively, laboratory methods using DNA technology may be used for sex determination.

## What Should You Feed Your Finch?

Finches are prolific breeders. The offspring are usually parent-raised, especially in insectivorous species. Society finches make good foster parents for other finch species.

Most avian veterinarians recommend a high quality, toxin-free formulated diet, preferably certified organic when possible. Supplementation may include chopped organic vegetables, and leafy greens. While many finches can apparently live for many years on primarily seed-based diets, most veterinarians believe disease incidence is reduced with a balanced, formulated diet.

## What Do Finches Do All Day?

Finches are less likely than parrots 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 day eating. Some of the more exotic finches enjoy live food, such as mealworms, but have been bred on vegetarian diets.

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 to provide housing for finches that is narrow and tall in design, but 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 will usually fly away when approached. Some young birds can be finger-trained individually. Aggression between birds can be reduced by providing ample space and multiple perches and feeding/watering station to reduce competition. New birds should be introduced gradually (side by side cages) before being introduced into established collections, after a suitable quarantine period.

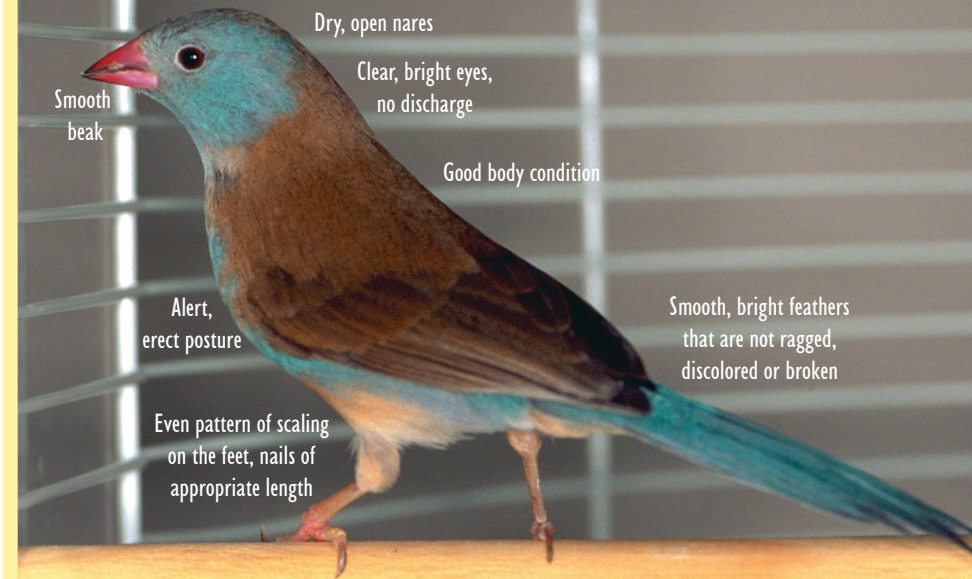
## How to Identify your Bird

Finches that escape outdoors are extremely difficult to recover. However, methods of identification include leg bands and implantation of a microchip, which is possible, but challenging in a bird of this size.

## Should the Wings Be Clipped?

Because finches cannot climb around the enclosure using their beaks like parrots, the wings of a finch should never be clipped. Once clipped, the finch will have a difficult time getting to upper perches. For this reason, finch enclosures should be secure to prevent accidental escape.

# What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Finch



# How to Keep Your Finch Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your finch to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then once annually for examinations.
- ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering greens and herbs, toys designed for very small birds, and foraging opportunities.
- ✓ Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet with fresh chopped fruits and vegetables according to the manufacturer's recommendation.
- ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently.
- ✓ Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath. Finches preferred not to be sprayed with a water bottle.
- ✓ Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

## Housing for your finch should:

- ✓ be as large as possible, allowing limited flight.
- ✓ be clean, secure, and safe.
- ✓ be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain heavy metals, such as zinc).
- ✓ contain variably sized perches made of clean, nontoxic pesticide-free wood or branches.
- ✓ not include sandpaper-covered perches.
- ✓ have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- ✓ have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- ✓ offer opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight and exercise.

Finches can easily become injured if they escape from the cage. Watch out especially for:

- ✗ ceiling fans
- ✗ stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets
- ✗ fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ pesticides or chemical cleaners
- ✗ dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- ✗ sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)
- ✗ plug-in air fresheners
- ✗ scented candles