

# Caring for your zebra finch

**How to keep pet zebra finches  
healthy and happy**



**Notcutts**  
GARDEN INSPIRATION SINCE 1897

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## Are zebra finches right for me?

Zebra finches are lively, chirpy little birds and one of the most attractive pet birds. With their intricate markings and inquisitive character, they are a firm favourite for an aviary or indoor cage.

Zebra finches originally come from Australia and can live up to 10 years with good care. Zebra finches live happily in groups and are easy to look after.

If kept indoors your zebra finch will need regular exercise outside their cage, preferably during the daytime when they are most active.

## Choosing a new pet zebra finch

When selecting your finch, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Bright and alert
- Clear eyes and nostrils
- Clean vent
- Feathers flush to the body
- Steady breathing
- Active, free movement
- Firm beak with no cracks
- Healthy claws and feet

## The first few days

Your new bird's cage should be set up before you bring him home.

When you get home, carefully place your finch in the cage and then leave him alone to adjust to his new surroundings.

Speak to him gently so that he becomes accustomed to your voice at feeding times. You will need to replace his food and water and clean the cage liner during this time but do so slowly and calmly.

Finches joining an established group of birds should be added in pairs. Your new birds will need a period of quarantine in a separate but nearby cage. This gives time for the birds to get used to each other. After a week, bring the cage closer and monitor the birds' behaviour.

When introducing your new bird for the first time in its permanent home, put food stations at both sides of the cage so that the birds can feed separately.

There may be some bickering and flapping at first but this is normal. If the birds fight each other you may need to keep them apart for longer and try re-introducing them in a week or so.

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## Creating a happy home

Zebra finches are happy in an outdoor aviary or an indoor cage.

If you're keeping your finches in a cage, it should be as large as possible to allow space for free flight.

When choosing where your cage should go, a draught-free position where there is a constant temperature is ideal. Avoid window sills as they can become very hot in the afternoon and cold at night. Kitchens are generally unsuitable because they can become hot or smoky.

In the evening, cover the cage with a thin sheet/towel as this will make your bird feel safe at night and protect him from draughts.

Perches should have slightly different diameters (around 10mm) to exercise your bird's feet. Place them close to food and water with another one higher up for roosting.

Aviaries should be in a sheltered position with adequate shade. As well as having a range of perches, your aviary should have a nestbox where birds can shelter and roost. A bird bath should also be provided.

## A healthy diet and treats

Finches need plenty of fresh water and it should be changed daily - twice a day in hot weather.

A healthy, varied diet would be:

- Foreign finch seed mix will form the basis of their diet. Grit must also be available to help proper digestion of the seed.
- Finches enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables such as apple and carrot along with meadow grass. Always remove any fresh items from the cage after a few hours to prevent the cage becoming soiled. Never feed avocado or chocolate as these are poisonous to birds.
- A piece of cuttlefish bone will provide vital calcium and keep their beak well-trimmed.
- A mineral block will also supply necessary minerals.
- Egg food can be used to supplement diets at all times.

Treat them now and then with millet sprays.

## Getting to know you

If you need to pick up your finch, remove the perches to allow more room to catch him. Gently enclose him in your hand with his head between your first and second finger.

## Exercise your zebra finch needs

Zebra finches kept in an indoor cage should be let out every day to exercise once they are familiar with the room. Always make sure all doors and windows are closed when you do this and other pets are out of the room.

## Zebra finches and other pets

Zebra finches are very social birds so they shouldn't be kept alone. They are happiest in groups where females outnumber males, or as or as part of a mixed collection of birds in an aviary. Avoid keeping them with budgies or other parakeets because they can be too boisterous for your finches.

## Zebra finch gender

It is quite easy to distinguish male zebra finches from females. The males have chestnut flanks (located on each side of the body just below each wing), zebra stripes on their neck and orange cheek pads. The females don't have the stripes or the cheek pads and their plumage is much more plain.

With the white mutation of zebra finch it is not so easy to tell the sexes apart. However, the male's beak tends to be a darker red when compared to the female's more orange coloured beak.



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## Potential health issues with zebra finches

### Salmonellosis

This is more common in birds kept in an aviary where your bird could be exposed to rodents. This disease thrives in a dirty environment so cleaning and disinfecting their cage or aviary is essential. An affected bird will have greenish blood-stained diarrhoea and if discovered, your finch should be taken to a vet straight away.

### Feather plucking

This is not usually a problem but overcrowding or lack of nesting materials can cause it. We would also recommend anti-pek.

### Egg binding

Occasionally eggs can become stuck in the egg tract and you may see the hen straining as she tries to lay the egg, your finch should be taken to a vet straight away.

### Mites

Birds with feather mites will appear restless, more so at night when the mites are most active. They can also suffer from anemia due to the blood loss.

Treat the bird, cage and any nest boxes with a suitable mite spray but if the problem persists, seek veterinary advice.

## Your new pet checklist

- Cage or aviary with roosting box
- Millet sprays
- Sand sheets
- Vitamins
- Bird bath
- Finch seed
- Mineral block
- Grit
- Cuttlefish bone
- Disinfectant



# Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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