

The Strawberry Finch

Learn about the beautiful strawberry finch, and how to care for them.

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The word "strawberry" conjures up memories of warmth, sweetness and a gorgeous scarlet and speckled color, all of which aptly describe the strawberry finch. These diminutive birds are relatively easy to keep, delightful to observe and more interesting than some of the more common finches.

There are two species of strawberry finches. The more well-known strawberry finch (*Amandava amandava*) is called the red avadavat or red munia and is renowned for the male's beautiful red breeding plumage, for which the species is named. The green avadavat (*Amandava formosa*) or green resembles an unripe strawberry.

Strawberry finches are part of the group of finches known as waxbills. They originate in the tall grasslands, marshes and bushes of India, Pakistan, some parts of China and the Philippines. They travel in small flocks that build nests amongst the reeds, bushes or grasses in their native habitat. Unlike many species of waxbills, the male strawberry finch's pleasant song and consists of clear, flute-like notes.

Because strawberry finches are sexually dimorphic: males and females can be visually identified. During breeding season, the males develop rich red and white-spotted feathers, and they have dark reddish-brown heads, backs and wings with a black tail.

Out of breeding season, the males and females look alike with brown feathering on top with darker wings and yellow underparts. The rump and upper tail appear dark red. Female strawberries display have a few white spots on the wings. As with most waxbills, males and females have red beaks.

Tips For Optimal Health For Strawberry Finches

These active, energetic birds need a large cage that measures at least 30 inches in length and enables them to fly. Alternately, house them in a large flight or aviary. Breeding pairs always should be kept in flights for optimal success in producing young. Choose bar spacing or screening that is 3/8 inches.

Provide several 3/8- to 3/4- inch perches or nontoxic tree branches and a variety of nests. Most strawberry finches periodically need their nails trimmed, but natural tree branches help wear down their nails. They also enjoy planted enclosures, so include leafy branches, grasses, reeds and dense bushes for coverage, socializing and nesting.

Strawberry finches enjoy bathing occasionally. Provide a bath dish that is 1 inch deep with a 1/2 inch of water or a clip-on bathhouse made for finches.

You must offer fresh wholesome food and clean water daily. Provide a finch seed mix containing white and yellow millets as well as canary seed. Strawberry finches also benefit from a daily provision of green foods, such as chard, spinach, celery tops, kale, chickweed and dandelion greens. Don't forget the treats! Millet spray, sprouted canary seed and treat sticks for finches are all favorites.

Foods high in protein — such as egg and nestling foods, mealworms, aphids, pupae and daphnia — should be provided, especially during breeding season.

Supplements such as cuttlebone, oyster shell and grit with charcoal are an essential part of a healthy strawberry finch's diet. They contain valuable minerals and trace elements needed for good health. Grit may aid digestion. [It is generally thought that passerines can use a little grit to help the gizzard grind up food, although it is not absolutely essential for finches and canaries as it is with pigeons. —Eds.] Cuttlebone provides calcium, which is necessary for the bird to have a strong beak and for females to produce healthy eggshells and to prevent egg binding.

Strawberry finches are prone to a condition called melanism: a loss of brightness in their otherwise red plumage. The exact cause is unknown, but because this condition rarely occurs in strawberry finches kept outdoors, sunlight may play a role in preventing this problem. If you house strawberry finches indoors, provide full-spectrum lighting as well as a healthy, varied diet to simulate natural light and the health benefits associated with it.

Some people believe that strawberry finches can be difficult to breed initially, but once they are experienced breeders, they do quite well. Following the previously mentioned tips for optimal health — a diet rich in protein, a planted environment, a large flight, lots of privacy and appropriate supplementation — will ensure breeding success.

Breeding Options For Strawberry Finches

Strawberry finches often make exceptional parents, which makes them a good choice for beginning waxbill breeders. They can, however, become aggressive when defending their nests during breeding season, so house each pair of strawberries in individual flights away from other pairs.

Strawberry finches accept a variety of nests including closed wicker baskets and half-open nest boxes. Most strawberries prefer to build their nests and will do so in bushes in the aviary or in man-made nest boxes. Both the male and female take part in this process. They use dried grasses, coconut fibers, burlap, hay and other types of plant material. They add moss to line the inside of the nest.

Clutches usually consist of four or five eggs, but as many as seven are not uncommon. Hens incubate the eggs and rear the young with help from the male. Incubation averages 12 days, and chicks fledge at about 3 weeks of age.

Strawberry finches are known to breed to exhaustion, so clutches should be limited to no more than three per year. After this, remove the nests to keep the pair healthy and strong.

These great little finches are both beautiful and entertaining. Their melodious songs make them endearing and unusual. They are also delightful birds that enthrall their owners. If you are looking for a warm, sweet and luscious little red bird, look no further than the strawberry finch.