

Finch & Canary Focus: Revive A Sick Cordon Bleu Finch

Caring for pet bird should start with trip to avian veterinarian

By Ian Hinze

Q: I have a new cordon bleu finch that I bought, I have to admit, a bit fluffed up. I realize now that I should have known better than to purchase it.

It's been about three weeks since then, and the poor pet bird doesn't want to come up from the bottom of the cage. It has food and water, and it seems to want to eat constantly, but it is stumbling along, as if it were weak.

Why is this happening? Is this normal behavior for a new baby bird?

A: Although your question relates to a cordon bleu (*Uraeginthus*), it is interesting because it covers all birds.

You don't mention if the store housed the little cordon bleu with other estrildid finches or not, but this could have had quite an effect on its demeanor. If the bird was a youngster, that makes things worse, because it may not have built up the necessary immunity to fight off infections.

Your pet bird should be taken to an avian veterinarian straight away for a thorough examination. Because your finch is obviously sick, quarantine it from other birds and keep it under a heat lamp with the temperature kept at 80 degrees Fahrenheit (minimum) until it can be seen by an avian veterinarian. A sick bird immediately needs warmth.

Heat lamps are better than hospital cages, because, if the bird gets too warm, it can move away from the heat. In a hospital cage, the heat remains the same throughout and the poor bird cannot escape it. Be careful not to dehydrate your finch — 80 degrees Fahrenheit is ample.

Caring For A Sick Finch

A bird with a good chance of recovery will typically respond well to this temperature. Once the bird recovers, the temperature can gradually be lowered by one or two degrees per week. I would not allow the temperature to fall below 60 degrees Fahrenheit for a healthy Estrildid finch.

Add a probiotic and multivitamin to drinking water, because your pet bird may be suffering from stress, and probiotics help alleviate this condition (ask your avian veterinarian before using supplements). If your veterinarian recommends antibiotics, you will have to withdraw the probiotics because they will be rendered inactive by the antibiotics.

The stress may have been brought on by the bird being removed from its home and companions, but it could also have been brought on by an illness that has only now manifested. This is why veterinary advice is vital.

The food you give to your pet bird needs to be extremely soft because hard seeds will be inadequate given the bird's present condition. Try soaked seed fresh wild meadow grasses from fields that haven't been sprayed with chemicals or fouled by pets. Also offer eggfood. Provide a dish of quality dry seeds especially prepared for a waxbill finch, but give the bird a choice. Also provide soft-bodied small insects, such as aphids, fruit fly larvae, whiteworm and tiny waxworms, because live food is often the only food a sick bird will take.

In a finch, there is a condition known as "going light," whereby it wants to eat all the time, and, yet, it just wastes away. Sulphur drugs have been used to treat this condition with some success, but your vet can decide which treatment is best upon seeing the bird.

Baby Bird Behavior?

The behavior you outline is definitely not normal for any bird, be it a baby or an adult. Your pet bird, as you already observed, was extremely sick when you purchased it. The fact that it has lasted for three weeks, and possibly longer, in its sorry condition is testimony to its will to live. Given the correct veterinary treatment and tender, loving care from yourself, it could very well improve and make a full recovery.

A cordon bleu finch needs the company of other cordon bleus. Failure to give it this company could cause the bird to deteriorate again. I've noticed that when my birds are sick and quarantined, the sounds of their own kind have helped their recovery. The other birds called to the sick individual, and it would return their calls until they got louder and more regular.

No baby bird, including the cordon bleu, should be sold until after its first molt. This usually occurs a few weeks after fledging. By this time the bird will be completely hardy and independent.

My heart goes out to you and your pet bird in its present dilemma. I have witnessed some truly remarkable recoveries, and you could well witness the same!