



Gouldian Finch Care

The Gouldian finch (*Chloebia gouldiae*) is widely regarded as being the most colourful finch in the world. It originates from the grasslands of the interior of Australia, but has been bred in captivity for many generations in captivity in the UK and Europe. Their beauty and the bright colouring attracts newcomers, but they are not the easiest of finches to care for and are not generally recommended for beginners.

The “wild” Gouldian Finch comes in three naturally occurring colour variants. These are the Black-headed, the Red-headed and the yellow or Orange-headed. The most common of these head colours in the wild is the Black-headed. The three colours are all the same species and will breed together with no issues. Over the generations fanciers have developed a wide range of variants affecting the body colour of the Gouldian Finch. The first to appear was the White-breasted. This is where the gorgeous deep purple colour of the chest is replaced by a striking pure white. The other colouring on the bird is unaffected in the White-breasted. The Gouldian is quite a stocky, large finch at 5 to 6 inches long and has an average lifespan in captivity of 5 to 8 years with proper care. Adult female Gouldians are usually easy to distinguish from males as their colours are much duller and paler.

The Gouldian is a bird that requires a higher temperature than many to keep in good health, although there are several strains that have been kept at lower temperatures for many generations and are therefore now in demand. The cost of heating a birdroom can be very high, so being able to maintain them 2 or 3 degrees lower makes economic sense. Although I have witnessed Gouldians playing in snow, they did have access to a warm, dry, draughtproof indoor flight to retire to when they wished to. They should not be kept outside without protection.

Gouldians are essentially a seedeater and a good, clean millet mix should be available at all times. This should be supplemented with fresh, dark leafy greens (clean washed Dandelion leaves are ideal) several times a week, plus slices of raw apples, grated carrots and either some hard-boiled egg or a proprietary eggfood. In addition to the egg a few mini-mealworms, or other livefood, will boost their protein levels when breeding.

Clean, fresh, water should always be available for drinking and they relish bathing water on a regular basis. A soluble Calcium supplement could be added to the drinking water.

Gouldians are usually housed in cages rather than aviaries. The cages should be placed off the floor in an area that is well-lit, I use specialist full-spectrum tubes connected to a timed dimmer switch. This allows me to extend the waking hours during the winter. I also provide a night light in case they get disturbed and would not otherwise be able to find their way back to their roost.

A rectangular flight cage, situated away from draughts, approximately 24"W x14"D x18"H, with metal bars spaced no greater than 3/8" apart, makes a good home for a pair of Gouldian finches and a clutch of youngsters. Perches should ideally be natural rather than dowelling as this will allow them to exercise their feet and find a thickness that is most comfortable for them. These perches should be well fixed, as fertility can drop if the perches being loose makes mating difficult. Do not place food or water containers under perches.

Nest boxes should be made of plywood and have a liftable lid to allow for easy inspection. The boxes should be attached to the front of the cages. Coconut fibre, soft dry grasses, animal hair and small soft feathers should be provided as a nesting material. A typical clutch consists of 5 eggs, which will hatch after 12 days of incubation. This will start after the 3rd or 4th egg is laid. Youngsters will be in the nest for about 3 weeks and will be another 3 or 4 weeks before they are feeding themselves and can be classed as independent enough to be removed from their parents. Young Gouldians are very dull and grey for up to 12 months, when they moult into adult plumage. It is during this time that you should pay special attention to them as this is a very stressful time for them and they can lose a lot of weight or in the worst case, die.

Many breeders increase the productivity of their Gouldian pairs by removing their eggs and fostering them to a pair of Bengalese finches, who will raise the chicks admirably. The Gouldians will then go ahead and lay another clutch within a couple of weeks. The hens can become low on Calcium with laying so many eggs in such a short space of time, so additional sources of this mineral should be provided. A pair should be allowed to raise at least one clutch of chicks each year and you should not expect the hen to lay more than 3 clutches of eggs without a rest period of several months.

Gouldians usually do very well at shows as their bright colours often catch the eye of the judge. As is the case with many birds, they should not be exhibited too often or they will become stressed.