

Gouldian Finch

FAMILY: *Estreldidae*

GENUS: *Erythrura*

SPECIES: *gouldiae*

OTHER NAMES: Desert Parrotfinch, Painted Finch, Gouldian Grassfinch, Purple-breasted Finch, Purple-chested Finch, Rainbow Finch, Rainbow Bird, Lady Gould Finch.

Description:

Medium to large strikingly coloured finch. Male's wings and back are green, rump and upper tail coverts blue. Tail is long, pointed and black. Crown, face, chin and cheeks black, breast purple. The belly is yellow, tending to cream toward the vent and undertail. Eyes are brown, the bill is horny white with a coral red tip. Legs and feet are yellow.

Females resemble males, but are much duller. Immature birds are generally an olive brown above and grey below and have blue nodules around the gape.

This finch is the most sociable of all the grassfinches and is strongly gregarious in all its activities. It is not surprising therefore, that they are usually encountered in very large flocks. Gouldian Finches are thought to be migratory, dispersing southward to breed during the monsoon and retiring to coastal lowlands during the dry period.

When feeding, Gouldian Finches come down close to the ground but seldom actually reach the ground. Instead, they prefer to harvest seeds directly from the plant and to take insects on the wing. When disturbed, the Gouldian Finch will take to the tops of trees. It also roosts in treetops.

Length: 130-140mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Status:

In the wild - endangered.

In captivity - secure (one of the world's most popular aviary birds).

Threatening Processes:

Fire and trapping for the avicultural trade have been implicated in the decline of this species.

Distribution:

Across tropical Australia from the Kimberley to Cape York. The Gouldian Finch has declined drastically since early this century and is now considered to be rare east of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Habitat:

Tropical savannah woodland.

Diet:

Seeds and insects (especially when breeding).

In captivity, a good quality finch seed mix is the mainstay of the diet. This should be supplemented with greenfood (eg half ripened seed heads of grasses or most other herbs from the garden such as Shepherd's Purse, Dandelion and Chickweed, or any vegetables such as silverbeet, lettuce, etc.).

Many aviculturalists provide live food (often mealworms) during the breeding season although others have had good results without it. Lastly, it is important to provide birds with ample grit (fine) and perhaps cuttle-fish where possible.

Breeding:

December-April. The nest is a rudimentary structure made of grass and located in a hollow branch of a tree or in a termite mound. (This is the only Australian finch which nests exclusively in hollow branches or termite mounds).

Both sexes are involved in constructing the nest and incubation is shared during the course of the day. The female broods at night, with the male remaining close by. The young are also cared for by both parents

In captivity Gouldian Finches will accept a variety of nesting receptacles ranging including woven baskets and boxes.

Courtship Display:

The male turns toward the female and commences to wipe his bill on the perch. This increases in rapidity until he commences a bobbing dance whilst ruffing his feathers and holding his entire body erect. Often this is accompanied by crowing. The female eventually signals her readiness to copulate by crouching down and quivering her tail.

Sexual Maturity:

Becomes sexually mature at the age of about 9 months, but most birds are most productive from their second year onward.

Clutch:

4-8 pure white eggs (17mm x 13mm). Incubation period: 12-14 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days. In warm climates these birds produce multiple broods.

Independent young should not be removed from the parents until about 4 weeks after fledging.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Two colour mutations are reported for this species: a black-breasted form (solid black between bars) and a fawn form.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

Double-barred Finches will be quite happy in suspended cages or breeding cabinets. These should have at least the following dimensions: 700mm(long) x 400mm x 400mm. These birds are at their best in larger planted aviaries. Such an aviary should provide plenty of shelter and should probably have a roof over at least half its area.

Black-throated finches will readily share an aviary with most other finches (eg. zebra, painted, parrot, etc etc), quail, doves and even neophema parrots.

Species Specific Problems

This species tends to be prone to airsac mite and scaly mite. Stress and obesity are also common problems encountered with this bird.

