

# Finches

There are many species of finches. Most common are **zebra finches** (*poephila guttata*), **Gouldian Finch** (*Erythrura gouldiae*), and **society finch** (*Lonchura striata domestic*)

## HABITAT

- *Size:*
  - Finches are birds that need ample room to fly back and forth within a cage. Therefore, the wider the cage the better. Typically, one would need to purchase a cage with the minimum measurements of 24” long by 14” wide by 18” high for a pair.
    - Barring on the cage must be relatively small to prevent the birds from flying out or getting stuck.
  - Aviaries are another route to go. These are large bird rooms that allow the finches to fly about without the restraints of a small cage. There must be sufficient lighting and aeration to keep them healthy.
- *Substrate:*
  - One option, often recommended by veterinarians, would be a paper substrate. This includes newspaper, Kraft paper, blank newsprint, and any other similar matter. Paper substrates allow owners to inspect the fecal matter for any possible ailment. Since it is easily dirtied, paper must be changed every day.
  - The second option would be a litter/bedding substrate. This may include aspen pellets and recycled paper bedding such as Yesterday’s News unscented cat litter. Pellet bedding is highly recommended because it has a lower risk of bird consumption and impaction. Unscented material is also recommended to avoid any possible respiratory issues. Although it becomes difficult to see and assess the fecal matter, litter substrates are more absorbent; thus, allowing owners to change it fewer times within a week
- *Accessories:*
  - Finches do not fancy regular bird toys. Instead, they enjoy materials that they can use to generate nests. Items such as wicker nests and fluff bedding may be used as foraging material due to their neatness and their ability to provide healthy stimulation. Other foraging material may be wheat grass pots or sprouts grown from finch seed. This also provides the finch with a healthy diet supplement. String, twist ties, and other such material must be steered away from due to the

fact that it may both be swallowed and choked upon or the bird's foot may become caught thus cutting off blood circulation.

- Perches are another necessity in keeping healthy finches. There must be a variety of perches with different shapes and textures in the cage since they spend most of their time on them. There are several types of perches available to finches. Manzanita branches are a common form of a perch used by most owners. It provides a natural look in the cage and it comes in a variety of sizes and structures. A manicure perch is often utilized for its perfect diameter size and for its ability to trim nails with ease. Soft rope perches are another type preventing callused feet. Try to stay away from sandpaper perches because they may often cause pressure build-up and sores on their feet. Provide as many different types of perches as possible to keep the finch happy and healthy. Place them away from food or water dishes to avoid contamination and sickness from any fecal matter. The more variety of perches in the cage the healthier the finch will be.
- Finches also enjoy swings made from dowel rods. Provide a couple of these in the cage to allow the finch to sit, swing, and relax throughout the day.
- Mirrors are another great accessory to add in the cage. They provide good mental and physical stimulation. When the finch sees its reflection, it will often posture and sing to its reflection. However, mirrors must be offered for short periods of time by rotating it in and out of the cage to allow the finch to rest.
- *Maintenance:*
  - Substrate must be checked on a daily basis. If a paper bottom is used, change it every day. Bedding must be inspected daily; however, it can be changed about twice a week. Full sanitation of the cage must be done at least once a month while the bottom tray is sanitized once a week. Food and water dishes must be rinsed out daily and replaced with new material. Perches should also be taken out and sanitized of any fecal matter at least once a week, or as deemed necessary.

## **DIET**

- *Pellet and Seed:*
  - Although most believe that finches are solely seed eaters, many recommend cutting back on seed and using more pellet food. The seed may be a finch favorite however it lacks several needed vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. It also contains a higher fat content thus exposing the bird to obesity or health disease. When providing the finch with a seed diet, pure Calcium and Vitamin A must be allotted to maintain the health of the bird. Pellets provide a more complete diet to keep the finch healthy. Since pellet food already contains Calcium and Vitamin A, providing extra may cause over exposure. Seed may be given occasionally or mixed in with the pellet in small amounts, but it should not make up the entire diet.
- *Protein:*
  - Providing protein, especially to younger birds or to birds that are molting, is especially important. Protein may include hard boiled eggs, other egg based food, and bugs such as mealworms and fruit flies. It is also a good idea to provide the

finch with the entire egg, shell and all. Other than protein, the shell gives the bird the Calcium that it needs to remain healthy.

- *Fruits and Vegetables:*
  - Chopped spinach, lettuce, kale, broccoli, mustard greens, carrots, and sweet potatoes are the most common and most recommended vegetables to be given to finches on a daily basis. Fruit slices such as apples, mangoes, and bananas are a great supplement in a finch diet. Other than being a healthy meal, they may also be used as activities for the finch. Larger pieces of fruits and vegetables may be used as exercise tools by tying them up to the sides of the cage so that the finch can try to pull and tug them.
- *Cuttlebone and Grit:*
  - Cuttlebone is highly recommended for finches. It provides them Calcium which is a vital component in their diet that must be met. Cuttlebone also has traces of lime that aid in digestion.
  - Grit is a charcoal essential in aiding digestion while also providing valuable minerals and trace elements such as Calcium. It should be provided in a separate cup.
- *Caution:*
  - Avocado, fruit seeds, chocolate, caffeine, and alcohol should never be given to finches for it causes serious medical conditions.

## **FEATHER CARE**

- *Proper Bathing:*
  - Bathing is very important in regards to finches. A water bowl should be placed on the bottom of the cage filled with lukewarm water. Bathing rituals should be done on a weekly basis during the year and on a daily basis during the summer. The bowl should be removed after the birds are done bathing.
  - Molting refers to the event in which the bird sheds or loses feathers then grows them again during a period of time. Bathing allows the finch to preen itself during the molting process, thus encouraging healthy feather growth.

## **LIGHTING**

- Proper lighting is necessary in keeping the finch healthy and responsive. UVB and UVA lights must be provided in the cage.
- Birds are very emotional in regards to lighting and it allows them to maintain a mental and physical health.
- *UVB:*
  - UVB lighting allows birds to synthesize vitamin D<sub>3</sub> in their bodies. It is essential for proper calcium metabolism, normal growth, egg production, and for strong bones.
- *UVA:*
  - UVA lighting is also known as visible lighting. This allows the bird to locate food, recognize mates, and identify different species. UVA helps reduce feather

picking and other unhealthy behaviors. This lighting helps stimulate appetites, develop feathers, and properly see colors.

### **BEAK AND FEET CARE**

- *Beak Care:*
  - Finches rarely need a beak trim; however, owners may bring their birds into veterinarians or other specialists who are able to do it. Finches themselves are able to trim down their own beaks through the accessories provided in the cage such as abrasive perches and nesting material. Supply a beak conditioner with pumice to aid in beak trims.
- *Feet Care:*
  - Nails may be trimmed when it is necessary. They are able to trim down their own nails through the help of proper perches. Proper perches entail different shapes, sizes, and textures.
  - Finches may form pressure sores on their feet if the proper equipment is not provided. Several perches of different varieties must be in the finch cage in order to relieve them of any pressure.

### **COMPATIBILITY**

- *General:*
  - Finches are social animals that usually do not harm one another provided that they have sufficient cage space. Multiple finches may be housed in one cage as long as it is big enough to allow them territory space. Larger species may cause problems in the cage if bullying ensues.
- *Species:*
  - For the most part, finches of different species are able to tolerate one another. However, certain breeds, such as the Zebra Finch, may be aggressive in their own nature. Though they are considered a gentle breed, they are aggressive towards other finches if there is not sufficient room for territory marking. It is often recommended to avoid mixing Zebra Finches with others.
  - Most finches are compatible and comfortable with others of the same species. It is recommended to obtain a pair of finches of the same breed so they are happy and so they can enjoy one another's company. If multiple pairs are desired, the issue of cage space is brought up. There may typically be competition amongst one another if there are two pairs; therefore at least three pairs of finches of the same species would be ideal in keeping them happy.
- *Gender:*
  - When purchased in a pair, the gender of the finch does not matter. It may be of the same gender or it may be a heterogeneous pair. However, once multiple pairs are looked at, competition becomes a factor. Males tend to fight over a single female therefore having an odd amount of birds is not recommended. Competition may even ensue if two pairs of finches are purchased therefore three pairs would be the best set up.

## ISSUES

- *Temperature:*
  - Finches must be kept away from drafts because they are highly sensitive to temperature. Warmer temperatures are needed in keeping finches healthy therefore cages should be kept away from windows, air conditioned and heat vents, or any other drafty area.
- *Respiratory:*
  - Although finches are hardy birds, they are notorious for having respiratory issues due to their sensitive systems. They must be kept away from any toxic fumes and their cage must be well ventilated.
- *Other:*
  - Finch illnesses are uncommon; however, those who do fall sick can usually blame it on improper diet, dirty cages, and drafts. Precautions must be taken in order to avoid sickness. Owners should constantly monitor their birds in order to notice any peculiar or drastic behavior changes. If a problem persists, veterinary involvement is mandatory.
  - Some signs of illness include: feather plucking, puffiness, beak swelling, wheezing and coughing, runny and discolored stools, swollen eyes, loss of appetite, eye or nasal discharge, and unusual sitting on perches or the floor of the cage.