



Commonly asked questions - and answers...

What finches should I start with? If you are new to the hobby, it is best that you start with finch species that do not require particular diets, special housing, or particular care. Some species make a great introduction to the hobby - Zebra finches, Bengalese finches and Canaries are relatively easy to keep and are readily available from pet shops.

What other finches could I breed if I have some experience in keeping birds, and have a well-set up large aviary?

- Gouldian finch
- Fire finch
- Cuban finch
- Ribbon Finch

and other harder-to-keep species as you grow in ability and experience.

Is it possible to catch naturalized finches and keep them in captivity?

Yes, it is possible to catch and hold species such as Greenfinch or Goldfinch in captivity, but few people do. Wild birds in captivity are often highly stressed and unhappy. It is far better to keep aviary bred birds that have been bred and kept for generations. Aviary bred Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Yellow Hammers and Redpolls are available.

How many introduced finch species are there in New Zealand?

There were many introduced finch species held in New Zealand for many years, but the number has been in decline over recent decades. A 2008 assessment estimated that finch species were classified as follows:

- 45 unknown or presumed extinct in New Zealand

- 10 most threatened
- 6 threatened
- 19 other.

The number of finch species found in New Zealand has at least halved between 1985 and 2022.

Can I keep more than one pair of Cuban finches in the same flight or aviary?

Cuban finches are very territorial and may kill other Cuban finches if kept together - especially in small aviaries. It is best to keep one pair per aviary, and to remove juvenile Cuban finches once they are independent, or at an age where they are capable of breeding.

What is the minimum size area needed to house a pair of finches?

In general, the bigger the area the better. A well-set-up aviary is likely to be more successful for breeding purposes than a cage. In addition, some finch species live in a group or colony rather than just as a pair. An aviary will need to have an area that is particularly sheltered from the weather.

What equipment do I need to include in my aviary to encourage breeding?

A variety of nesting materials (straw, twigs, feathers) and nesting containers at various levels and styles in the aviary. Always have more nest boxes or containers than pairs of birds.

Housing and transport

Should I release a new bird straight into its new cage/aviary when I bring it home?

Some finches can be easily stressed. They need time to get over their journey home, as well as familiarize themselves with their new environment. You may be able to leave them in their transport cage for a short time next to their new cage/aviary. Allow them to see and hear their new surroundings. Avoid releasing your new bird into an aviary late in the

day. Allow time for it to become confident in exploring new surroundings, including feeding and desirable roosting areas. Watch the behavior of your bird, and any interactions with others that may be of concern.

Ideally if you have a new bird you also have a well set up cage for quarantine (allows separate worming and visual inspections for a couple of weeks) to keep your existing birds safe.

How do I transport my finch so that it arrives safely?

If you are transporting finches more than a few times or over a long distance, then consider making or buying a transport cage. These are generally the size of a shoe-box, and contain an entry point, mesh on one side and contain spill-resistant secured dishes for water/seed. In general, your finch will be less stressed if the transport cage is covered, or the finch cannot see out.

Health

How often do I need to worm my finches? Recommended every six months. Avoid dosing the birds with wormers in the middle of winter, or the middle of the breeding season.

What are the basic things I need to do to look after my finches?

Provide good quality food with supplements including a range of greens. Refresh water every day. Provide clean, dry living quarters that are warm and sheltered from the wind if outside.

How do I tell if my finch is not well?

Your finch may be sick if it is not as active as normal, is fluffed up, and sitting low on its perch, does not make vocalizations, is losing feathers, has runny droppings, or does not eat.

What is a hospital cage?

A hospital cage is normally made from a wooden box in order to retain heat, and may have a plastic front cover. A light bulb or other low emitting heat source is placed in a lower

section of the cage. The heat rises up through vents or mesh to the main section of the cage to provide warmth to a sick bird.

Diet and feeding

Seed imported into New Zealand is heat-treated so that foreign plants do not get established.

What is the impact on the quality of the seed when fed to finches and other birds?

Heat-treated seed won't sprout, and loses nutritional value for the bird. This has an impact on breeding success, in terms of fertility of adults and eggs, and survival of chicks.

Other than seed and greens, do some finch species need live food like insects?

Yes, several finch species eat insects or other sources of protein to supplement their main component of their diet. Some species require these supplements for breeding to be successful, and to help them through their seasonal molt. Other food sources include corn, and bee pollen.