

Basics of Breeding Gouldians

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These days the husbandry of breeding the Gouldian Finch is well understood, making it easy to breed providing basic rules are followed. Although, as we all know, it can be a very difficult species if treated in a conventional fashion.

There is nothing wrong with keeping a few Gouldians in an ornamental mixed species aviary but, obviously, you should not expect to breed except accidentally. These notes, however, are for the person who is serious about breeding Gouldians and are somewhat uncompromising.

What Not To Do

Colonies. Do not try to colony breed Gouldians. In a colony, only the dominant pair or pairs will breed. Depending upon the number of birds per square foot, those at the bottom of the pecking order are likely to die from stress.

Outdoors. Do not breed them outdoors. Gouldians do not adapt well to changing weather.

Hygiene. Do not shortcut on hygiene. Gouldians have low resistance to bacterial contamination.

Pampering. Do not pamper Gouldians with a large variety of foods and avoid the "drug store" syndrome. In the wild, Gouldians feed off of only one species of sorghum grass and a few insects (20% of the diet). This is a species which can easily be killed by kindness by feeding too rich a diet. Remember, it has spent millions of years adapting to life in a very harsh environment.

Success? Inevitably, you will talk to people who have broken these rules and are still claiming success. First of all, how do you measure success? Is success breeding 12 plus youngsters per pair year after year? Or is success just managing to get one or two

youngsters "onto the peg?" You will have to set your own standards. Sheer behavioral diversity will ensure that a few birds breed, no matter what the conditions, preferring to ignore Mike Fidler's rules.

What To Do

The Gouldian is an ideal avicultural subject well suited to standard bird room conditions.

Temperature in the bird room should be maintained at a minimum of 63° F. Humidity is unimportant within very wide tolerances.

Cages can be any type. Most of my breeding pairs are housed in 19 in. cube cages which I suggest is a minimum. Anything from that size up is suitable and there is no advantage or benefit in any particular size or shape.

Nests. Gouldians use any kind of nesting receptacle. In the wild, no two nests are the same. However, more consistent self-rearing results will be obtained with nest boxes that are approximately 4½ in. square by 11 in. long. These can be mounted either vertically or horizontally, the birds do not care.

Diet. The basic diet should consist of a standard plain foreign finch mix. My own mix is 25% canary, 25% white millet, 25% red millet, and 25% Japanese millet. This is not particularly better than any other mix but does minimize wastage from uneaten seed.

Soft food. Provide a proprietary 16% protein egg food or soft food mix during molting and breeding to which a small amount of multi-vitamins may be beneficially added.

Grit. Gouldians need grit. I know that there has been some debate in the U.S.A. as to whether grit is necessary, but, please believe me, for consistent results feed grit to all Australian finches.

Water. It is important to supply fresh water every day in clean containers. Gouldians have a low tolerance to common bacteria and contaminated water containers in a warm room are the perfect media for breeding bacteria.

Separate. Better results are obtained if cocks and hens are kept separate in larger flights or cages while not breeding. During this period they should be kept on a basic maintenance diet and

given soft food only once a week. To bring them into breeding condition, start feeding soft food at the rate of ½ teaspoon per bird per day. Within six weeks your birds will be in breeding condition.

Pairing. Pair up your cocks and hens. It matters not who goes in the cage first. Put some dried grass or coconut fiber into the nest box to give then a start and leave an adequate pile of nesting material in the cage. It is important to let them build their own nest as it is a part of the pair bonding process and also helps bring both partners into breeding condition.

Eggs. Within a further three to six weeks you should have eggs. If you are just starting out with Gouldians and have just a few pairs, it may be better not to inspect the nest box once brooding has begun. Although most pairs are highly tolerant, the occasional pair will desert if interfered with.

The eggs hatch after 16 days at which stage start to increase the amount of soft food provided. By the tenth day after hatching, they will be consuming three to four teaspoons per day depending upon the number of nestlings.

Juveniles will fledge on the 27th or 28th day and may be weaned at 35 days.

Now what? Provide the parents with a fresh clean nest box on the 30th day as they will be getting ready to recycle and have often built their new nest and begun to lay before the juveniles are weaned. Do not attempt to halt this recycling in the mistaken belief that you are giving the hen a rest. It is entirely normal for them to recycle and holding them back will only convince them that conditions are no longer suitable for breeding, bringing on an interim molt.

Your only problem is likely to be the failure of the parents to rear. This is largely due to the number which are being fostered in today's aviculture. If they fail, let them have another try. Pairs which fail the first or even the second time often succeed on the next.

There are husbandry techniques which can be employed to enhance your success in self-rearing but that is the subject of a future article. ➔