

# GOULDIAN FINCH

Latin Name: *Chloebia gouldiae*

## INTRODUCTION

Gouldian finches are native to Northern Australia. Their natural habitat is the tropical savannah woodland. These birds select open plains with dispersed groups of tall trees or choose to stay at the fringes of mangroves and thickets. They always tend to be near the water. It is a migratory species, moving south in the rainy season and reappearing in the northern regions for the dry months.

Due to the fact that they are now threatened because of illegal trappings and also because of the invasion of humans into their habitats, the number



of gouldian finches in the wild has drastically dropped. Its own beauty seems to be another cause of this danger status because of its ensnarement for aviculture trade, and fire is also listed as a jeopardising agent to their natural populations. A massive protection scheme is now under way and with assistance from the public, this bird can be maintained from total extinction. At least, it can be considered secure in captivity as a result of it being one of the most prized aviary birds in the world.

The gouldian is truly a wonderful bird bred in a wide variety of colours which never cease to amaze. They are quite sturdy birds but can become stressed quite easily especially during travel. Gouldian finches are much more difficult to care for and breed than other types of exotic finches. So,

they are generally not recommended for the novice bird breeder who has little or no experience with birds.

## DESCRIPTION

The Gouldian finch is between 13 and 14 cm long. The three main types of gouldian finches that are commonly bred are the black-headed, the red-headed and the yellow-headed gouldian, with the black-headed normal gouldian being the most common bird found in the wild. There are three main chest band colours which are purple, which is considered the normal colour, white and lilac. Body colours vary from the green of the normal coloured bird to yellow, blue, or silver. It is a relatively quiet bird and its song cannot be heard over long distances.



## HOUSING

These finches should be kept in one or more pairs to satisfy their need for social contact. They will do well in both a mixed aviary as well as cage setups, both of which should be as spacious as possible. Maintenance of a certain temperature is extremely important for the gouldian finch and so, the use of an outdoor aviary during the colder months is not recommended. Different authors state that the humidity level should be maintained at or above 55 percent but not to exceed 70 percent. So, the use of a humidifier or dehumidifier, whichever is the case, is recommended. Cold, damp or windy locations are to be avoided at all costs.

## SEXING

The standard normal male gouldian finch has a grass green back with a purple breast. The breast and belly colours are usually used to determine sex. Males will have a brighter and darker colour of purple on the chest and the yellow of the belly will be darker and more intense when compared



with the female. The green back colour and the light blue around the face mask are also darker. All these colours are quite brilliant. The beak is an ivory colour with either a red or yellow tip, although this can vary depending on which mutation of gouldian one has. The male also has a noticeable longer centre tail feather when compared with that of the female. The males will also sing a nearly inaudible song and they will usually begin to sing long before they have completed their first moult.

The female has the same colourings as the male but paler in comparison and she generally gets a dark beak when in breeding condition. The young birds of both sexes resemble a hen bird with no head or chest colours. One will have to wait until they have completed their first moult to be able to distinguish between them. Their heads, sides and necks are ashy-grey changing to olive green on the backs, wings and tail feathers.

## **BREEDING**

The gouldian finch will generally breed towards the latter part of the year, although it is not out of the norm to breed at other times. When the birds come into breeding condition, one will notice certain physical changes. The cock will stand upright on his perch sporting a white beak, which would have gained a red or yellow tip by now. It will sing heartily, attracting as much attention as possible, while the other birds around him will be listening intently.

Gouldian finches do prefer to choose their own mate and at times do not breed if the male and female birds do not have a liking to each other. In a compatible pair, the



cock will approach the hen and start to sing. The male will then dance in front of the female, actually jumping and leaving the branch in the process. The female will twitch her tail towards her mate in response. Then, the nest building begins. The birds seem to prefer mating inside the nest box, and the eggs usually appear a short while afterwards.

These lay surprisingly large clutches of eggs. In fact, on average they lay between 5 and 8 eggs, which are white in colour. The pair share incubation duties during the day but quite often the male will stay outside during the night. At times, a clutch of eggs isn't incubated well and so it has to be fostered to Bengalese finches. After about 13 or 14 days of incubation, the young being to hatch. They are all pink and lack of fuzz. Some gouldian finches are notorious chick tossers; they incubate well but toss out the young soon after hatching, which will then have to be fostered to Bengalese finches.



The chicks of the gouldian finch are easily identified by the light reflecting nodes at the corners of their mouth. Both parents take on the role of feeding the chicks. After about 10 to 14 days, the female begins to sleep outside the box.

The chicks fledge at about 22 - 25 days. Young gouldian finches are somewhat dull in colour and do not show their true beauty until they have completed their first moult. They are dusky green with a cream belly, but this colouring depends on the type of gouldian one is breeding. The parents will continue to feed the chicks for an additional 2 - 3 weeks. The young birds are normally separated from their parents at around 43 days old. One must always check beforehand that they are eating well because when they are moved to a separate cage, the stress may cause them to stop eating. Moult will take place at



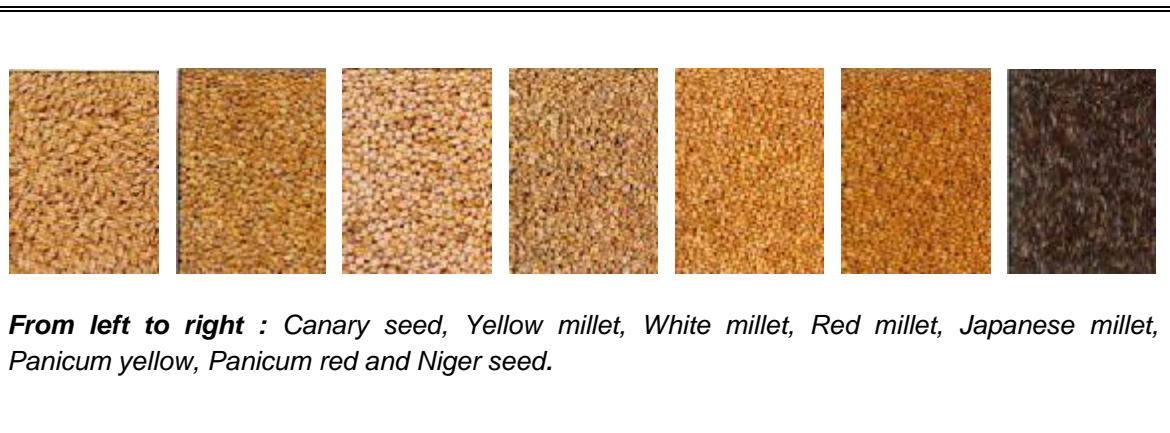
about 4 - 6 months and it can take up to 9 months for a juvenile to fully moult into adult plumage. During this critical time, it is good to give the birds a diet richer in protein.

## NESTING MATERIAL

Gouldian finches have no difficulty in raising young in either small cages or planted aviaries. They should be given the standard finch box, which has an entrance at the top. This allows them to get down low in the box and hide, thus feeling safer. They are not master nest builders and will use mostly rough materials with softer materials being ignored or even ejected if placed in the box. At times, no nesting material is used at all. The male will take on the majority of the nest building chores by bringing in material to the nest. The female will rearrange the material to her liking.

## DIET

The gouldian finch should be offered a mixture of canary seed, various types of millet and niger seed, all of which should be available in a good quality Foreign Finch Mix.



A good mixture of seeds is not completely sufficient to insure a balanced diet. So, they must also be given egg food, greens, mealworms and soaked millet. Grit and calcium in the form of crushed egg and oyster shells should always be available to them. Charcoal is a very good digestion balancer and should also be made available. Gouldian finches

also seem to have a greater dietary need for iodine than other birds. Insufficient iodine in their diet often results in a loss of feather around their head but once the iodine intake is increased, the feathers will most likely regrow. Fresh clean water should be present at all times in any birds' cage.

## **SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS**

Gouldian finches seem particularly susceptible to Air Sac mites. It is a highly contagious parasite which invades the respiratory system and which will eventually cause the bird's death. An infected bird seems lethargic and has difficulty in breathing, but a sure sign of this parasite is the clicking sound the bird makes while breathing. A drop of medication (ask local veterinarian for advice) on the bare skin between the shoulder blades should do the job.

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## **LINKS**

<http://www.gouldianfinch.co.uk/pages/home.html>