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## Zebra Finch

*Serinus canaria*



### Necessities:

- Cage
- Bedding
- Seed/Zupreem® Pellets
- Mineral block or Cuttlebone
- Millet spray
- Mealworms

### Extras:

- Perches
- Toys
- Treats

### General:

Originally from Australia (where they are considered a pest), they live in large flocks on open grasslands with very few trees or bushes. Because they come from an area with a very short rainy season, they are the "mouse" of the bird world.: they are totally geared for reproduction. Almost as soon as the babies fledge, their parents are working on another clutch of babies. They have an average lifespan of 8-15 years or even longer on pellet diets.

### Handling/Exercise:

Zebra finches, like any other bird, are social, curious, energetic, playful and mischievous. They are not recommended for handling. Instead they should be kept in groups with lots of room.

They love toys and swings! Any thing with small beads or strings or even hay. Variety is important and different birds can have different tastes. Switch them out regularly and check them for stray strings or broken parts. They can get bored, so change the toys and try new ones on occasion. You can always reintroduce older toys later and the birds will think it's a new one.

### Housing & Bedding:

The cage should be large enough to allow the birds to spread their wings and move freely about the cage even with an assortment of toys. 12"x 14"x16" would be the absolute smallest. They do the best in very large flight cages. Bigger is always better! The cage should be placed in a well-lit, smoke-free, draft-free environment away from cats or dogs, outside of the kitchen and not in direct sunlight. Remember that they are very social and do not like to be away from the family.

Set up the cage the way you'll want it with the food, water and toys. We recommend a staggered arrangement of the perches. i.e.: the lowest ones towards the front on the lowest section of the cage close to the food dishes (this keeps the top wire of the cage attached to the bottom plastic base) and the next perch up on the next cross bar about four inches further back and at least four inches away from the back of the cage (this helps to prevent their tail from becoming frayed from rubbing against the back). If the seed cups have covers, remove them until the birds are comfortable and eating well. Initially it is helpful to put a millet spray on the side of the topmost perch and to cover up that half of the cage with a towel for a little security. Do not use newspapers on the bottom of the cage as the ink is toxic and it will discolor the bird and cage. We recommend using paper towels and changing them daily. This way you can check their droppings each day. A change in their droppings can be the first sign of an illness. You can also use Carefresh® paper bedding, but it should be changed at least once a week. Most cages come with a grate at the bottom to prevent the birds from picking at food that has been polluted or from chewing on their own droppings, but the grate must be kept clean and can be difficult to remove from the cage. If you cannot keep it clean, just remove it, use paper towels and make sure to change the paper daily. We recommend using a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach and 9 parts water) when cleaning the cage. Other cleaning products leave toxic residues. Always rinse thoroughly. This should be done at least once a week. Keep the box that we sent the birds home in to put the birds in when you clean their cage with this solution.

Place the birds very gently in the cage. The box we send the birds home in has an end marked for opening. Place this end up close to the door, have someone hold open the door and open the end into the cage. The birds will fly into the light. A scared bird in a new environment can hit a wall hard. It is very important that they begin eating within 24 hours. If they do not begin to eat within this time PLEASE call us immediately! Birds do not store enough body fat to go for extended periods of time without eating and drinking.

### **Diet:**

The birds should have fresh food and water available to them at all times. Use only filtered water and change daily. We recommend filtered water because birds are very susceptible to the additives in tap water and the bacteria that makes it through the system. If the bird is still on seed it should be freshened daily by cleaning out the empty hulls. Birds have been known to starve with a full dish of seed just because they couldn't see the seed under all of the empty hulls. Pellets should be replenished and fruits and veggies replaced. Here at the store we try to get all birds moved off of seed by mixing Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets into their seed, eventually moving them off of seed entirely. Once they are solidly on the Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets we will slowly move them onto either the Zupreem® Natural Blend, Lafebbers® or Roudybush® pellets. Pellet diets are much healthier for your pet and can double their lifespan! Seeds are like eating cheesecake day in and day out. For more information refer to our information sheet "Feeding for a Healthier Bird".

Here is a list of foods that we feed to our zebra finches: Finch diet, Zupreem®, Lafebbers® or Roudybush® pellets, Crazycorn® cooking mix, whole grain breads, oranges, apples, millet spray, cuttlebone, romaine lettuce, kale, collard greens and mustard greens, mealworms and small crickets. You will find many other suggestions in your book and our web page. Suggested reading: Barron's® "The New Zebra finch Handbook."

### **Heating & Lighting:**

Zebra finches do not like to go below 68° F at night and can overheat at 90° F. If you are worried about temperatures please call us so we can help you. We also recommend covering the cage at night so the birds are not startled by car headlights flashing by or sudden cool drafts.

Birds generally do not require extra lighting other than the ambient light in the room, but it should be light during the day and dark at night to allow for a normal sleep and eating cycle. If you feel that your home is too dark your bird can benefit from UVB and UVA lighting designed for reptiles.

### **Health & Wellbeing:**

It is very important to monitor your bird's eating habits and its droppings for any change. If you have just gotten your bird from us and you feel that the bird is not eating enough or the droppings are loose or that it is inactive in any way PLEASE call us immediately! We have a 2-week health guarantee on all of our pets. If you have had your bird longer, you are still welcome to call us with any questions. Act quickly! Birds by nature hide all signs of illness. By the time you notice a change, the situation can be very serious.

Probably the biggest problem with Zebra finches is feather plucking. There are many reasons for this and they are very good at it. The first reason is for breeding. Even same sex pairs will do it. Here is a list of different things you can do to discourage it: First, you can give them a nest and allow them to breed, which could have you with a whole flock in just a few months. If you don't want babies, you can replace the eggs with small craft eggs after the female has started to actually incubate them. You can give them different types of fresh sprouts (NOT lima, fava or mung beans) or grasses or hay. You can save their molted feathers to use as a distraction by putting them back in the cage. You can try moving the cage to a slightly quieter location or giving them a bigger cage. You can also give them more protein by giving them mealworms or small crickets. Or you can separate them for a few days.

Also be aware of airborne toxins and fumes such as air fresheners, incense, fumes from household cleaners, neighbors spraying insecticide, fumes from home improvements such as new carpets, paint, glues, wood floor finishes, etc. For these reasons also we do not recommend leaving your bird alone for a weekend in a closed up home. If you purchased your bird from us, we do provide boarding accommodations. Just give us a call! Our favorite veterinarian is Dr. Obegi at Allpet Vet - 206-365-1102.