

# Handfed Gouldians . . .

## Believe It or Not!

by Dr. David N. Mellard  
Atlanta, Georgia

In late April, a friend called me with a newly hatched finch — species unknown — that had been tossed from a nest. After giving the standard instructions on keeping the bird warm, 1-2 hour feedings, my formula, and a good luck wish, I expected to hear of the unsuccessful attempt. Four weeks later I met the most charming shafttail finch named Beaumont after the city in Texas. At the party I attended, Beaumont visited every individual with a friendly barrage of chatter along with

a great deal of searching and pecking for tidbits. I was even more amazed by the success of my friend since this is his first bird.

With his success fresh in my mind, I decided I would handfeed the next finch that came along. After all, he wasn't even a novice, and I've been into birds for six years. How vain. After transferring six Gouldian eggs to a pair of societies, the tension began to rise. Are they fertile; will they hatch? *Finally*, five hatched on May 15. On May 22,

two were pulled and placed in a five gallon aquarium. The heat source consisted of an aquarium heater placed in a small water bottle with the temperature regulated to around 35-37°C near the source.

Seven day old Gouldians are just beginning to show pin feathers on the wing tips but nowhere else. I was a wreck. Having handfed cockatiels for several years, I knew what a full crop looked like for a cockatiel, but how full is full for a Gouldian finch, especially since they continue to beg mercifully even with a full crop?

So, I started out slowly giving only a small amount per feeding the first day or two while keeping a close eye on when the crop emptied. The same principle applies to Gouldians as to cockatiels — feed only after the crop empties. After three days of successful feeding, the remaining three Gouldians were pulled on May 25. For the next two weeks, feeding occurred every 2-3 hours with no feedings from midnight to 7 a.m. A man needs his beauty rest. All five did superbly.

I tried several different utensils. The first was the typical eye-dropper which did fine until I lost it at a cockatiel show in Dallas. On the ride home, the babies were fed with a plastic coffee stirrer.

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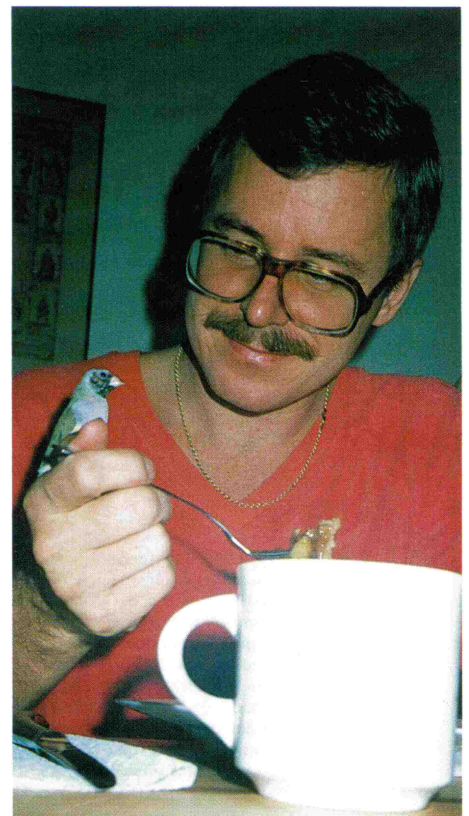
Photos by the author



*The young Gouldian finches learned to fly to and hover near the feeding syringe.*



*Cupped hands make a perfect bathtub for Peaches.*







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Back in Houston, I now switched to the plastic pipettors with the tapered ends. This utensil proved to be a little more messy and hence difficult since I often got as much on their faces as in their beaks.

Since the drugstore I visited did not carry small, glass eyedroppers, I switched to 1 cc tuberculin syringes which turned out to be ideal. As the babies became more feathered, they were moved farther away from the heat source. Even with a thermometer, this process was total guesswork. By June 10, the babies were completely feathered showing an army green back, a soft cream-yellow abdomen, a cream-brown chest, and a grayish-green head.

The babies were now placed in a small, covered cage. Feeding times became much more active as the babies were placed in a plastic cup to be fed. Soon, they learned to perch on the edge and then to fly around my hands and head in search of the syringe. At times feedings became rather frenzied as excited babies sat on my fingers or on the syringe with mouths agape.

At one point I added a society finch to their cage, while still continuing to handfeed three times a day, in hopes that the babies would learn to crack seed by example. Wrong move. Within two days, the society was happily feeding the entire lot. I allowed this to go on for a few days and then decided that I wasn't going to lose out to a society. Jealousy overcame me, and I pulled that nursemaid to continue the handfeeding myself.

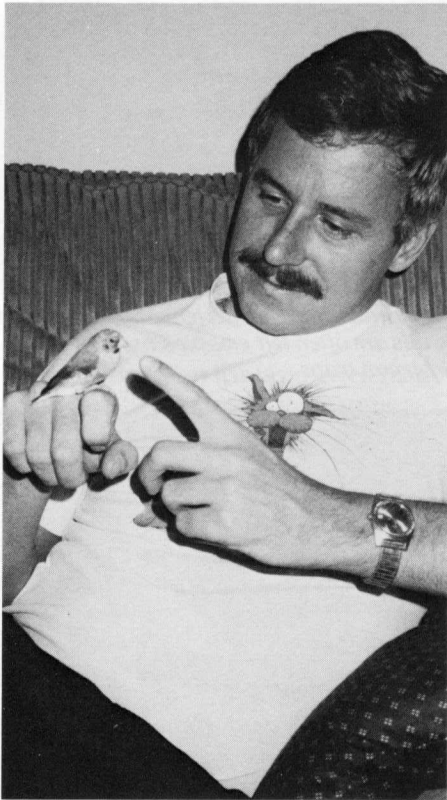
Unfortunately, two of the babies were lost when I had to leave them with an experienced bird friend while I went to Atlanta to look for a house. A week after my return, the babies started weaning themselves as they became less and less interested in the syringe and more and more interested in exploring. Feeding became guesswork again as I approached a gaping mouth only to be foiled at the last second by an uninterested, closed beak. Sound familiar?

It was intriguing to note personalities especially as the fledging process proceeded. One baby hung around long enough to be fed and then darted off to the cage or to explore while everyone else *usually* remained at the feeding station. This individual later became very untame and has since been returned to a holding cage.

A second baby, a real sweetheart, was sold for \$100 to a family who already had one Gouldian and wanted a companion. I tried to impress on them the

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's closest state coordinator. There is a state coordinator listing with phone numbers elsewhere in this publication.

rarity of a handfed, fingertame Gouldian. They kept asking, "Does handfed mean we still have to feed it from our hands?" I was rewarded after calling to check on the bird's progress by ohs and ahs on how *tame* this bird really was. Now they know what handfed means.



*Peaches, the tame Gouldian finch, likes to lounge around the living room.*

The third baby became "Peaches" and was kept for my pleasure. Peaches is a very quiet, demure Gouldian who enjoys sitting on my finger or shoulder with only an occasional flight to explore. It is very rewarding to see her flying around a room and then returning to me.

With the proper utensils and a good formula, I consider week-old Gouldians easier than cockatiels to feed and certainly just as rewarding a pet. My impression is that handfed shafttails are energetic and inquisitive while handfed Gouldians are quiet and docile. I plan to handfeed other species if given the opportunity so as to determine some type of broad generalization on personality. Melba finches and fire finches are currently on eggs. I am certainly glad I made the effort to feed Peaches.

Never again do I want to hear that women are better at handfeeding than men. I know two men who have handfed finches, one from the egg. Top that one, ladies. ●



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