

The Gouldian Finch: *a history*

by Peggy Dalrymple, Galesberg, IL

In northern Australia centuries ago, aborigines were probably the first humans to revere the bird that John Gould named "Lady Gould" after his wife. After all, the aboriginal people didn't pollute the water holes, destroy the habitat, or trap the bird for commercial gain.

The encroachment of civilization has not been kind to the brightly colored bird that so fascinates aviculturists the world over. This bird that decorates our living rooms and enhances aviaries in such diverse places as our back yards, nursing homes, and even gaming casinos, is and has been for years, declining in the wild.

Australians are making efforts to keep the Gouldian Finch alive and well in its native habitat. They are doing field censuses, maintaining clean artificial water holes, and have banned most trapping. There may be, however, many unknown causes for the birds' decline and, unfortunately, illegal trapping may be one of them.

Although the aviculturists' desire for the birds, and the trappers financial hunger, have no doubt contributed to the birds declining status, aviculture may eventually be the salvation of the species.

Today's avicultural subject – the



A Red-headed, White-breasted mutation of the already colorful Gouldian Finch.

Gouldian Finch raised in captivity and offered for sale at bird marts across the country – is a changed subject. Like many other captive bred species, today's Gouldian is deviating from the norm of its wild ancestors. It is becoming larger, seldom receives or shows any inclination to accept the dietary preferences of the wild birds, and, for increased production, its eggs are often fostered to other species leading to a much disputed debate as to the continued ability of the Gouldian to even feed its own young.

Gouldians in the U.S. today have a history that encompasses four continents. Documentation shows that Australian wild-trapped Gouldians entered the U.S. market up to the time of the Australian ban on wildlife exports in the early 1960s. As early as the 1930s, Japan had a lucrative export business in Gouldians, many of which

came into the U.S.A. During the 1970s and '80s, Western Europe emerged as the primary supplier of Gouldian Finches to the U.S.

These European birds, the true predecessors of our aviary inhabitants of today, had several strikes against them before they ever arrived into the hands of the bird enthusiasts who purchased them.

Most European-bred Gouldians came from the bird rooms of generally small scale breeders in Holland and Belgium. The U.S. importers at this time required large quantities of birds to fill their (by now required) quarantine facilities.

European dealers became adept at accumulating birds from many breeders to meet the demand. Assembling birds from various aviaries and environments spread diseases in the accumulated flocks. Compounded with the

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stress of transport and quarantine, even the well-bred European Gouldians arrived in somewhat delicate condition.

From a continent where the seasons are the reverse of ours, from the commerce of Japanese traders, and from European entrepreneurs, and travelling in boxes that held up to 100 birds for days – our captive Gouldians are fortunate to still be around. Remarkably, some of these birds lived to thrive and breed in U.S. cages and aviaries.

The beautiful color mutations of the Gouldian Finch came to the U.S. from the Western European breeders. While they may have originated elsewhere, the diligent breeders of Europe bred them and sold them to U.S. dealers and breeders. Importing the expensive mutations into the U.S. was a challenge, not only because of the expense of the birds, but also because of the quarantine regulations. Quarantine was expensive and a risk to the health of such an easily stressed bird since quarantine facilities often held thousands of birds at a time.

Gouldian Finches available in the U.S. today are primarily domestically bred. There are no wild-trapped birds, no Japanese imports, and very few European-bred Gouldians on the U.S. market today. This is an admirable accomplishment for the dedicated Gouldian breeders in America – past and present. Very few finches in aviculture have become so well established as is the Gouldian today.

Whether it was the quest for commercial gain or the real love of the bird itself that resulted in its entry into avicultural history, the bird that Australia now strives to preserve in the wild shows few signs of impending extinction in aviculture. ➤

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Veterinary Viewpoints

*Edited by Amy Worell, DVM, ABVP
Woodland Hills, CA*

Question #1: Through the years, I have been to several different avian veterinarians. Each vet recommends different tests for my birds. I appreciate that there are different reasons for doing these tests, but I really can't figure out which tests I should do each year on my birds. I have three pet birds, which I dearly love. Since there are several vets that answer these questions, I thought I would ask and hear what each of you has to say. So, My question is what tests would I do on my birds each year and why?

T. Study, Virginia

Answer #1: If your birds appear healthy and you feel that they are stable and a complete physical examination and careful history do not reveal any problems, I would, as a minimum, recommend a yearly gram stain of the upper respiratory tract and of the lower digestive tract, and every other

year a complete blood count. Needless to say, if there were any abnormality found I would go further with testing and evaluation.

*James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA*

Answer #2: I am going to assume that these are routine checkup requests. If so, the tests recommended might vary with the history. For example, if one of your pets is a macaw (or other high risk species) acquired within the last two years, in our area we might recommend screening tests for signs of proventricular dilatation disease (PDD), especially since you have two other birds at risk. Yearly weights, droppings evaluation, test feedings (a seed meal instead of pellets), radiographs, blood tests for white count, albumin, and lipase/amylase are used at our facility. Crop biopsies are used if any results are suspicious. Another factor important in established pets is

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