

Canaries

The canary is the smallest seed eating finch. It weighs approximately 1/2 ounce and measures about 5 inches long. Wild canaries do not show the tremendous colour variations found in the domestic birds available in pet shops; they are primarily a greenish yellow. The wild canaries have been bred over a number of centuries to develop birds both bright and distinctive in colour, as well as birds that produce a pleasant song. Years ago, the best singing canaries were bred in the Harz Mountains of Germany. Generally, only the male canary will sing, but the female will make pleasant sounds.

HOUSING: Since canaries, being members of the finch family, are relatively small birds, they can live in a comparatively small space. The bars of the canary cage can be either horizontal or vertical, but the bars of the cage should be narrow enough to prevent the canary from sticking his head out. This active bird should have plenty of perches located in such a position so no portion of the bird's tail, wings or head will touch another perch. The perches should not be located above open food or water dishes. The perches should allow the feet to encircle them completely. You can use sanded perch covers, if you wish, to help keep the nails trimmed.

Food and water dishes that were purchased with the cage can be used. These can be covered. Treats can be fed in smaller treat cups to help provide a more varied and balanced diet.

Since canaries are avid bathers, a cage bird bath should be provided.

You can locate the cage where your pet can get some indirect, natural sunlight. Never keep the cage in direct sunlight for extended periods of time because this can cause dehydration or heat stroke. Keep the cage off the floor to prevent drafts. A quiet area of the home will provide the bird with a sense of security. Cover the cage at night, because birds roost at dusk and a canary will not sing in the dark.

CAGE MAINTENANCE: The cage should be cleaned thoroughly once a week using soap and warm water to clean the bars. In addition, the bottom of the cage should be cleaned daily if possible, replacing the gravel or gravel paper. The seed cups must be checked daily to ensure the availability of fresh seed at all times. The empty hulls should be removed (you can hold the seed in the palm of

your hand and gently blow the empty hulls away) and the seed replaced. The water container should be washed and rinsed carefully and refilled with clean water. Do not wash the perches, but clean them using a special perch cleaning brush.

FEEDING: Clean, fresh water should always be available. Make sure to check it more frequently during hot, humid days.

Birds have a very high metabolism, which means that their bodies use, and need, tremendous amounts of food in comparison to their body weight. Members of the finch family can eat about one-third of their body weight daily. Canaries feed primarily on seeds and fruits. A basic, high quality canary food containing primarily canary seed, rape seed and other assorted seeds, should be available at all times. Many types of specialized canary foods are available including song food, moulting food, greens and grains, and more. All birds require grit in order to properly digest their food. This can be sprinkled on the bottom of the cage or supplied in a treat cup.

Variety in the diet is very helpful in maintaining healthy, colourful birds. Canaries cannot forage for food in captivity as they would do in nature, so it is up to the pet owner to provide the variety in their diet. This can include green vegetable tops (avoid lettuce), small slices of fruit or even hard-boiled egg yolks. Remember to feed these treats in small quantities and remove any uneaten portions to avoid spoilage.

Cuttlebones will provide a source of calcium and minerals that are important components in bone and feather development. Food supplements and vitamins can be added to the food or water.

LIFESTYLE: Canaries, like other members of the finch family, are extremely delicate birds. They should not be handled unless absolutely necessary. One such occasion is when the nails may need trimming. Gently hold the canary in your hand with the feet exposed. Carefully extend the foot and trim the nails using a sharp pair of scissors or preferably a nail trimmer made specifically for birds. If you hold the foot up to the light, you will see the "quick". Be sure to avoid cutting the quick; if cut it will bleed.

Do not allow the canary to fly around the home. Open doors, windows and uncovered water sources could be hazardous to the canary.

The sexes are difficult to distinguish except for the fact that only the male will sing. If you have a compatible pair, provide them with a nest for canaries and attach it to the cage. A special breeding cage should be used with a wire and solid partition in the centre. Keep them separated for a few days then remove the solid partition so they can see each other. When they are ready to breed, the male will sing a distinctive mating song. At this point the wire partition is removed. Provide the female with nesting material, or nesting hair. The female usually lays 3 to 4 eggs that will hatch in about 2 weeks. The young will remain in the nest for about 3 more weeks until they become fully feathered. They are dependent on their parents for food for an additional few weeks.

HEALTH: If you are attentive to the normal activity and the amount of food consumed, you can easily determine if your canary is feeling well. The most dangerous problem canaries, and most caged birds, face is drafts. Inactivity, diarrhea or shallow breathing are all signs of potential problems. Many products are available for combating bacterial or intestinal problems.

Prevent mites and lice from attacking your canary by using a bird cage guard. Washes and powders are also available to keep these problems minimized.

The best prevention when dealing with caged birds is careful, attentive care. A proper diet and cages located in suitable locations will help you keep a healthy, active pet for many years.

There are many varieties of canaries, some are: the Yorkshire, Border Fancy, Red Factor and Roller. Each has been bred to provide a distinctive song, a particular body shape, or colour.