14 Health Care Tips

for

Lady Gouldian Finches

By Jean Ferguson

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http://lady-gouldian-finch-breeding-expert-guide.com

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Introduction:

Proper care for Lady Gouldians can seem to be very complicated. A lot of conflicting information is readily available.

There are a million or more products on the market that promise to be the missing and needed medication or supplement to assist breeders and hobbyists. Don’t be overwhelmed and don’t be misled.

I am Jeanie Ferguson and it is my hope that this site, guide book and my free monthly e-zines, full of tips, will enhance your experiences with Lady Gouldian Finches.

I was introduced to the wonderful world of finches by accident when I became a volunteer in the Rain Forest at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, Maryland. It took a few years, but in 1990, I founded Flexible Flyer’s Aviary and set out to breed Lady Gouldian Finches.

My goal was to raising healthy, beautiful finches and to increase their availability in the market place. While doing that, I have acquired a wealth of knowledge on this subject and it is with this site that I am eager to make that information easily available to all who are hopeful and caring owners of Lady Gouldians.

I am determined to do the best I can to see to it that Lady Gouldian Finches live long, happy, healthy lives. Breeding Lady Gouldians, learning about them and living with them has been fantastic for me. I believe that you will find these tiny companions bring much more than just beauty into your lives.
My promise to you and the goal of this web site is to continue accumulating and publishing current and accurate information that will improve the lives of Lady Gouldians and their owners. I will regularly be adding content to my site to delight finch fanciers, so be sure to visit frequently and subscribe to my free monthly LGF magazine at http://lady-gouldian-finch-breeding-expert-guide.com

Many places on this web site have been designed so that you can send me information and photos that can be added to the site so that it will continue to be an increasingly valuable source of information.

Owning Lady Gouldian finches requires some knowledge and planning, but is not mystical or difficult. Obtaining complete and correct information can make all the difference. For those of you who are planning to breed Gouldians, accurate information is critical for your success. It can be difficult to get consistent answers from different breeders. Their main goal is to sell their birds to you.

My reports, eBooks and free e-zines will address issues such as the dietary needs for breeding and molting, how to recognize problems when pairing your finches for breeding, what to do if newborn chicks are thrown out of the nest, what can be done to assist a bird if there is a problem and there is no avian veterinarian available and much more.

I am not a veterinarian. My web site, news letters, tips and e-book do not dispense medical information. I write about what has worked well for the Gouldians I have owned.

I hope these fourteen practical ideas will be of some value, interest and comfort should you find yourself without professional help.
14 TIPS ON HEALTH CARE

FOR LADY GOULDIAN FINCHES

Tip # 1

An injury that causes a Gouldian to bleed can very quickly become the cause of death. As an example, no matter how careful we are when trimming over grown toe nails, sometimes the nail will be cut too short and the quick will start to bleed.

Any bleeding injury calls for quick action. Plan ahead and keep a bit of flour or cornstarch handy among your bird supplies. Gently apply either one with slight pressure to the wound.

The gluten in the flour or cornstarch will make a sticky mix with the blood and that will hasten coagulation. The bleeding should stop almost immediately.

Lady Gouldian Finches, have high rates of metabolism which is good and bad. The bad being that if bleeding cannot be stopped quickly, the bird is very likely to die. The good, being that a fast rate of metabolism helps to speed their healing process.

Tip #2

Diarrhea that does not resolve itself in a few days most likely will be fatal to your lady Gouldian. Because of the naturally high metabolic rate in Gouldians, dehydration will quickly occur and lead your bird in an irreversible decline.

In a last ditch attempt to save a dying bird, a breeder once relayed that he had some success by using a very dilute solution of bleach and water. The ratio is one to four.
He mixed together one drop, from an eye dropper, of bleach, (sodium hypochlorite) with two ounces of water and replaced his sick bird’s drinking water with this for a couple of days. This solution kills all of the bacteria in the digestive system, the good and the bad.

The good bacteria will quickly be replaced by the bird as soon as he/she is placed back in a cage with other birds. Humans normally have the bacteria E. coli, (Escherichia coli), in their digestive systems, but E. coli is not a bacteria normally found in our birds and if we pass it on to our birds, it can kill them.

The best way to prevent your bird from being contaminated with this bacteria is to wash your hands before you starting to care for your birds. See Tip #3, going light, for more details on this subject.

**Tip #3**

Going light is a term used to describe a very sad situation during which a Lady Gouldian will rapidly lose a great deal of weight. The bird will most likely appear depressed and droopy with puffed out feathers. This indicates a need to appear normal and to retain heat.

Serious weight loss is most often fatal. Bird will hide the fact that the body has been breaking down muscle and protein and using them to provide energy just to stay alive.

Even in the presence of food, so many things could be the problem that an experienced avian veterinarian will be unlikely to identify it quickly.

An infection agent in the digestive tract is the most likely cause, but it takes time to have a vet culture that organism, identify it and then treat with the correct antibiotic.
If any bird in this situation is to have even the slightest chance, act quickly. Increase the cage temperature to 90-95 degrees F. After collecting the stool specimen, add bleach to the drinking water as already discussed in Tip #2 and additionally provide honey in water, in a ratio of one to two, for a quick energy source and hopefully stop the wasting.

Do not be afraid that the bleach will poison your bird. Gouldians will not drink the water if it is too high in chlorine. They will wait until some has dissipated into the air before drinking.

Tip #4

To the best of my knowledge, twirling is a condition found only in Lady Gouldian finches. An adult Gouldian suddenly becomes unable to maintain normal control of the positioning of its neck and head.

The bird will no longer be able to perch normally or calmly and will display a strange variety of twisting and distorted movements that can appear quite uncomfortable and bothersome. Some time ago a recessive genetic defect was identified in birds that show the signs of twirling.

Because the mutated gene is recessive and because the signs of twirling are rarely present until adulthood, breeding of birds with this mutated gene has continued unnoticed.

Australian finches are believed to have a higher need for trace elements, (arsenic, chromium, cobalt, copper, fluorine, iodine, iron, manganese, nickel, selenium, tin, vanadium and zinc), then other domesticated finches from other parts of the world.

It has been considered that birds who carry the two recessive mutated genes and who also do not receive adequate amounts of the trace minerals will at some point in time exhibit the twirling trait.
To further complicate matters, Gouldians who carry the necessary two recessive mutated genes, but who are given sufficient trace minerals do not always develop visual signs and symptoms.

Since the root cause for twirling is genetic, this is believed to be an irreversible condition. One could still attempt to provide the missing and needed trace elements as an experiment as there is nothing else left to try.

**Tip #5**

Star-gazing is frequently thought to be the same as twirling, but it is not. Star-gazing is a rare diagnosis that shows up in growing nestlings. The head of the young bird will appear to twist backwards and upwards, (being the reason for the term, star-gazing).

Insufficient amounts of two nutrients, (manganese and thiamine), should be considered. A genetic mutation could have produced birds that have greater needs for one or the other of these nutrients than their siblings.

A deficiency of manganese reportedly causes a defect in the inner ear where balance is controlled. The head of a bird with this deficiency will face sideways, backwards and straight up.

By immediately offering small cups of foods with high concentrations of manganese such as ground nuts, cloves, and/or ground tea leaves, you may at least give your Gouldian a chance for recovery.

A thiamine insufficiency is rare in finches since it is naturally present in the whole grains finches regularly eat, but it would be foolish not to offer supplemental thiamine in the diet, if that is the cause, the symptoms of star-gazing are said to subside once the correct amount is satisfied.
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Tip #6

Knowledge regarding total nutrition for our birds is of utmost importance. What we provide for their consumption will determine their success or failure.

Ask the breeder from whom you buy your birds to write down for you what if any supplements they use, why and how often. Peace of mind comes with experience and the person who has raised the finches you want to buy clearly knows what is needed.

If they will not share their knowledge with you, you are likely to struggle from the start. The marketing of supplements is big business.

May I suggest that by frequently and separately supplementing the regular diet with fresh hard cooked eggs, sterilized egg shells, additional shelled and chopped sunflower seeds, additional canary seed, (having the highest mineral content of all of the other seeds we offer our Goulds), lots of spray millet, safely soaked or sprouted seeds and vegetables from dark leafy greens, that you will be offering foods which provide all the needed nutrients for your Lady Gouldians.

Tip #7

Watch very carefully that molding foods and molding nesting materials never enter your bird cages or nest boxes. Molding food has much less nutritional value and will lead to malnutrition.

Worse, it also will contain lots of fungal toxins. The worst of these toxins can alter and weaken the Lady Gouldians immune system, thereby opening the door to microscopic pathogens that would normally be unable to gain a strong hold in an otherwise well bird.

Over crowded juvenile Gouldians and the weaker mutation will be the first to show signs of illness and dying. Egg food or soft food left too long in cages can easily become spoiled. Remove uneaten soft foods within 2 hours of offering it to be certain to avoid mold.
Incorrect preparation of soaked and sprouted seeds is a major cause of mold problems. About a week after ingesting moldy foods, almost all of the birds in the contaminated cages will begin to show the typical signs of being ill Gouldians previously described on our web site.

There is no known remedy for the problems caused by eating mold. Best avoid the possibility, by being ever vigilant and avoid the introduction of mold to your birds’ environment.

**Tip # 8**

Mites can be a serious problem especially during the time for brooding and raising chicks. Red mites hide in crevices in your cages and nest boxes during the day.

They come out in darkness to bite and suck the blood of their victims usually inside the nest boxes. They are very hard to see because they are so tiny and move quite quickly.

One may try to observe them by shining a flashlight into a dark nest box. Look for tiny little red dots trying to escape the light or place a white handkerchief inside the nest box over night. When the mites hide in it they will be visible on the white handkerchief the next morning.

These mites can cause exhaustion in parent birds, anemia, death of nestlings and indirectly dead in shell chicks because the parent birds are so exhausted by them they are forced to abandon brooding.

Another type of mite resides on the skin and feathers of Lady Gouldians, damaging feathers and causing serious skin irritation. Lastly, the air sac mite lives in the airways and air sacs of Gouldians. They cause internal irritation, wheezing and difficulty while breathing.

Severe infestations can clog the breathing passages and cause death. To diagnose the presence of air sac mites, at night listen closely by the cage for a clicking sound in your birds breathing.

When all else is quiet in your cage, the difficult breathing sounds are easy to hear.
Thoroughly clean and disinfect cages and nest boxes There are several over the counter medications known to rid your birds of these mites. Do some research pertaining to Ivermectin and Scatt as they are the most widely available agents used to fight these mites.

Again, contact a breeder, an avian supplier or an avian veterinarian to obtain these and the important dosing methods and directions.

**Tip# 9**

Improperly soaked and sprouted seeds can lead to serious health problems for Lady Gouldians and their young. A seed mixture created specifically for the purpose of soaking must be used and the directions for soaking must be followed exactly.

Mold, E.-coli and other undesirable bacteria can grow rapidly in warm moist soaking seeds. Always add a disinfectant such as bleach or Aviclens to the soaking water using a ratio of one part bleach to one hundred parts water.

Jars used for canning come with a two part lid, a rim for screwing onto the jar and a lid to make a vacuum seal when cooling. By replacing the lid part with a piece of common screening, the rinsing and soaking will become a bit easier.

To start to prepare soaked seed, place a small amount of seed into the jar, fill the jar with the disinfectant and water mixture. Soak the seed over night.

In the morning, invert the jar, pouring the water out through the screen. Add water and rinse several times, until the rinse water is clear.

Soak the seed again for fifteen minutes in a fresh solution of disinfectant and water. Rinse again several times before feeding to your birds.

Uneaten seeds must be removed from the cage after three or four hours and thrown out.
Soaked seed may be stored in the refrigerator for a day or two.

Always do a sniff test as safely soaked seed will have a sweet smell. If the smell is unpleasant or sour do not feed the seeds to your birds.

**Tip # 10**

Seed moths can become quite a nuisance. Even worse, they are stealing the nutrients that were intended for your Gouldians.

Buying the freshest seed is not always possible. There are no dates on the seed bags. Purchase your seed when it is first harvested if at all possible and then either freeze it or refrigerate it until you are ready to feed it to your birds.

This will limit the seed moths’ development only. If refrigeration is not an option, there are safe, non toxic, seed moth traps that, when placed near your bird cage will attract the male moths to a nice sticky pad thereby eliminating reproduction.

**Tip # 11**

Non-fertile eggs need to be removed from nest boxes as soon as possible. If left in the nest, the eggs will most likely get broken and make an awful unhealthy mess there.

Candling, which involves holding a special candling flashlight or just a very small flashlight gently against the egg will, after a week or so, reveal tiny red blood vessels in fertile eggs if all is going well. If there are no veins, if the egg shell has a dim pallor to it or if you see large compartments that appear to be air filled, all of the eggs will need to be disposed of.

Take heart, chances are your pair will start to lay another clutch almost immediately. If only one or two eggs are fertile, foster them out to Society finches.

Lady Gouldian finches will rarely take the time to raise so few chicks.
Tip # 12

A hospital cage does not have to be a specially made five sided wooden box with places for electric light bulbs to increase warmth. Any small cage can be wrapped on the top and all four sides with toweling held on with clothes pins to minimize stimulus and to keep in warmth and encourage calmness.

A ceramic heat lamp, or a heating pad placed under the cage or even wrapped around a side of the cage will help to increase the temperature for your bird. By doing that, your bird will be spared expending the energy to do it for himself.

This is a twofold benefit. The already weakened bird conserves his already taxed energy supply and the increased body temperature of the bird works to quickly kill off the bacteria or microorganism that is causing the illness.

TIP #13,

Under the heading of diet, unlike a lot of other types of birds, Lady Gouldians do not need and should not be given gravel, grit or sand. They will need sterilized egg shells or broken bits of oyster shells to provide the calcium needed.

Since Gouldians are among the group of birds who remove the outer husks of their seed before swallowing them, they do not need gravel or sand to pulverize their food for digestion.

It is a fact that offering gravel or sand can be harmful as either one could lead to a digestive tract blockage if eaten.
Tip # 14

This last tip is one that I hope you will never have to make use of, but I believe that preparation and knowledge can decrease pain should you be faced with a catastrophic event.

As it is with all pets, there may come a time when there is nothing that can be done to improve their situation, to decrease their pain or to lessen their suffering.

Euthanasia may need to be considered. At the point in time when the decision is made, there is then the question of how to proceed. Having sought and gotten many different answers to that question, I am most at peace with this one method.

Saturate a small rag or paper towel piece with engine starter fluid the kind that comes in a spray can and is designed to help gasoline engines start easily. Starter fluid contains enough ether to put a tiny finch peacefully into a permanent sleep.

Should you need to do this, place the paper towel in a small plastic bag and take it outside, (and out of sight of your other birds). Saturate the towel in the bag with the starter fluid and close the bag.

Go and get your tiny sick or injured Gouldian, who will most likely be so debilitated as to lie motionless in your hand. As you gently place the bird in the bag, sleep will quickly overcome him and his suffering will end.

May you never need to use this tip, but may this knowledge give you peace and comfort that you are prepared to always give your bird the kindest of care.
Conclusion:

Once again, I repeat this important notice:

I am not a veterinarian. My web site, news letters, tips and book do not dispense medical information. I write about my own experiences. Not everyone has an avian veterinarian with Gouldian finch expertise available to them.

Not every bird keeper has access to experienced Gouldian breeders who will selflessly give their time to help when needed.

I do not presume to give advice or to replace information from a veterinarian. Should your bird need help, find a vet!!!

I hope that you have found this report helpful to you in the care of your Lady Gouldians, and feel free to ask me for answers to anything not covered in here, on the FAQ form:


Jean Ferguson
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