

Try A Finch As A Pet Bird

As pet birds, finches offer more than pretty feathers.

By Karl Lieberman

Zebra finches are extremely social birds.

Life with birds doesn't mean you have to deal with an overly dependent cockatoo or go through an endless supply of wood toys to quench the chewing needs of an Amazon parrot or macaw. Many bird enthusiasts have discovered the joy of finches as pet birds.

Finches come in a amazing variety of colors and patterns. There are many finch species available, and zebra finches, Gouldian finches and society finches are long-time favorites.

Zebra Finches

Practically everyone has seen a zebra finch. Zebra finches are usually very inexpensive and highly available.

Zebra finches are extremely social by nature and should always be kept in pairs or groups unless they have been hand-reared as pet birds. They are generally friendly with other birds and each other, but some individuals can be bossy. Zebras are prolific breeders.

Zebra finches do not become hand tame, though they do come to enjoy interaction with their owners over time. Many respond to talking or whistling, and they usually greet their owners with happy songs and beeps — especially at feeding time. The zebra finches' song is a peculiar metallic trumpeting sound, and these birds love to perform it.

Zebra finches make excellent companions for situations where noise and space may be a concern. Their care is simple, and their bold and busy nature is always charming.

Care & Feeding: Zebra finches come from the arid interior of Australia where they live in the open grasslands. When possible, a pot of organic grass can be kept in their cage. Like all birds, they like an attractive environment, and bird-safe plants can be placed near their cage for a more natural environment. Zebra finches are usually crazy about canary tassel toys.

Zebra finches need finch seed as a base diet supplemented with chopped hardboiled egg, greens and spray millet. Grit is unnecessary, but cuttlebone should always be available. A well cared for zebra finch can be expected to live 7 to 10 years or more.

Gouldian Finches

Gouldian finches are very peaceful and gentle birds and should be kept in pairs or groups. They should only be kept with other mild-mannered birds. Gouldian finches are calm by nature and seem to enjoy attention from their keepers. Like most finches, they do not become truly tame and do not enjoy handling.

Aside from their beauty, Gouldian finches are an excellent choice as a pet bird because of their steady and personable nature and interesting social behaviors. They have an elaborate courtship display, and the male finch has a complex but quiet song. Gouldian finches never fail to generate conversation!

Care & Feeding: Gouldian finches come from the tropical North of Australia where they inhabit eucalyptus forests. In captivity they are highly adaptable and no special provision for heat or humidity are needed. When possible, they enjoy having (pesticide-free) eucalyptus branches from which they love to snip the leaves. Gouldian finches should be offered a couple of small canary-type toys. Some enjoy them though some do not. A roomy cage and pleasant surroundings are probably more important to them.

Gouldian finches are easy to please in terms of feeding them; a standard finch mix, chopped hard boiled egg and regular greens meet their simple needs. They also enjoy spray millet. As with all finches, grit is not needed, but cuttlebone is a must. With good care, Gouldian finches can be expected to live from eight to 12 years.

Society Finches

Society finches do not occur in the wild. They are a hybrid of two other finch species and were first produced in China or

India thousands of years ago. They are handsome little pet birds with a neat and balanced appearance. They come in many color variations from pure white to almost black. Most are mottled brown and white, and no two are exactly alike. This is part of what makes them so interesting. There is no visual difference between males and females, but only males sing.

As their name implies, these pet birds are social in the extreme. They must be kept in pairs or groups or they are truly unhappy. They are gentle and friendly with each other and with other types of finches. They are also very productive breeders.

As with most finches, these pet birds do not become finger tame or enjoy petting. Because of their high degree of domestication, they are fearless of people and often become quite interactive. With patience, many will come to accept treats from your fingers.

Society finches are wonderful birds for the home. Their variable and interesting appearance and peaceful ways all add to their desirability. They are also affordable. Some males are quite good singers.

They can also be kept in indoor or outdoor aviaries provided the climate is mild and they have been properly acclimated. They can be disruptive to the breeding activity of other species by trying to "help" build nests and raise babies. Lightweight canary toys are appropriate for society finches. It may take time for them to become interested in them but most will enjoy them after a while.

Society finches are easy to care for. The same diet outlined for zebra finches and Gouldian finches suits them well. Society finches tend to be one of the longer-lived finches. Some individuals approach 20 years, though 10 to 13 would be more average.