

# BENGALESE FINCH/SOCIETY FINCH

Latin Name: *Lonchura striata var. domestica*

## INTRODUCTION

The first Bengalese finches were bred in the Far East. Their captivity dates back to several centuries ago, but their true origin has always been controversial. Authorities now believe that the Asian Striated and Sharp-tail Mannikins are their direct ancestors, because these wild and seldom seen Mannikins are essentially identical to the Chocolate Self Bengalese finch.



As its scientific name suggests, the Bengalese is one of the few domesticated species of finches. They are somewhat of an oddity because they form a hybrid race, and are not found in the wild. It is believed that the initial drive behind the development of the Bengalese finch was to develop a strain of birds to be used in the fostering of other more difficult finch species. Bengalese finches are good breeders and so make ideal foster parents for many of the rarer finches that are not steady enough to be called reliable parents.

Whatever its origin, the Bengalese finch is one of the most enjoyable and easiest finches to keep and breed.

## DESCRIPTION



There are many colour variations of this small finch, which grows up to a length of about 12 cm. Two of the colour forms are Chocolate and Fawn, which are dark brown and light brown respectively. Pied forms, also described as variegated, are also exists, while when a pure colour is present, it is described as self. A white mutation has also been bred; these are still rather scarce and the birds are generally smaller than the other colours. Crested and frilled varieties can sometimes be seen.

## HOUSING

Bengalese finches thrive well in cages as they do in aviaries, and are good breeders either way. They are generally very hardy and sturdy but if the climate is too cold, they are best kept indoors. When breeding these birds, only one pair should be housed per enclosure because if there are a lot of Bengalese in there, they would all go to sleep in the same nest. If any eggs or chicks are in that nest, the many birds cramming into it at night could squash them to death.



## SEXING

Sexing the Bengalese Finch is quite hard although it can accurately be determined in two ways: by their song and their behaviour. Only the male sings; the female does not. When they first come out of the nest they don't sing so don't think that you have only females. It can take some time for them to be able to start singing well. Also, while the male sings its squeaky little song, it puffs out its chest and sticks its head and tail up high in the air during the courtship display. This elaborate and amusing little performance is punctuated by short, vigorous hops.

## BREEDING

Bengalese finches do not form particularly strong monogamous pair bonds. The formation of a pair bond is marked by 'clumping', that is when two birds perch so near to each other that they appear to merge in a ball of feathers. The male builds the nest and then the breeding process begins.



The mates sit on a perch next to each other and 'talk' together. The male will draw itself upright next to the female and commence to crow at an almost inaudible sound. It may hold a fine grass stem in its beak. It raises the feathers on its head and neck and fluffs out the feathers on its abdomen. It will then proceed with a series of bowing and

jerking jumps, even sometimes actually leaving the perch. The male will then hop on the female's back to fertilise her and flutter his wings to keep balance. The whole process takes about one minute and the routine is carried out a number of times.

Once fertilised and after nesting, the hen will lay between three and eight eggs; one each day. After a couple of eggs are laid, the pair will begin sitting on them. The brooding and incubation process lasts around 11 to 14 days or more. The two parents take turns incubating the eggs and feeding the young until they are independent.

The parents are tolerable of nest checks, but be sure not to disrupt the chicks after 18 days of age so as not to scare them into a premature fledging. When they do so, one notices that the young birds are very similar to the adults, but have a shorter tail and black beak. Later they will moult into their adult feathering. They should be removed from their parents' cage as soon as they are eating on their own so that they will not disturb the pair as they start their second clutch.

If Bengalese are to be used as foster parents to other breeds, the hatching date of the fostered eggs or chicks should coincide as closely as possible with the hatching of their own eggs. Bengalese are devoted parents, and, if the fledging time of foster chicks should differ from their own, there will be no objection or desertion. Also, they know no nesting season and will go to nest at any time of the year.



## **NESTING MATERIAL**

Bengalese finches will nest in about anything, but a half-open nest box or covered wicker nest are preferred. They will use just about anything for nesting material - cotton balls pulled apart, burlap strands from a burlap bag, feathers, grass and coconut matting or nesting material from pet shops are all suitable. Take a handful of the nesting material and place it inside the nest. Punch down slightly to make an indentation in the middle of the nest. In a few days, the societies, mainly the cock, will have rearranged the nesting material. Check to make sure that all four corners are filled in to prevent eggs and chicks from falling in.

## DIET

The Bengalese finch diet consists of a seed mixture for small birds. An already prepared mix is generally made up of different kinds of millet and canary seed as well as other seeds. It is called "foreign finch mix".

Soft food may be given all year round but mainly in the breeding season as a rearing food. In addition to this, Bengalese finches like many greens such as dandelion leaves, chickweed, spinach, vegetables such as grated carrots and cucumbers, and fruit.

Sprouted seeds are given to the birds to satisfy their need for greens. Millet sprays are also appreciated.



Bengalese finches should always have access to fresh water. It's helpful to supplement their diet by putting a powdered vitamin in the water. All birds should always have access to some form of calcium. Calcium is an essential mineral supplement to any bird's diet and is important both to the birds' bone development and maintenance and to the females' calcium-intensive needs in egg laying. Further more, birds need grit or sand, which they use to grind their food. A gravel/grit mixture, preferably one that also has minerals added, like oyster shell and charcoal is a good choice.

## REFERENCES

Alderton, D. (1995) '**Looking after Cage Birds**', Blandford, London

Spencer, K. '**Successfully using Societies as Foster Parents**' [On-line]  
Available: <http://www.birdsnways.com/articles/spencer1.htm>

'**Bengalese Finch**' [On-line] Available:  
<http://www.zoo.org.au/Exhibits/Imagedir/bengalese%20finch.pdf>

## LINKS

[www.bengalesefinch.co.uk](http://www.bengalesefinch.co.uk)