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Introduction

Many people have been so overwhelmed by the amazing beauty of Lady Gouldian finches that they proceed to purchase one, planning to learn how to care for it as time goes along. This is not a good plan. Finches in general are unlike most other pet birds and this is not always obvious. The majority of other pet birds are happy to live as solitary birds. They will talk, socialize, learn tricks, sit on a finger or shoulder, eat out of your hand, cuddle, kiss and truly have an emotional connection with their owner. We say that finches are domesticated because they have been bred in captivity for many, many years, but that is not the same as being tame.

Finches live in their own little worlds. They allow us to be their owners, protectors and care givers. In most cases they do not enjoy being touched or picked up out of their cage. They prefer their relationships to be with companion finches and they will suffer if kept in a solitary existence. It is rare that a Gouldian will bond with a human, but I have seen photographs that prove this can and does happen. The only tame Gouldians that I have knowledge of were chosen or rescued as tiny babies and then were hand fed and kept alive by experienced breeders.
Some finch species are known to be aggressive toward other finch species and other species are categorized as being nonaggressive. Lady Gouldians are for the most part docile, nonaggressive and are content to live peacefully in pairs, or colonies. If a large flight is available in which to contain Gouldians, they will behave nicely with other species of nonaggressive finches. Appendix A is a list of compatible, nonaggressive species of finches. If the plan is not to keep breeding pairs, may I suggest that same sex Gouldians be kept together. Several males together will be content and most beautiful. The males have the rich, deepest and most beautiful colors. With same sex Gouldians living together, the desire for breeding won’t be as consuming and competitive and will mostly be avoided. The males will still practice singing, but for each other rather than females.

Gouldians are fun to care for. They are very inquisitive and will pay attention to everything an owner does. They are constantly watching and will eagerly show enthusiasm and appreciation for what is provided for them. With larger bird species, it’s my understanding that they will often become angry or otherwise distressed if left alone for too long a time. Lady Gouldians won’t pine away for their owners as long as they have fresh water and seed, they will do very well should an owner go away even for an extended period of time.

I fell in love with Lady Gouldians many years ago and can think of nothing better than sharing the knowledge that I have acquired with those who might benefit. There is no such thing as one right or only way to care for Gouldians. My aim has been to include in this book as much information as possible about what my experiences with Lady Gouldian finches have taught me and to give everyone who
wants to keep and/or breed Gouldians choices as they begin a most wonderful hobby. I do not presume or intend to give advice.

“To your success as a Gouldian finch aviculturist.”

- Jean Ferguson, 2011

About the Gouldian Finch

General Description

Appearance, Size, Weight, Lifespan

The Gouldian finch is a small to medium-sized bird that is easily identifiable by its striking and distinctive colored feathers. While these color markings vary considerably and are most often spoken about in context with their black, red or yellow head markings, it is typically the bird’s beautiful purple breast, yellow/orange underbelly and bright grass-green back that make most adult Gouldians easily recognizable.

As a seed eating bird, Gouldians sport a bone colored stout, cone-like beak that usually ends with a reddish tip (this may vary depending on the genetic variations inherent in the bird). Their beak is somewhat similar to that of a parrot and, also like a parrot, their brown eyes are set back almost horizontal to the point of the beak. Their scaled legs and feet are pinkish in color.

Adult Gouldians grow to an average length of between 12 and 15 centimeters, (5-6 inches from head to tail), and weigh anything between 15-30 grams,
A cock grows slightly larger than a hen. Both sexes are generally calm and quiet. The exception to being quiet occurs when males exhibit their courtship songs. Their singing is so beautiful that it rivals that of the finest male canary. Gouldians will enjoy an average lifespan of around 9-15 years with proper care. Research has shown that Gouldians most often die by the age of 3 because of malnutrition caused by poor quality seeds, an incorrect or unbalanced seed mixture and/or from improperly made moist food.

**Taxonomy**

**Name Origin, Known By, Species**

Scientific Classification

- **Kingdom**: Animalia
- **Phylum**: Chordata
- **Class**: Aves
- **Order**: Passeriformes
- **Family**: Estrildidae
- **Genus**: Erythrura
- **Species**: E. gouldiae

60% of the world’s bird populations are known to be classified as belonging in the Passeriformes order, Passerine for short. These birds are classified as small or sparrow-like, with claws built for perching, hence the slang term perch bird. Most Passerines have well developed vocal organs. Gouldians are no exceptions.
Not too long ago Gouldians were thought to belong to the family known as Estrildidae, commonly called grass finches. They have now been moved and belong in the family, Erythrura along with parrot finches. Other species belonging in this family have unique markings inside their mouths, with Gouldians their markings are at both corners of their beaks. The pattern of these markings is species specific. Researchers theorize that when the tiny babies open their mouths to beg for food it is easy for the parent birds to recognize whether all of the chicks are actually their own. There is a species of exotic finch that lay their eggs in the nests of other finches, thereby avoiding having to rear their own young. With each species having different buccal markings these babies presumably can be identified and tossed out in order to protect the original clutch members.

If all of those different names weren’t enough, there’s more. Depending on where you are in the world you may also hear Gouldians referred to as Australian grass finches, painted finches or rainbow finches, the latter two of which are common in the United States. In Australia, it is simply known as the Gouldian finch, although even the Australian term is an abbreviation. The true origin of the bird’s common name stems back to 1844 when British ornithologist and artist, John Gould, first described the bird and officially named it the Lady Gouldian finch in dedication to his wife Elizabeth.

“It was with the feelings of the purest affection that I ventured to dedicate this lovely bird to the memory of my late wife.”

John Gould (1804-1881)
It is out of respect and in consideration of John Gould’s dedication that I have chosen to title this book accordingly.

**Where to Find the Gouldian Finch**

**In the Wild**

Gouldians are native Australian birds found in small and sporadic pockets across the tropical Savannahs of Northern Australia. Studies show that these birds find noise agitating. Therefore they tend to isolate themselves in quiet locations – something to keep in mind when planning the best location for their home.
The majority of the estimated 2,500 wild birds remaining make their home in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory and the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. There are small numbers still in the northern parts of Queensland, but reported sightings are very rare. Gouldians are considered nomadic birds. They do not migrate, but they do not stay in the same spot all year round. Living in the wild is a constant battle for survival, one that they unfortunately are thought to be losing, and one that forces them to consistently move from place to place, (and back again), depending on how the wet and dry seasons impact their resources.

To see them in their natural Katherine habitat, take a walk around Yinberrie Hills and in Kakadu National Park. In the Kimberley Region they are commonly spotted at Lake Argyle, Kununurra and around shallow waterholes connected to the Durack and Dunham Rivers. The best chance of sighting them in good numbers is to visit the Australian Wildlife Conservancy’s Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary located near the town of Imintji in Western Australia, (about 7 hours drive from Broome and north of the Fitzroy River).

During the wet season Gouldians tend to be scattered into small groups across lowland habitats, making it very difficult to reach or to even spot them. For this reason, the best wild Gouldian bird watching experience is to be had during the dry season when they flock in numbers to hilly country, nest in hollows found in smooth-barked Eucalyptus trees, feed on dry spear grasses and forage on the ground for other fallen seeds. The best sightings usually occur early in the morning when the birds make their way in numbers to nearby water holes.
In Captivity

Prior to the Australian Government placing a ban on the export of Australian fauna in 1959, the Gouldian finch was a bird exported to all areas of the globe. While Australia primarily exported to Japan, England, and the United States, the business of Gouldian trade was lucrative enough to inspire other countries, including many in Europe, to begin to import these beautiful little birds. Ironically, it was this flourishing trade that has helped to preserve the precious Gouldian because while it tinkers on the edge of wild extinction, there are significant numbers in captivity all over the world. Finding a supplier of Gouldian finches is therefore relatively easy regardless of where you’re based.

Housing

Choosing a Home

Before purchasing a first pair of Gouldian finches, I set up their home so it is ready and waiting for them and that it meets their unique needs. When it comes to building or buying their home there are several choices to consider. The easiest approach for me was to buy and kit-out a pre-made or pet store bird cage. Deciding on the number of birds to keep will determine whether a cage, a bird room, a flight cage or an aviary will be needed. Some finch keepers have turned a spare room into a dedicated bird room which can house quite a few cages. I’ve seen several interior bird rooms where a wooden screen door with a spring has replaced the usual solid wood door. It
protects the birds by keeping them in the room and other pets out. Better ventilation is obtained and I think the sounds from a bird room are so nice to hear throughout the house. I want to add here that escape is routinely a tragedy for a Gouldian. They will of course fly at full speed into a window and end up with broken bones or dead.

In climates with a similar temperature to the Gouldians’ wild environment, where the temperature averages 70–95°F, (20-35°C), and where it never dips below 50°F, (10°C), the finches can also be housed comfortably in outside aviaries or flight cages. If the birds are to be housed outside, the flight cage must have a solid roof for protection from the weather. Larger aviaries provide space to expand the variety of finch species kept in one enclosure.

As a bird keeper, I want to make sure my birds enjoy their lives. Lady Gouldians need to have plenty of space in which to fly and exercise, without risk of hurting themselves. When purchasing a cage for one pair, always select the widest cage available because that will provide the most horizontal flight space. I think the minimum cage size for one breeding pair should be 16 inches, (40 ¾ cm), high x 12 inches, (30 1/2 cm), wide x 24 inches, (61 cm) long. When planning to breed Gouldians, the size of the cage becomes an even more important factor because successful breeding is linked to how healthy and active the birds are. Avoid overcrowding as well. It may help to keep a mental picture of an adult pair of Gouldians plus six equally large juveniles all together in one cage for several months. Pet stores routinely stock small, tall and narrow bird cages. These will not do for Gouldians.
It would be nice to purchase a cage just because it is attractive, such as an old-style brass cage, a painted cage or a cage made of hardware cloth that has not been treated to prevent zinc poisoning. Brass cages or cages that have been treated with paint or other chemicals are potentially toxic to the birds.

Gouldians will do well in rectangular box cages, by that I mean cages that have a solid side, ends and tops. Only the cage front is made of wire. These cages may be made of metal, plastic or wood. The cage front will have a door and openings for food, water containers and a nest box. Box cages give the birds an increased sense of privacy and security. Partially covering the cage with fabric will do the same thing. The spaces between the bars need to be at intervals no wider than 0.5 inches, (1.3 centimeters). Large cages provide many opportunities to create areas for the birds to find shelter or rest periods. Strategically placing artificial foliage, such as plastic leaves in or on the outside of the cage will help to further create appealing and interesting private places for them. I tried silk foliage, but the finches picked or pecked and unraveled the silk leaf edges, which created dangerous places in which a toe or foot could become entangled.

**Placement of Your Cage**

Selecting the best location for the cage takes a bit of planning. Place the cage in a location where people and birds will frequently see each other. Gouldians enjoy watching what people do. I like positioning the cage as close to my eye level as I can arrange. Gouldians spend most of their time in the top one third of their cage. Positioning the cage this way will allow easy bird watching, eyes to eyes. Keep the
cage away from anything that may cause extreme hot or cold temperature fluctuations. Place it away from any area that could possibly have a draft. Avoid putting the cage in a location that may be exposed to harmful chemicals or potentially toxic gases. Avoid tiny kitchens, fumes and smelly cleaning supplies, polishes, glues, felt tip markers, oven cleaners and other cooking related chemicals and gases. Be aware that the gases given off by an overheated Teflon pan are toxic.

If possible place the cage away from complete direct sunlight. To remain healthy, Gouldians require both shade and natural sunlight. It’s nice if the location of their cage can provide them with some sunlight, but don’t over expose them. The easiest solution for me was to buy a household timer and set up an artificial light source designed to give them the same benefits that natural sunlight would provide for them, (lighting will be covered in the next section). Once the spot has been chosen, avoid changing it or otherwise moving the cage from place to place. Settled in Gouldian finches become calm and relaxed birds, but they are likely to become stressed if their environment is constantly disrupted. Stress is without a doubt a leading cause of health disorders in Lady Gouldians.

When putting together the interior of the cage or aviary, it helps me to think of it as an opportunity to create a natural appearing environment, more of a home and not just wire and dowels. I like tiny things and frequently enjoy the child like feelings that come while setting up a new cage and imaging a pair of Gouldians enjoying it. It reminds of setting up a dollhouse.
Every cage should be stocked with a clean cuttlebone, a mineral block and health grit, such as crushed oyster shells, (not gravel, more about this is explained in the dietary pages). Cleanliness can never be emphasized enough. If allowed Gouldians will forage on the floor of their cage for seed which is why I always select a cage that has a wire or a mesh floor and a pull out tray beneath it. This prevents the birds from having access to seeds which have been contaminated with droppings. Without such a tray the cage will need to be cleaned daily.

**Perches**

How and where the perches are placed will largely depend upon the size of the cage and how many birds will live there. I decided the best approach is to place perches in clusters. Exotic finches like to sit in pairs or groups and hop up and over near branches and around each other as they socialize. A single straight dowel doesn’t give them that opportunity and the dowels have boringly uniform diameters, not as good for the feet as having varying diameters. A small multi-branched piece of wood from an apple tree, or other nontoxic wood, wedged or tied into a corner of the cage gives the birds group perching areas. Types of branches that are nontoxic and may be used as perches are listed in appendix C.

I try not to overdo things and compromise their flight space. At a minimum, I place at least two perches in the upper area of the cage and as far apart as
possible. I cut off any vertical twigs that might disrupt an otherwise clear landing spot. Do not use the gravel wrappers that are sold in pet stores to cover perches or to line the cage floor. That substrate is too harsh. I think of their perches as exercise equipment.

Nontoxic houseplants provide great entertainment for birds. They make natural playgrounds for Gouldians. I once looked at a flight cage and thought all the birds had escaped. I also looked down at the ficus inside the cage and thought it looked better than I remembered. Closer examination revealed that all 26 of my birds had not escaped. They were all sitting on little branches of the ficus. Their green backs nearly identical in shape, size and color to the leaves on the tree. Appendix B is a list of safe plants to use. Small plants placed in bird cages are treated similarly to bones that are given to dogs. Don’t be surprised or disappointed when replacement plants are needed.

**The Cage Floor**

With a wire or mesh floor and a tray, plain newspaper is a safe option. It can be quickly changed. I have been told that the ink used in the printing of newspapers is toxic to Gouldians, but none of my birds ever died from playing with the newspaper. So I question the truth of that. With a solid floor, there is no way to stop the birds from shredding the paper. I have seen gravel used to cover the floor in a cage and this is an option as long as the birds do not eat it. It can be washed daily and will not need replacing completely for several weeks. I have even seen bags of crushed walnut shells being sold as bird cage floor covering. Some breeders use dirt from the garden. Dirt does require more effort to keep
clean and needs to be replaced more often than gravel or walnut shells. Newspaper is so easy. While preventing fallen seeds and droppings from mixing together, I always double check where I have placed feeding dishes and water containers so that those aren’t accidentally placed beneath a regular or favorite perching spot.

**Temperature and Humidity**

Of all the exotic finches, Gouldians require the most heat. Ideally, the temperature and humidity around the cage need to be kept within a range similar to that of their natural tropical Australian environment. When the little humidity gauge, (specifically marketed to reptiles owners), that I keep in the aviary drops below 50 %, I hook up my little humidifier, which came from the drug store and is the kind used for babies rooms and is not expensive. I have seen Gouldians that have adapted to living in lower temperatures, but I still wonder about their health, comfort and whether their life span will be affected. The temperatures and humidity levels described in this book are the ones that I have had great success with. I specifically protect the birds from extreme heat, extreme cold, sudden temperature changes and drafts. I keep the average daily temperature ranges between 72-78°F, (20-25°C), and higher when breeding and the humidity level between 50-60%.

**Lighting**

Gouldian finches require exposure to natural sunlight. The man made substitute for sunlight is called full spectrum lighting. Sufficient sunlight, either occurring
naturally or artificially must be provided in order for the birds to be healthy and breed successfully. To understand the importance of this, it’s helpful to have a basic awareness of what sunlight can do and how light works.

Light is comprised of many wavelengths called spectrums. Some of these spectrums are visible to humans, while others are not, and some that are not visible to us are visible to Gouldians. Each of these spectrums is comprised of different amounts of energy, (called electromagnetic energy), and these different levels of energy provide essential health benefits for birds. They provide the building blocks that birds bodies convert into much needed vitamins.

In the U.S., setting up artificial sunlight was not as complicated as I thought it would be. The light bulbs we use to light our homes are insufficient to supply all of the spectrums needed to replicate sunlight. Standard light bulbs can be handy to place near a cage or a nest box for the purpose of warmth, but these bulbs do not produce anything like natural sunlight.

In the U.S., it is possible to purchase full spectrum light bulbs and full spectrum fluorescent light tubes. I like using the fluorescent light tubes because they do not emit heat. An ordinary household electric timer connected to a light fixture that has full spectrum bulbs will work very well. The number of hours the birds receive this artificial sunlight can easily be set and changed as needed. I just hang the lights on the outside of the cages with wire
Giving the birds 14-15 hours of daylight is a major factor that helps stimulate Lady Gouldians to start their breeding cycle. As a guide, the estimated average number of daylight hours for each month in Brisbane, Australia is given in appendix E. It is important to give the birds a full four seasons of light hours in a year’s time. It may not matter when the start of the spring season is, but I think that once spring has been started, summer, fall and winter light cycles should follow. In Australia, when spring is starting, the United States is going into fall. This explains why in captivity, the most successful breeding period for Gouldians in the U.S. has been observed to be the fall.

The light wavelength we call ultra-violet is the key source of energy the birds draw upon to produce vitamin D3. In some areas of the world, there is no such thing as a full spectrum light source that produces ultra-violet light to the levels that the birds need. I have read that an alternative source for this could be a sunlamp that provides ultra-violet light along with a vitamin D supplement added to the diet. If a sunlamp is going to be used, the research I did said to use it for about half an hour a day. Please confirm that for yourself before using a sunlamp. I have no personal experience using a sunlamp. I routinely look for the words, full spectrum, on the packaging to make certain that is what I am buying.

I use a few night lights for safety. They are always turned on even if the cage is covered. In total darkness anything can startle the birds. When this happens the birds panic and will start flying rapidly, thrashing blindly to escape. Unable to orient themselves in the dark in such a state accidents happen. A night light will
provide enough light to enable the birds to re-orient themselves in the least amount of time.

**Nests**

Wild Gouldian finches have a reputation for being poor nest builders. This is not quite fair or true. In the wild, they mate and nest in the hollow limbs of smooth-barked Eucalyptus trees. They do not need to make the typical nest that we are used to picturing in our mind’s eye.

In captivity, nest boxes constructed of wood or plastic are quickly accepted by Goulds. In the beginning, I had success with the little bamboo, stick or wicker, gourd-like nests that hang inside a cage. They don’t reduce flight space very much, but they are very small and impossible to inspect or to clean. Wooden and plastic nest boxes that hang on the outside of the cage will have an access door in the back or top that allows for internal examination and easy cleaning. I place my nest boxes in the top one third to one quarter of the cage. Of the three materials, I use plastic. It can be cleaned and disinfected easily. It is light weight and not difficult to hang on the outside of the cage. After the chicks have fledged, I dump out the soiled nesting material and place the dirty nest box in the dishwasher for sanitizing before reuse.
**Bathing**

Lady Gouldians love to bathe. About once a week, early in the morning, I give my Gouldians room temperature baths, no more than one inch and a half deep. Their enthusiastic splashing gets water everywhere. Any container that has an edge or rim for the birds to use as a perch, will hold a little water and will fit through the cage door works. My favorite tub is one that confines most of the splashing. It’s about five inches square, clear plastic on five sides, open on the sixth side to about one and a half inches from the bottom. It is designed to hang over the cage door opening and on the outside of the cage.

At least two finches can bathe together. Each box tub has two wire hooks at the top of the open side. I tie the cage door open with a twist tie or anything that will keep it from slipping down and blocking the tub entry and then hang the bath cube on the bar over the open cage doorway. The first time I put it up no one would get in. The birds would come close and peer in, but until I covered the clear plastic bottom, they would not get in or even perch on the door sill. I can only assume they thought it was bottomless because there was very little hesitation after that.

To announce bath time, I play a tape or CD of nature sounds. Every single bird gets real quiet and still. They all watch me as they wait for the delivery of their tubs. When the recording ends, it reminds me to return and remove the bath tubs. For a large flight, I enjoy watching the birds use the water bowl fountain.
that is currently being marketed for dogs. It recycles and filters the water. I put rocks in the bottom so that the water never can be too deep.

**Selecting your birds**

I started by shopping for a reputable breeder or hobbyist. I really enjoy dealing with hobbyists. It is easy to see that they love their birds. In the United States, The National Finch and Softbill Society, ([www.nfss.org](http://www.nfss.org)), can provide a list of affiliated finch clubs in your area that could be a place to start. Privately owned pet shops or bird shops might be willing to give your name and number to clients who regularly buy Australian finch seed. The magazine called Bird Talk, has a section in the back where breeders advertise by types of birds and by state. Breeders who are willing to ship birds can be found online.

Here are some things I consider when I am trying to decide if a specific bird is a good choice. I want birds with a strong and erect posture. I check their feet and I don’t by a bird for breeding if it has missing toes. The claws need to be a safe length, the eyes bright and clear, showing no sign of discharge or swelling. The nostrils of healthy birds must be free and clear and the feathers near the beak should not show any signs of staining or drainage. I avoid a bird with an overgrown beak or a beak that is crossed at the tip. That bird is likely to have difficulty eating down the road. The bird should be actively moving about. I pick
birds that inquisitively come toward me as I approach their cage. I reject birds that are lethargically sitting on the bottom of the cage or on a perch with puffed out feathers, bald spots, panting or sneezing.

I look for the feathers to be tight and sleek and I do not buy birds with ragged feather edges. I will ask the breeder to bring the bird out of the cage so that I may observe the area around the vent. I don’t buy a bird when there is evidence of thin watery droppings sticking to the feathers in that area. While the bird is still in the breeder’s hand, I will ask to gently touch the sides of the abdomen or blow on them to move the feathers that cover the sides. I do this to make certain that the sides are gently rounded and the bird has been well fed. The breast bone should not stand out like a knife blade or the breast bone of a turkey’s carcass.

**The differences between hen and cock**

Distinguishing males from females is fairly easy when it comes to adult Gouldians except in the case of some of the rare mutations. The head and chest colors of the male Gouldian will be clear, deep and bright, very vivid with some iridescence. The female colors appear to be faded or muted. It is easy to see the difference when male and female can be put right next to each other. Another clue is to look at the two central tail feathers. The males have two, very long
central tail feathers and the females will not. The males will sing and hop up down in one spot doing their courting dance. The females do not sing or hop up and down.

**Dominance and Social Order**

In colonies, the head colors of Gouldians will have an effect on how they establish a hierarchy or pecking order. Make an informed decision when selecting birds to share a cage because there is always a possibility of creating a social situation that will lead to aggression, conflict, stress and even death. The Gouldians different head colors reflect their different genes, and their different genes influence how they each behave.

Of the three head colors, red-heads are considered to be dominant. While the red-head might be predisposed to dominate, Gouldians are by nature nonaggressive. In the wild, the red head Gouldian forms only a quarter or so of the population. If there is conflict or stress in a colony or flight cage, I have observed that sometimes it can be lessened by limiting the male red head population to roughly the same ratio as occurs in the wild or to 30% or fewer. I read about a study in which a male yellow head was placed in a cage with several red head males. The red heads became menacing toward the yellow head. The yellow head was removed from the cage so that his yellow feathers could be died red. He was then returned to the cage with the other red heads. This time there was no aggressive behavior from the red head males. Once he was a red head, he was accepted by them.
The second leading cause of conflict among captive Gouldians is a lack of availability of cage resources and the layout of the cage itself. I provide extra nest boxes when colony breeding, plenty of food and water in several different locations and in large enough containers so that more than one bird can eat or drink at the same time.

**Price**

I believe it is risky to sell lady Gouldians before they have safely gone through their first molt. This is a slow molt and can take several months to be completed. Juveniles remind me of first grade school kids. They are able to leave their parents, but they are still physically delicate. This makes the first molt a vulnerable time. To protect the health and well being of the pairs I limit each pair to laying three clutches a year. Taking all of these factors into consideration, it is completely understandable why Lady Gouldians are priced as they are. Quality birds will sell between $75.00 to $400.00 depending on the mutation and the market.

**Dietary Needs**

**Wild diet**

Lady Gouldians consume one third of their total body weight each day. They spend a great deal of time hunting for and eating grass seeds. In the wild, the seeds available to them vary according to the seasons. During the dry season they primarily feed on spear grass, (Sorghum spp.). As the wet season comes in and
spear grass becomes scarce, they switch to the seeds of a variety of other perennial grasses including Cockatoo grass, (Alloteropsis semialata), Ribbon/Golden Beard grass, (Chrysopogon fallax), and Curly spinifex, (Triodia bitextura).

In the wild, Gouldians are known to feed on insects and have even been seen stealing them from the webs of spiders. I never had a Lady Gouldian who would ever even try to eat insects.

**Domestic, Non-Breeding Diet**

**70% a Seed Diet**

In the U.S., there are many different distributors of seeds specifically selected for Australian exotic finches. These mixtures provide the majority of nutrients Gouldians need. The ideal composition of seeds for a non-breeding diet includes an equal combination of plain canary seed, French millet, panicum, (Hungarian millet), and Japanese millet. Nutritionally complete pellets are manufactured now to replace these seed mixes. Some birds will switch to a total pellet diet over time and some will not. I found trying to switch Lady Gouldians to pellets to be a long and unsuccessful process.

**30% Softfood and Greens**

A pure seed diet will provide much of the needed nutrients, but not all. Gouldians must also be fed what is referred to as softfood and greens. Since my Gouldians do not eat insects, I substitute with small servings of finely chopped, hard boiled
chicken eggs instead. When feeding the maintenance diet, I give egg food to them only once or twice a week. When either breeding or molting, they need it daily.

**Proteins**

Softfood can be enriched by combining finely chopped cooked egg with a dry egg food mix. I buy egg food specifically blended for exotic Australian finches, (CeDe is my favorite). While there are many different recipes for egg food, appendix C shows the two recipes that I use. Egg food must always be served fresh. I make up a large amount and freeze it in small portions. I try to offer only the amount of softfood that the birds will consume within an hour or so, (about one teaspoon per day per pair). I want to emphasize the importance of removing the uneaten moist egg food. Softfood that is prepared incorrectly or left in the cage too long will spoil. This is one of the most frequent causes of sickness and death. Millet sprays are a good source of plant protein and a great favorite of Gouldians. I try to always keep a bunch of it in each cage. My birds get plenty of exercise picking the spray to its shaft.

**Vitamins**

Vitamins are complex organic matter essential in small amounts to control metabolic processes in the body. There are two subcategories of vitamins, fat soluble and water soluble. Without vitamins acting as catalysts, other chemical processes in the body will not occur. Vitamins can be added to drinking water or sprinkled on egg food. Vitamins mixed with seed, I think are of no benefit because Gouldians don’t eat the outer seed covering. I prefer either to add them to the softfood or the water.
Fat Soluble Vitamins

Dark green leafy vegetables, (spinach, romaine lettuce, etc.), are good sources of vitamin A which is the vitamin that is most frequently lacking in Gouldians. Appendix F provides a larger selection of vegetables to offer to Gouldians. Choose vegetables containing carotene, (carrots, etc.), and vegetables having lots of yellow pigments, (yellow squash, etc.). During the non-breeding diet, green foods should be provided fresh once or twice a week and removed before wilting. Safflower seeds or oil, (the most nutritious oil for Gouldians), and cod liver oil are also excellent sources of vitamin A. The body uses this vitamin in the development of eye sight and to help decrease episodes of egg binding. Vitamin A allows the oviduct or passageway for the eggs to remain soft, moist and flexible.

Vitamin D-3 comes only from animal sources. The absorption of calcium by the body is considerably greater when there is adequate vitamin D-3 in the diet. Full spectrum light or natural sunlight is needed to activate vitamin D-3 which is stored in the skin of the birds. Fourteen to fifteen hours of full spectrum light is needed daily to enable a Gouldian to absorb enough calcium to produce eggshells, bones and feathers.

Vitamin E comes from many sources; eggs, seeds, nuts and dark green leafy vegetables. Do not cook the vegetables. Cooking greatly decreases the content of vitamin E which the body uses to conserve oxygen for the cells that keep mucous membranes permeable. It helps the body to heal wounds quickly. It contributes to
the development of nerve cells in the brain and in skeletal muscles as well as aiding in the overall development of the embryo.

Both vitamins F and K are found in oily seeds; flaxseed, sunflower seed, safflower seed, wheat germ and walnuts. Vitamin F consists of three necessary fatty acids, linoleic acid being the most important of the three. This fatty acid assists in the formation of internal structures and cell membranes and is needed during the growth and reproduction processes. Vitamin F is found in dark green leafy vegetables as well as in oily seeds. It is used by the liver to help with the formation and regulation of blood clotting proteins.

**Water Soluble Vitamins**

Vitamin C, (which can be manufactured by Gouldians during digestion), choline, biotin, B12, B1, B5 and all other B vitamins make up the water soluble vitamins. Fortunately, all of these are contained in sufficient amounts in the seeds that are the mainstay of the Gouldians’ diet. Supplementing the diet with these vitamins is not necessary as long as the birds are being given a seed mixture designed for Australian finches.

**Minerals**

No nutrients work in the body alone. There must also be minerals that will complete the chemical reactions necessary for life. Confusing the needed minerals with gravel or sand is understandable. As stated earlier, Lady Gouldians do not need gravel or sand or any other material to grind the seeds they eat because Gouldians remove the hard outer coating of their seeds before they
ingest them. However, the body does need small amounts of essential minerals; calcium, sodium, potassium, magnesium, manganese, zinc, iron, iodine and copper are the most important.

In each cage I keep a cup of a quality, mineralized grit, consisting of crushed oyster shells. A mineral block will provide what is needed, but my Gouldians rarely touch the ones in their cages. I also keep a cuttlebone in each cage. When I observe the Gouldians frequenting the cuttlebone, I can be pretty sure that breeding is about to start. I also sterilize chicken egg shells and offer them too. Unsterilized egg shells can introduce salmonella poisoning, so I sterilize the wet egg shells by spreading them out on a paper towel and putting them in the microwave for two to three minutes or until they are totally dry. It is fine to crush them or mix them with the mineral grit. I don’t mix them with egg food because I want the birds to be able to eat the shells at will and when I give them egg food, I don’t want to be filling them up with egg shells. Sometimes I just put the egg shell halves in the cage. The birds seem to like tackling the large pieces. I have read that limestone powder and rock chalk will also provide calcium, but I have never had those.

If you are wondering about providing fruit, that’s fine to offer, but don’t be surprised if Gouldians show no interest in eating fruit. Apples and oranges may be nibbled on, but all of my Gouldians ignore fruit.
Unsafe foods

There are a few foods that absolutely must not be given to Gouldians. Human sweets, specifically chocolate, are toxic as is alcohol or caffeine based products and avocados. Iceberg lettuce isn’t toxic, but it consists mainly of water and has very little if any nutritional value. I have read that it can cause diarrhea.

Water

It is essential to provide fresh water daily. Plastic water tubes that hang on the outside of a cage are convenient. The birds won’t be disturbed by a hand regularly reaching into their cage and it is less likely that the birds will be able to foul their water. When there are multiple cages, it’s very easy to overlook replacing a water tube. At one time I kept a large number of cages and found it very helpful to keep two sets of water tubes. This allowed me to take down and put back fresh water on each cage at the same time. When I find I end up with an extra tube, I know that I have missed a cage and I can go back and replace it right away. Having two sets of water tubes also gives me time to put the tubes through the dishwasher.

Sprouting or soaking seeds

In the wild, breeding comes at the same time that there is a natural abundance of insects and sprouting seeds. Small soaked or sprouted seeds are very nutritious, but the actual process of sprouting and soaking seeds can be risky. I do not use the Australian finch daily seed mix for this. I buy a seed mixture specifically blended for soaking or sprouting. I rinse the seeds in sterilized water and follow the directions exactly. I also add an antimicrobial to the first soaking to destroy
any existing bacteria from growing among the wet seeds. The seeds will take several days to develop and require lots of rinses at specified times before they are ready to be fed to the birds. At each rinsing, rinse until the water runs clear. If the soaking process is not done properly, the seeds can sour or bacteria will grow. The birds that eat these will become very sick.

**The Molting Lady Gouldian**

Once a year, lady Gouldians molt, a process during which all of their feathers are replaced with new ones. Their regular diet must be enriched at this time as it was for the breeding diet. Since we are artificially creating and controlling their environment, there is no single or specific season for molting. Adult Gouldians begin a molt at the end of their breeding cycle. Most juveniles will begin their first molt at around 8 weeks of age. Usually the first sign that of a molt is by finding huge amounts of feathers on the cage floor and my floor.

In the wild the immature or juvenile Lady Gouldians, will slowly begin to molt in August and this can continue into December. Mature wild Gouldians will start their molt in October and be finished by the end of November. The weather in Australia, during the molting period, can cause a lot of stress particularly for the juveniles. It can be extremely hot in October and November and seeds may become scarce. Most seeds will have already sprouted and the plants grown far beyond the sprouting stage which makes them useless to Gouldians. As the rainy season begins new seeds will start to sprout in December.
Juveniles can take as long as six months and sometimes longer before they complete their first molt. The abdomen and breast feathers are the first to be replaced, next are the rump feathers, followed by the head feathers. The back and wing feathers are last to be shed and replaced.

The creation of a single feather is amazing. The diet during a molt must provide extra protein, carbohydrates and oil. Carbohydrates will provide the additional energy required to produce feathers. The protein in dark green leafy vegetables or sprouted seeds and chopped hard boiled eggs and egg food should be offered daily during a molt. Once I am aware that molting has begun, I increase the availability of oily seeds such as canary, Niger, safflower and chopped sunflower seeds. Also, give the birds more opportunities to bathe as it must itch to get new feathers. Bathing will also help to breakdown the chitin straws that cover each new feather. I also feed the molting birds the breeding diet.

Ninety percent of a feather is composed of protein. Minerals in feathers provide for depth of color and for their stiffness. Oils, fats and the essential fatty acids give the feathers sheen and gloss. The initial appearance of the new head feathers can be quite startling if you have never witnessed a molt. The Gouldian will appear to have tiny little white tube things, somewhat resembling parasitic insect larva on a caterpillar, projecting from its head. A closer look reveals the amazingly thin white tubes that contain the new feathers.

Sometimes an abnormal molt will occur. There may be spots on the bird where there are no feathers or the head feathers can partially or totally fail to come in.
Replacement of the feathers can become delayed. This can be caused by a number of things. Australian finches are known to need larger amounts of iodine than other exotic finches. Supplemental iodine has been seen to correct this problem, but be careful about the dosage because too much iodine is also toxic. Extreme or abrupt environmental condition changes, mutations, mites, lice, diseases, fear, shock or the malfunction of the thyroid gland can disrupt a normal molt.
Breeding

Breeding in the wild

In Australia, Gouldians breed when there are plenty of grass seeds and insects to feed upon. This is usually between the months of September-March. They lay their eggs in the hollows of smooth-barked gum trees like the Snappy gum, (Eucalyptus brevifolia), or Salmon gum, (E. tintinnans). A single parent will always stay with the eggs in the nest, the number of which will vary, (depending heavily upon the availability of food). Both parents share the responsibility of feeding the chicks. After roughly 3 weeks the fledglings will leave the nest to experience the world. The parents continue to share the responsibility of feeding them until they become fully independent at around 40 days of age.

Breeding in captivity

Captive Gouldians can be encouraged to breed by altering their living conditions and environment to duplicate the spring time in Australia. Records show that the most successful period for breeding Gouldians in the Northern Hemisphere is September/October and in the Southern Hemisphere, where the wild Gouldians breed, it is March/April. The Gouldians in the U.S. have not acclimated themselves to breed when it is spring time in America. However, this is not much of a problem because we can manipulate their environment at any time of the year by
increasing or decreasing the light hours, temperature, humidity and feeding them a breeding diet. We can create a spring season for them whenever they are physically mature enough to breed. These environmental changes tell the parent birds that all the resources they need to care for and to feed their chicks are available for them.

Creating Pairs

I found pairing birds that are at least 9-12 months old or older has benefits. Such maturity provides more calmness and more consistent parents. Sometimes even 5 and 6 month olds can be beautifully colored. Some even begin acting like flirtatious teenagers. At this age I separate the juvenile males and females, but I arrange for them to still see and hear each other. The separation is just to allow for a bit more maturing before setting up pairs.

Any cage that gives the pair an adequate amount of flight space can become a breeding cage. I set up the cage, add a nest box, nesting material and move the male Gouldian into the breeding cage first. I allow him to be there for 1-3 days before letting the female join him. Once the male has become acclimated to his new environment, he will begin the courtship with his partner feeling confident and in charge.

Recently I learned that it’s been scientifically proven that female Gouldians are able to control the sex of their offspring. The head color of the male she accepts holds the secret. The mating of pairs having differing head colors will lead to an
imbalance of the sex ratio of the chicks and will cause there to be an increase in the number of males in the clutch.

The breeding pairs need a minimum constant temperature of 77°F (25°C), at least 14-15 hours a day of full spectrum light. When I use a cage that has wire on all sides, I provide additional privacy for the pair by covering some areas of the cage with anything that is available. A thin, light weight towel held on with clothes pins or a bit of artificial foliage draped on the top and sides of the cage I think helps them so they can relax and concentrate on each other. There are no guarantees that the two birds will be interested in each other, but it doesn’t take long before it’s obvious whether they are interested or not.

If there is no interest the two birds will show an unwillingness to perch close to each other. They may display agitated and unfriendly beak fencing, chase each other aggressively, or act in a way that never allows them to relax when they are close to each other. If this occurs, I separate the birds. I have never had a pair change their minds. If the partnership blooms, there will be very clear signs. All exotic finches have quite elaborate courtship rituals that differ from species to species. I think this prevents a lot of cross breeding. If it is a good match, the pair will perch close to each other and the male will make a grandiose motion, similar to that of a musketeer bowing. He will stretch and stand up, very erect, and proceed to bend down slowly to start wiping the perch side to side with his beak. Then he will stand up very straight again and begin to sing and hop up and down in front of his mate. He will inflate his chest and adjust his handsome feathers. The female will respond by continuing to perch close to him. She will lower her
head while rapidly vibrating all of her tail feathers side to side. Throughout this period of time, it is important to give the pair plenty of privacy.

**Breeding diet**

The six necessary dietary components, proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and water have been discussed earlier in the dietary section. As it is with molting, the routine daily seed diet for Gouldians is insufficient to sustain the lives of both parents and developing chicks. Some birds will still produce eggs, but without additional nutrients, they will be depleting their own resources. This increases the probability that the eggs will not be viable or that the chicks will hatch only to struggle and ultimately die because they were deprived of the proper nutrient at the time it was needed.

I attempted one year to mix my own selection of seeds, but I couldn’t get all the seeds I needed and the bags were heavy. After that I tried buying seed from hampers and open bins. It was less costly, but I quickly found out how old, and dirty that seed becomes. Now I buy the best packaged Australian exotic finch seed mix that I can get. When I bring it home it goes straight into a freezer or refrigerator until needed. I hang multiple little seed cups on the cage bars, to give the birds choices of canary seed, Niger, chopped sunflower seed, rape seeds, wheat seeds and some wild finch seed. I enjoy just watching them think over and decide what they want at that moment.

For anyone who wants to make their own seed mix, here is the list that I tried to get together, but gave up on.
**A breeding seed mix**

I started by increasing the amount of canary seed in the overall seed mix to roughly 40% of the total. 50% of the mix is an equal combination of French millet, Hungarian millet, Japanese millet, and red millet, but this is as far as I got because I could not find Hungarian or Japanese millet. The recipe goes on adding wheat, Niger, chopped sunflower seeds and rape seeds, with the wheat forming half of that, (i.e. wheat should form 5% of the total seed mix).

During both a molt and a breeding cycle everyone needs an increased amount of animal protein. My daily routine is to offer a mixture of egg food and finely chopped hard boiled eggs. I always give the egg mixture and the soaked/sprouted seeds or vegetables to my birds as early in the morning as I can bare to get out of bed because that is the time they want it will eat the most of it. As previously stated, two recipes for egg food are described in appendix D. I usually make a large quantity of moist egg food and freeze it in small portions to keep from having to make egg food fresh daily. It stays fresh if refrigerated for 3 days at least.

**Nesting**

A good size for a nest box is 4.5 inches, (12 centimeters), in width, 5 inches, (13 centimeters), in depth, and 6.25 inches, (16 centimeters), in height. Gouldians are not the smallest birds in the finch species. The small plastic finch nest boxes that
are on the market for finches will be accepted by them. I like slightly larger nest boxes that are designed for parakeets, but I have used both successfully. The larger boxes are only slightly deeper with just a bit more overall space. Juvenile Gouldians use their nest boxes longer than many other types of finches. I hang the breeding box on the outside of the cage so there flight space is not reduced. Cages designed specifically to be breeding cages have nest box doors on the ends of the cages and near the top.

For cages without nest box doors, I cut a hole in the cage side which is then covered when I hang the nest box over it. When the box is not being used, it’s not hard to find something to make into a patch. Both the plastic and wooden nest boxes have either a rear or a top door that allows for examinations of the contents. My Gouldians act as if they appreciate having a small perch placed near the opening of the nest box so they can land there and look around before entering. Once on the little perch, a parent will usually peer inside before going in. I think of Gouldians as being very thoughtful of each other.

When there are multiple breeding pairs in the same flight cage, I hang the nest boxes in a vertical hierarchy as best I can while still keeping them in the top one third of their flight cage or aviary. This sets up levels that the birds use to demonstrate their social dominance and hopefully it reduces the likelihood of squabbles over specific boxes. Large flight cages and aviaries have enough space to make it possible to put up two next boxes for each pair. Place a good amount of nesting material inside the boxes. The males like to add a few fibers to the
boxes themselves so I put a little bit of loose nesting material inside the cage or I poke a small amount of it through the wire for him to carry up.

My preferred nesting material is coconut fibers, about six to eight inches long. I take a handful sized hunk of the fibers, separate them loosely and then by wrapping them around my hand I make a circle or a U shape, I can then fit that into the nest box and spread it out to cover and cushion the entire bottom. Once inside, the fibers will automatically form a cozy, concave, hammock-like shape. Avoid nesting material that is made of yarn, very fine fibers or stringy material, such as hair. The straight strong smoothness of coconut fibers make it less likely that a bird will get entangled in the nest. Other good nesting materials are fine hay, and couch grass. Another reason why I like giving the birds slightly larger nests is because the serious mating takes place inside the box. The male may make attempts at breeding while the female is on the perch, but this will not be successful and the male will just fall to the floor.

**Egg laying**

*After breeding, it takes about 10 days before the hen will start to lay her eggs.* Once she starts, she lays a single egg each morning, every day until her clutch is complete. The hen will be in and out of the nest frequently until all of her eggs are layed. The clutch size can vary, but
the average is between 4 and 6 eggs. Don’t worry if it seems the hen is not settling down and brooding right away.

The eggs of Gouldian finches do an amazing thing. The first eggs to be layed wait to start development until all of the other eggs have been layed. This means that all the chicks will hatch on the same morning which means that all of the chicks will be at the same stages of development while they are growing. No one chick will become larger than the others and all the care will be equally divided among them. Of course, it could be that the eggs don’t wait at all. It could be that the embryos don’t start developing until they reach a certain temperature and that temperature is only reached when the hen starts brooding, but to my way of thinking, the eggs wait. Either way is shows a brilliant plan.

Ten days after the last egg has been layed, I candle them with a pen light flashlight. If all is well, the light shining through the eggshells will illuminate the interior enough to see lots of developing red blood vessels. If the eggs are not viable, the sooner they are disposed of, the better. Eggshells in which an embryo has died lose their sheen and appear to have a yellow tint or cast instead of the normal lovely white porcelain look of a living egg shell.

If death occurs at a later stage of development of the egg, the exterior of the shell takes on a gray cast. I have heard that dead in the shell chicks are caused by a lack of humidity. Increasing the humidity while the birds are breeding is an easy thing
to do. I bought an inexpensive humidifier from the drug store and use it when my humidity gauge drops below 50%.

**Brooding**

Sometimes a breeding pair may appear to be hyper-vigilant and nervous during this period. They may get very stressed if their nest is inspected too often. If that happens, avoid doing anything more to upset them. I try to move extra slowly and quietly when I am near that pair. As suggested earlier, partially covering the cage may help the pair to calm down. With all sides of the cage except the front covered, the pair will have only that one open side to defend. They won’t have to be as stressed all the time, expecting attackers to come from any and all sides.

Once brooding starts, both the cock and hen will sit on the eggs during the day. The hen will take over complete responsibility at night. During this time, it is perfectly normal for both parents to lose feathers on their abdomens and reveal bare skin. This is a normal way for the birds to allow additional body heat to pass to the eggs. I keep a thermometer close at hand because the nest box temperature must be kept between 78 and 82 degrees F.

**The Growth of Nestling**

Early in the morning and all on the same day, the chicks will hatch. Their egg shells mysteriously disappear from the nest because the parents eat them right away. The chicks hatch with transparent, bare skin and closed eyes. Normal Gouldians will be pink to peach or flesh color with a bright sheen. The chicks of
the blue back and the yellow back mutations will have slightly different colored
skin than the pink of the normal. The skin will remain shiny until the dark feathers
begin to appear. This is around the same time that they will open their eyes.
Within 3 weeks they will be nearly fully feathered. Their flight feathers won’t
appear until weeks later.

I number the cages and keep note cards for each pair. I think that placing leg
bands on the chicks is an easy way to keep records of the parent birds’ genetic
descriptions. Not everyone is comfortable banding tiny legs. I prefer to use the
split bands which can be put on at any age. I assign one color to each breeding
pair and I band all of their chicks with that color. If closed bands are to be used,
they must be put on the leg between the seventh and the ninth day of life. To do
this, hold the chick in your hand and gently squeeze the three front toes together
while sliding the band over them and over the ball of the foot. Bend the back toe
up against the back of the leg and continue sliding the band up as far as it will go.
A drop of water on the back toe to lubricate things can help to let the band slide
on. I use a flat tooth pick to help get the back toe out from under the band.
Afterwards just put the chick back into the nest.

The color of a normal juvenile’s feathers is an overall olive green. The head and
neck feathers are a lighter brownish gray and beaks are dark at the tips. These
colors provide a natural camouflage for wild Gouldians. Visibly sexing the
juveniles is impossible for me until after the first molt. Both parents feed their
young by regurgitation until they become fully independent around day 40.
continue to provide fresh softfood for the parents that can easily be regurgitated. The chicks will need soft food until they have completed their first molt.

Observe the chicks’ droppings. Healthy droppings will be solid, not watery, and contain only the colors white, black or yellow, (or a combination of these). As the chicks continue to grow, be sure to notice their clever habit of backing up as far as they can in the nest box before depositing their droppings, another reason why I like the slightly larger boxes. Although the chicks will start peeping right away, they will live the first one or two days on the remains of their yokes.

After that, the parents will actively go about taking over feeding. As previously stated, Gouldian chicks have noticeable iridescent and reflective, purple to blue nodules that protrude from the inner corners of their beaks. These are called papillae and will disappear some time before the first molt. When the chicks chirp for food, they lift their bobble-like heads and open their mouths. The papillae reflect the light that comes into their dark box, showing their parents exactly where to put the food.

It takes about 25 days for the chicks to become fledglings. Two weeks, after fledging, the young are considered to be independent of their parents for food, but I always wait and observe that they are eating entirely on their own before
separating them. This is a good time to transfer the juveniles out of their parents’ cage and into a large flight cage. This avoids the issue of parental aggression, which can occur when the next clutch arrives. It also gives the juveniles increased flight space so they can strengthen their muscles.

**Hand Feeding Chicks**

Some Gouldians for no known reason will throw their new hatched chicks out of the nest to the cage floor or even out of the cage. A parent could become injured or die. Usually the remaining parent will take on the added work, but if not and there are no foster parents set up to take over, the only thing to do is to try to hand-feed the chicks. Fostering with society finches or zebra finches is for me the easiest way to save the chicks.

Hand feeding is a difficult task and very time consuming. Chicks often refuse to open their mouths for food. It can become a two man job to feed them, one to open the mouth with a tooth pick and one to put the food in. Aspirating food is a serious concern. If it is a choice and not a necessity to hand feed a Gouldian chick, the best time to start is when they are between four and ten days old.

A brooder is any kind of container that keeps the chicks secure, has ventilation and can be warmed. The chicks get placed into a make shift soft little nest, (I put pieces of paper towel into a small plastic bowl for the nest), and then I place the little nest inside the ventilated container. The temperature in the brooder can then can slowly be increased to between 80 F. and 84 degrees F. by putting it on a heating pad set on low. I keep a little thermometer close by so I can be sure what
the temperature is. When using a heating pad under the brooder, I put a towel inside the brooder under the makeshift nest to protect any chick from coming into direct contact with the hot hard bottom of the brooder.

The next part of this job is to gather the tools, (bleach, syringe, small cup or bottle cap, nestling food and sterile water). I soak the syringe and the, mixing cup in a diluted bleach solution for a few minutes before rinsing them and I do this before each feeding. Several different brands of nestling food or, hand feeding formulas are available in bird shops. If not, most feed and grain stores sell some type of game bird starter or mash. If there are no instructions for mixing the formula and water, add enough sterilized or bottled water to get a runny consistency that can be drawn up into the syringe. In order for the chicks to digest the formula, it needs to be served to them at a temperature between 98 – 100 degrees F.

The tiny chicks cannot store very much food in their crops. They will need to be fed hourly for the first 3 to 4 days and nights. Gently rubbing a chick’s back may inspire it to open its mouth for food. Sometimes gentle tapping on the side of its beak will be an effective stimulant. If nothing works place one drop of the runny formula on the side of the bird’s beak to entice it to open its mouth for more. At this young age, a chick’s crop will only be visible on one side of the neck. As the chicks grow, it will become easier to see the crop on both sides of the neck.

Do not over feed and feed only when the crop is empty. As the days go by and the chicks are growing well, gradually thicken the consistency. After day 5, night feedings may be stopped. Feed as early in the morning as possible and as late at
night as possible. When the feathers begin emerging the chicks will require less heat. When they are completely feathered out, gradually reduce the heat to room temperature. Watch for signs such as flapping wings and attempts to perch. These are signals that the birds are ready to learn to fly.

**The two most common breeding issues**

1. Egg binding
2. Abandonment.

**Egg Binding**

Egg binding happens when a hen’s egg becomes lodged in the birth canal. There is no time to waste, because this is a life threatening condition. I will share one experience I had. Early one morning I found a Gouldian hen sitting on the bottom of her cage looking weak, tired and miserable. She was motionless, breathing hard and nearly panting. She made no attempt to escape being picked up. I gently touched and ran my finger over her lower abdomen. In most cases of egg binding, the egg will be stuck close to the vent and can be palpated. If caught in time, egg binding can be corrected.

Her lower abdomen seemed to be larger than usual and it felt hard. I was careful not to manipulate the egg in any way for fear it would break in the oviduct. Using an eye dropper containing a small amount of vegetable oil, (mineral oil is unsafe to use. It contains petroleum), I inserted only the very tip of the eye dropper into the vent opening. I placed one drop of the oil inside the vent hoping to lubricate
the mucous membranes that line the oviduct. I did not release the pressure on the eye dropper’s rubber top until I had withdrawn it from the vent for fear of breaking the egg.

Once treated, I placed the hen back onto the cage floor and gradually increased the temperature close to her to 90 degrees F. As previously mentioned, a heating pad clipped onto the side of the cage or under it or a reptile ceramic heat bulb placed near her cage will provide the needed additional heat. I also put a shallow tub of lukewarm water on the cage floor near her. Increasing the humidity is believed to help also. I checked on the hen after 30 minutes and would have repeated the vegetable oil treatment a second time had she not passed the egg. I found the egg in the tub and the hen recovered.

Offering breeding birds seeds that are high in oils such as safflower, chopped sunflower, rape, Niger and flax either mixed together or set out in individual cups is about all I do to try to prevent a hen from becoming egg bound. Over breeding, old age, stress from being cold, night frights, a lack of adequate exercise that leads to poor muscle tone, or malfunction of the calcium depositing action in the bird are some other possible causes.

**Abandonment**

As I have previously mentioned in the hand feeding section, abandonment of the young is known to be a behavior of some parent Gouldians. For unknown reasons a parent will throw the newly hatched chicks out of the nest box and onto the floor of the cage and sometimes even totally out of the cage. It has been my
experience that the chicks this happens to are unharmed by the drop, but it is heart wrenching to find the little guys wiggling on the floor of the cage. Placing them back into their nest has never worked for me. They will just get tossed out again. Different breeders offer a variety of explanations, but no one has convinced me of the cause. It is fortunate that newly hatched chicks do not need to be fed for the first day or two. That allows time to decide what to do, foster or hand feed. Keep the new chicks as warm as they would have been in the nest box.

Cage disturbances, such as noise, frequent invasive nest inspections, pests in the cage or aviary, (mice or snakes), over rich food that causes hyperactivity and even routine human movements while maintaining the cage are all thought to be possible causes. Over time, I have seen that the breeding pairs who toss their day old chicks once will continue this habit with future chicks.

**Foster Parents**

While breeding Gouldians, I keep several cages of society finches set up with nests. There are differing views on the topic of fostering Gouldian eggs and/or chicks. I choose to leave the Gouldian pairs who will raise their own young to do so. I find it hard to believe that parent Gouldians are abandoning weak or sickly eggs and chicks. How would they know? Tossed chicks that have been fostered by society finches thrive. I have heard it said that the parents doing the tossing are inferior or weak birds and that their offspring would be the same or worse. And still others say that fostered chicks will not know how to behave as Gouldians if they are raised by a different finch species. I remain unconvinced. I have heard
recently that research has shown that Gouldian pairs having different head colors have an increase in the incidence of tossing chicks out of the nest.

Society finches, also known as Japanese Mövchen finches or Bengalese finches are excellent parents and wonderful foster parents. These mostly brown and white, happy little finches are prolific breeders and because of that, they are frequently referred to as the “mice” of the bird world. They love to sit on eggs and feed chicks. The same man made atmosphere in which Gouldians breed is not necessary for societies, but they do well in it. Societies like to huddle and bunch together. They remind me of the small clowns in the circus that just keep pouring out or into a little Volkswagen. I keep a colony of nine society finches. A photo of their cage is on the back cover. At 5:00PM, each day, all of them fly into the same finch nest box for the night. Leaving not one child behind must be their motto too.

Societies do not require a large flight area. They will do well on the same diet as Gouldians. Usually I select three males or three females per cage when setting societies up to be foster parents. Keeping the same sexes together prevents the societies from laying their own viable eggs. Societies will take care of their own chicks in preference for caring for Gouldian chicks and it has been my experience that they won’t care for both at the same time. It doesn’t matter if the Societies are three males or three females. Both sexes will rise to the occasion when eggs or chicks are put into their nest box.
Another reason to use three Society finches is that if something bad happens to any one of the three, there are still two birds to share the work of feeding the chicks. Three hens together will still lay eggs, but, since they are not fertile, they can be switched with Gouldian eggs when needed. Tiny plastic eggs are made especially for society finches, I think, so the females will stop laying eggs.

My Understanding of the Colors of Normals, (green back Gouldians)

Head colors

There are three independent colored areas on the body of a Gouldian, the head, breast and back. These areas of color are called independent because any one of the colors can visibly appear separately from the other colors. When describing a red head, normal Lady Gouldian, we say the bird is a red head, purple breast, green back or it is a red head, normal. Gouldians are described by their head colors before any other area of color on the body is mentioned. Breast color is second followed by the back color. Head color is a major factor influencing how Gouldians establish their social hierarchies. As written earlier, in the wild there are three different head colors, red, black and yellow, (visibly an orange color). This is true for both males and females. While they are referred to as head colors,
they may just as accurately be described as masks, because the head color always extends over their eyes and face.

**The Red Head**

The red head is the second most prolific head color in the wild, forming almost a quarter of the entire population. Red head males have a nature often to display dominant behavior over the black head and yellow head Gouldians. The red head females have varying amounts of black feathers mixed in with their red feathers. Bordering the red feathers of the mask, both males and females have a narrow band of black feathers that extend all the way around the head and under the beak. Next to that is a slightly wider brilliant ring of blue feathers that separate the black ring feathers from the green/black feathers of the back. In this paragraph, when I use the word dominant, I am talking about aggressive behavior. There is a theory that because there are fewer red heads and a much greater number of black heads, that these wild birds have created somewhat of a truce. The fewer numbered red heads don’t show physical dominance over or fight with the black heads because they know they are greatly outnumbered. I think the black heads too that know there is strength in numbers. Since there are so few yellow heads, they must know they don’t have either the strength or the numbers to start a fight. So there is peace among all three head colors in the wild.
There are genes in the birds’ bodies that control feather colors, (more about this is in the domestic mutation section). The genes that are responsible for the red head color are dominant over the genes responsible for both the black heads and the yellow heads. Because the red color genes are dominant, (RR), the red head is considered not to be a mutation, but to be the original head color of the wild Gouldians.

**The Black Head**

The black head is the most common head color in the wild. It forms roughly three quarters of the entire wild Gouldian population and is considered to be the strongest physically of the three head colors. This color head is caused by a mutation that occurred in the wild. It is unknown when. Since the mask is black, only the ring of blue feathers is visible as a separation of the head and back color feathers. The color of the tip of the beak can be red or yellow indicating that not all of its ancestors were black heads.

**The Yellow Head**

Yellow heads are very rare in the wild. It is estimated they form only 1% of the entire wild Gouldian population. In captivity, they are very well established. Yellow head Gouldians appear to have a wide range of shades from light yellow
to dark orange. Like the red head females the yellow head females have varying amounts of black feathers mixed into their yellow masks. The male yellow heads have very clear and intense shades of yellow to orange feathers without any sign of black feathers mixed in. The black and blue colored rings around the head are visible just they are on the red heads. The yellow head lady Gouldians are the only other mutation known to have occurred in the wild.

**Breast and Back Colors of Wild Gouldians**

All wild Lady Gouldians have purple breasts. As usual, it is the males again that have the most brilliant and deep purple colored feathers. The females have a soft pastel or a faded purple feather colored breast. The back, wings and tail feathers of all wild Gouldians are a combination of black and green grass colored feathers and the abdominal feathers begin as a bright yellow color that gradually lightens to a white color in the vent area.
My Understanding of Mutations

Visible color, invisible color and no color guarantees

Many Gouldian owners enjoy breeding Gouldians and view it as a chance to attempt to achieve different, multiple or specific color mutations in the offspring. The topic of genetic mutations in Gouldian finches is a very complex subject and clearly warrants a book of its own. This subject goes far beyond my area of expertise. I will report what information I have obtained through research and personal experiences. It is my sincere hope there are no errors here, or any where else in this book, but if there are, in this age of e-books, I hope the reader will send the corrections to my website so that I can correct them for future readers.

The word mutation is defined as, “a variation in some inheritable characteristic of an individual animal or plant as distinguished from a variation resulting from generations of gradual change.” In the late 1950’s, the white breast Gouldian
mutation was discovered in captivity in Australia and in the 1970’s, the blue back mutation appeared in Europe. What caused these mutations to happen is not known.

What follows is my understanding of how this happens. A fertile Gouldian egg contains 14 chromosomes. Each parent contributes 7 chromosomes to each fertile egg. These chromosomes contain genes that carry information that determine what hereditary traits the future bird will have. Simply put, these genes contain the directions for the design of a new Gouldian. Just as it is for humans, there are dominant, (visible), and recessive, (invisible), genes or traits. When selecting two green back birds to pair, the most common approach has been to select birds having different colored head feathers. Breast and back feather colors will come into the mix a little later. With a pair of Gouldians having different head colors, a breeder can just wait and be surprised by which head colors the offspring will have.

A different approach to pairing green back Gouldians, (also called normals), is the pairing of birds that both have the same color heads. The object of this approach presumably is to establish, genetically pure lines of Gouldians. Both parents and all of the young will have the same head colors. This approach to breeding requires more planning over a much longer period of time. This method is used to improve the physical qualities in a pure bird rather than to obtain a variety of different head colors. Most birds being sold today are impure, (having dissimilar genes that effect color), and the buyer is told little about the bird’s lineage.
Head Color Mutations

The only domesticated Gouldians that are not mutations are the red head, purple breast, green back birds that have two dominant genes for the red head color, (RR). With that established, I will go on explaining Gouldian mutations. There are two visibly red head mutations that do have mutations. One of their genes for head color is either the recessive gene for a black head, (Rb), visibly a red head, invisibly a black head, or the recessive gene for a yellow head, (Ry), visibly a red head, invisibly a yellow head. The description of Gouldians that have recessive genes has become simplified. When describing these mutations, we use the words, “split to” or “split for,” to describe a bird with one recessive gene. For example, “visibly red, invisibly yellow,” becomes, “red head, split to yellow.”

Gouldian mutations having two recessive genes for head color, (either for a black head, (bb), or for a yellow head, (yy), can only donate to the future chick one recessive gene, (b) or (y). The offspring of a pure red head, (RR), paired to a pure black head, (bb), can only produce red heads, split to black heads, (RR x bb = Rb or Rb). Going a step further, pairing one red head, split to black, to another red head, split to black, can produce, red heads, red heads, split to black, and black heads, (Rb x Rb = RR, Rb and bb). The pair combination of a red head split to black, and a pure black head, can produce only two different head colored birds, red heads, split to black, or pure black heads, (Rb x bb = Rb and bb).

To illustrate in a different way, compare the creation of eye
colors in humans where the gene for brown is the dominant gene and the gene for blue is recessive. Each child receives one gene from the mother and one from the father. A parent with visible blue eyes, (bb), does not have a gene for brown, eyes, (BB). If it did, its eyes would be visibly brown because brown is dominant and would hide the blue. However, a person having brown eyes may or may not have their second gene for eye color be the recessive gene for blue or a second dominant gene for brown, (BB or Bb). If the second gene for eye color is brown, the eyes will be brown. If the second gene for eye color is a recessive blue, the eyes will still be brown because brown is the dominate color gene over the recessive color gene for blue.

Once again, when the two genes of a human parent are different for eye color, either gene can be passed to the child. The genes for Gouldian head colors perform in the same way. Substitute the dominant red head color gene of a Gouldian for the dominant brown color gene of a human eye. Now substitute the recessive black or yellow head color gene of a Gouldian for the recessive blue eye color gene in humans. The yellow head Gouldians are recessive to both red and black heads. Here are two more mutation head color pairings for practice.

(Ry) x (yy) = (Ry) and (yy)
(by) x (yy) = (by) and (yy)

There are always little exceptions or quirks to rules of nature and in the case of red head hens, just memorize that red head hens cannot ever be split to black.
The mutated gene that causes the hens to have a red head is attached to the hen’s sex chromosome. This is called a sex linked inheritance.

**Breast mutations**

There are many different color mutations for breasts. The white breast mutation showed up first in South Africa in the late 1950’s and in captive Gouldians in Australia in 1954. They did not appear until 1967 in the U.S. Now they are very well established worldwide. There is a blue breast mutation and several different shades of purple breasts that range from blue to lilac and rose. These are not considered to be well established mutations and they are not widely available at this time.

The gene for a purple breast is not a mutation. It is the wild Lady Gouldians’ only breast color, (PP). The recessive gene for a white breast is a mutation. When planning to produce good quality white breast Gouldians, a visibly white breast, (ww), and a visibly purple breast, split to white, (Pw), can be safely paired. Two purple breasts, split to white, (Pw) x (Pw) will also produce strong white breasts. In order for a recessive gene to be visible, at least one recessive gene has to exist in both parents. The pairing of a visible white breast to another visible white breast has proven to produce weak or inferior offspring. When I am attempting to breed for visible recessive genes, such as a white breast, in the offspring, I will
select at least one parent that is a split to a white breast. The split parent birds have fewer mutations and these pairings produce young that are stronger offspring.

*Back Color Mutations*

In captive or domesticated Gouldians, there are three well established different back color mutations, yellow back, blue back and silver back. The yellow back and blue back Gouldians appear in all different shades from light to dark. There are several genetic mutations that occur in a bird’s body to create a blue back Gouldian and there may be more mutations that have occurred in the bird that have nothing to do with color. The pairing of two visibly blue back birds, (just as it is with the pairing of two visibly white breasts), is known to produce frail and weak offspring that will most likely die young or live to have breeding failures. It’s generally accepted that as the number of mutations increase in individual birds, so does the likelihood that the offspring from these pairings will be increasingly weakened creatures.

There are also many different yellow back mutations. These first appeared in the 1960’s in domesticated Gouldians in Australia, but it was a Dutch breeder who was given credit for seriously establishing this mutation. Yellow back Gouldians show no signs of being weak or frail. They are comparable to normal green backs in strength and vigor. This is a terribly complicated mutation to write about because different countries use so many different names to describe the birds. There are red eyed, yellow backs or albino Gouldians, dark eyed, yellow backs and many shade variation of yellow. There are purple breast, yellow backs and white
breast, yellow backs, lutinos, some yellow backs are classified as being single factor or double factor. I look forward to a time when describing yellow backs becomes simplified.

I have only written about the most well established mutations, but there are also other mutations. There is a group called, “the rare mutations.” The choice of the word, “rare,” is used to convey that these Gouldians are not well established. They are usually found only in one location in the world and in small numbers. Some of these may become established mutations over time, but some are so oddly colored that they are considered to be freaks of nature. The rare mutations that I have only seen pictures of include pied, melanistics, dark greens, pastels, clear wings, cinnamons, Japanese red eyes, blue breasts, sea greens, Australian blues and yellows, lilac breasts, there are Gouldian mutations that have a thin line of red feathers separating the breast and the abdominal feathers and more that are called modifications of mutations.

Most amazing to me are the gynandromorph mutations and the half-sider mutations. These visibly look a like, but there is a big difference between them. The word gynandromorph describes an organism that has both female and male sex organs. The Greek words gyne, which means female, and Andros, meaning male, are combined with the word, morph which means a combining form, to create the word gynandromorph. This mutation has also been found to happen in plants and
other animals including; butterflies, moths, lobsters, crabs, chickens and some other bird species. The photos taken by Annie Wahl of Lakeville, MN, show her gynandromorph Gouldian which is visibly bilaterally asymmetrical. One side of the body of this bird visibly appears to be male and the other half is visibly a female. There is a second form of gynandromorph mutation which is called, “a mosaic,” gynandromorph. In this mutation, the feathers are both those of a male and a female, but the feathers appear in patches of color equally all over the bird.

This mutation is believed to occur in the very early stages of cell division, before cell differentiation takes place. A chromosome happens to not divide equally. The cell having the increased number of chromosomes will have both male and female sex organs. These sex organs do not develop fully causing this mutation to be infertile.

The mutation called, “half-siders, is often thought to be a gynandromorph, but is not. Half-siders are visibly symmetrically bicolored Gouldians. Unlike the gynandromorph, half-siders are physically either male or female and they are able to reproduce, but they do not produce more half-siders. Visibly half of the bird has feather colors of a male and the colors of a female on the other. It looks as if a male and a female have each been cut straight down the middle and the wrong halves were put back together. Half-siders can occur in all combinations of head colors and in all the different mutations.
What Changes Produce a Color Mutation.

In order to understand what has physically changed when a color mutation occurs, it may help to understand a bit about pigmentation in Gouldians. The word, pigment refers to any coloring matter in the cells and tissues of plants and animals. Gouldians produce two different pigments in their bodies which are deposited into their feathers. Eumelanin is a brownish gray to black pigment and phaeomelanin is a red/brown pigment. Carotenoids are yellow and red pigments which come from certain vegetables eaten by the birds.

The presence or absence of these individual pigments determines the visible colors of the feathers. The green back bird has black and yellow pigments in its back, wing and rump feathers. When black and yellow pigments combine they produce varying shades of green and black feathers. Some mutated genes affect the bird’s ability to accept or not accept certain color pigments into their feathers. The color of the blue back Gouldian occurs when mutated genes affect the black pigment in their feathers causing the black pigment to lose the ability to hold onto or contain the red/yellow pigments obtained from carotenoids. The color pigments for green, yellow and red cannot be formed and do not exist in a blue back.
This explains why a genetically red head, blue back has visibly a straw or light tan colored head with a blue back. The black head blue back is still visibly a black head. The newly hatched blue back chicks have a skin color that is gray and less pink and when mature, the feet and beaks will be a light tan to cream color. The red or yellow tip of the beak will not be present.

The mutation that produces a yellow back Gouldian prevents the production of black pigment. This explains why there can be no green in the yellow back. Neither can there be a visibly black head yellow back. The black head of a yellow back will visibly be white, very pale gray or off white.

Another mutation is described as being, “sex-linked.” Meaning that the mutated color gene is somehow attached to the sex gene. Only males can be dilute backs. This mutation is unable to make enough black pigment to produce the color black. The word, dilute, describes the appearance of a lighter colored bird over all. In this mutation, the normal green color is in-between yellow and green. All areas which would otherwise have been black, such as the band of feathers between the back and mask, and the feathers under the beak on the neck area visibly are a medium gray. Just memorize that dilute backs do not have white breasts. Purple is the only breast color found on dilutes.

The albino or white back Gouldian first appeared in domestic Gouldians in 1960 in Australia. This bird has no color pigments. Even the eyes are void of color and are visibly red due to the blood vessels in the eye. The silver back has become an established mutation due to the work of the same Dutch breeder recognized for
establishing the yellow back. This is an otherwise entirely creamy white back Gouldian which appears to have some iridescent sheen on its back feathers.

**Words of Caution When Breeding Mutations**

As mentioned earlier, while we can see the obvious color mutated birds, we cannot know if other genes, (not related to color), have mutated as well at the same time. If there are additional genetic mutations, could they be the cause of the frailness that occurs when birds with the same mutations are paired to each other? There is more to be discovered in the field.

Birds having multiple mutations are often difficult or problematic to breed and to care for. Pairing closely related birds is known to increase the production of weak offspring. Birds having mutations are often less resistant to cold and more seriously effected by stress. I believe that as the number of mutations increase in individual birds, so does the likelihood that the offspring from those pairings will be increasingly weakened.

**Showing Lady Gouldians**

Going to a bird show is an enormously exciting and educational experience. It provides a great opportunity to meet exhibitors and breeders. Spectators sitting in front of the judges’ bench will thoroughly enjoy watching the judges
and listening to their remarks. Often a judge will answer questions from the gallery and make valuable comments and comparisons. Especially for someone who does not own a Gouldian yet, going to a show is an ideal way to learn what to look for.

When I decided to participate in shows, I made certain that I started with quality birds. In the United States, The National Finch and Softbill Society, (NFSS), a nonprofit hobbyist group, is dedicated to promoting the welfare and enjoyment of and for domesticated finches and softbills worldwide, (the term, softbill, is used to define a group of cage and aviary birds who feed on insects/egg food and soft plant material and whose young are helpless at birth. These birds don’t really have soft bills). Currently there are hundreds of individual members representing almost every U.S. State, Puerto Rico, Canada, England, Spain and Australia.

Anyone may join or gain further information about the NFSS by going to their website, www.nfss.org. One of the many benefits which this organization offers is the ability to participate in sanctioned bird shows held throughout the U.S. Canada and Puerto Rico. To find a local bird show or bird club, inquire at your local pet store or find a copy of Bird Talk Magazine. Many bird clubs will have a finch division even if the club is not exclusively devoted to Gouldians. Canary shows frequently do this.

A show cage, a bird, seed and water are all that is needed to enter. Several different show cages are available commercially. Some hobbyists choose to buy a wire show cage front and make the plywood box. The best place to see a picture
of one is on the NFSS website. Most are wooden, plastic or wire cages of uniform size. The box cages have wire on the front and half of the top of the box. Only one perch is placed in the center of the back of the cage and there is a door on one end of the cage. When pairs are being judged, there are two perches in the show cages.

Most boxes are painted black, (white is allowed but is not the most popular), on the outside and pale blue on the inside. Do not put your name or any other distinctive or identifiable marks on the show cage. The exhibitors will not be identified until the judging has been completed.

At the show the birds are registered in their proper division. A small fee is charged for a tag, which must be filled out and attached to each cage, and to pay the judges. Cages are placed on tables behind the judges’ bench with other cages of birds in the same division. In high ranking shows, birds are required to have closed bands. These can be purchased at the NFSS website. The current year is imprinted on them.

Lower ranking shows allow birds that have no bands as well as birds having split bands, which can be put on at any time, to enter. Split bands are cut plastic bands. They come in many different colors and can be stretched open for a few seconds by a little tool that comes with the bands. Of great importance is a show rule that cages without food and water will be immediately disqualified.
The NFSS has established specific criterion called standards for finches and softbills that are exhibited at the shows. Lady Gouldians are judged based upon; conformation, (body shape, size and posture), color/markings, (depth and evenness of color), deportment, (how the bird behaves in the cage, sitting still and being calm on the perch is most desirable for Lady Gouldians), demeanor, (considered for the types of finches that are recognized as being a bit on the wild side and are expected to be active in their cages), and condition, (feathers must be in tip top shape), the bird must be the proper weight and picture of good health with nails trimmed.

**Health Issues and Maintenance**

*Prevention is Better Then Cure*

Starting out with healthy birds, a nearly sterilized living environment, the proper diet and climate are all very important. I wasn’t always, but I soon learned to be cautious when I allowed other breeders into my aviary. I asked them to wash their hands and take off their shoes before entering. Most times I would ask them to wear clothing that they had not worn while caring for their own birds. Whenever it was possible I would bring the bird or birds out of their environment to be examined by the other breeder.

*Quarantine Period*

When deciding to introduce additional Gouldians to the cage or colony, a quarantine period is needed for several reasons. The entrance of parasites, such
as mites, lice and worms, bacterial and viral agents must be prevented. Once introduced, every bird is considered to be at risk and every bird will need to be medicated if an infected bird does get into the same room. A thirty day quarantine period should begin along with some preventative treatments. I treat new Gouldians for worms, lice and mites. Should the new Gouldians be carriers of any viral or bacterial infection, it will be evident in that period of time.

When possible, have a stool sample microscopically examined by an avian veterinarian. Better still, purchase a little microscope, learn how to use it and check the stool samples yourself. There are several infections that can be identified in stool samples. Another option is to plan ahead for stool sample analysis by getting acquainted with the closest avian veterinarian before there is a real need. When the need arises, collect several fresh droppings on wax paper. Put that in an air tight container and get it to the veterinarian. Many veterinarians will have their own preferred method for obtaining a specimen, so always ask before collecting. The most important thing is not to let the sample dry out. In appendix G, I have listed diseases and conditions known to affect Gouldians. As I have said throughout this book, I am not a veterinarian. I cannot make diagnoses. If there is not an avian veterinarian who treats finches that you can contact at the first sign of illness, there really is not much help for the bird unless we teach ourselves. My reason for listing these illnesses is so that it will be a place to start to research and learn about what health problems are common to Gouldians, how they appear and how to treat them.
Treating Bleeding Injuries

Nail and Beak Care

An injury that causes a Gouldian to bleed can very quickly become its cause of death. I think the most frequent injury that causes bleeding occurs when toenails are being trimmed. It is important to trim long or curling nails for safety reasons. Overgrown toe nails can cause injuries and lead to bacterial infections. To determine if the bird’s nails are overgrown, watch the bird when it is standing on a flat surface, the tip of the nail should be almost level with the toe itself. If the nail is too long, it will cause the toe to lift off the ground.

Have another person hold the bird during the first few trimmings, placing a forefinger over the top of the Gouldian’s head will help to keep the bird still. Do not pull on the toes. Just let them rest on the heel of the holder’s hand. Regular nail clippers, the type that might be found on a man’s key chain are what I use. A tooth pick helps to unclench and separate the toes. Do this near a good source of light. Backlighting the toenail helps me avoid cutting the quick. Most often I am able to see how far it grows into the nail. The quick is hard to see when the nails are dark.

The more often the nail is trimmed, the further the quick will recede over time. Trim a little at a time if the nails are very over grown and curling. If the blood vessel in the nail is cut, it will bleed seriously. I keep a small container of flour or corn starch with my bird supplies. As quickly as I can, I put the bird’s toenail in either of these powders. The gluten in them helps the blood to clot quickly. If the
bleeding does not stop, cauterize the wound immediately. Light a match, blow it out, and place the hot match tip against the bleeding nail. Because Gouldians have a high rate of metabolism, they are in serious danger if bleeding is not stopped quickly. Having a high rate of metabolism is not all bad. On the flip side it also speeds up the healing process.

Some birds have overgrown beaks or beaks that cross at the tip. The beak is a very important tool. It is the tool with which they eat, defend themselves, preen feathers, feed young and interact socially with other birds. An overgrown beak can lead to a variety of complications and needs to be corrected. The process is not much different than trimming toe nails. Trim a little bit at a time regularly over time until the beak is corrected. Accidentally cutting a blood vessel in the beak is also serious and can lead to the death of the bird. Sometimes I prefer to file the beak with a diamond dust nail file.

**Going Light**

It is often hard to recognize when a bird is ill until it is too late to do anything to save it. Going light is a phrase used to describe a Gouldian who has rapidly lost a great deal of weight. All birds attempt to hide signs of an illness. The fluffed up feathers of a sick bird make it hard to see that the body has been breaking down muscles and proteins to use to provide energy just to stay alive. The first thing to do is to isolate the bird into a small container. Once that is done, slowly increase the temperature to 85-90 degrees F. This container is frequently called a hospital cage. Both of these actions will help the bird to conserve energy that can then be used for healing. Since I know what a healthy Gouldian’s droppings look like. A
sudden change in the smell, (Gouldians’ droppings normally have no odor), color or consistency, watery droppings or diarrhea indicate illness. Diarrhea that does not resolve itself quickly can be fatal. Again because of their high metabolic rate, dehydration occurs quickly and may put the bird into an irreversible decline.

When I am unable to get to an avian veterinarian and I know there is nothing I know to do to save the bird’s life. I’ll use “going light” as an example, I can be pretty certain that this illness is caused by an organism somewhere in the digestive tract. A gentleman I met at a bird show years ago, Robert Black, told me of his method of mixing together one drop, from an eyedropper, of bleach with two ounces of water and replacing the sick bird’s drinking water with this mixture for three days. I was at first skeptical, but he went on to tell me that the bird will not drink the water if the chlorine content is too high. It will wait until some has dissipated. My experiences have shown me that if I do nothing the bird will die. This treatment kills all the bacteria in the digestive tract. It offers the only hope. I know the good bacteria will be replaced as soon as the bird is put back in the cage with other birds.

A common cause of diarrhea in Gouldians is E. Coli, (Escherichia coli). E. coli is a bacterial organism not normally found in Gouldians’ digestive systems, but it is normally found in the human body. As mentioned earlier, I am a big believer of hand washing before caring for my birds. Hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of E. coli. See appendix G for more information regarding illnesses and infections.
**Star Gazing and Twirling**

It happens without warning that an adult Gouldian suddenly becomes unable to maintain normal muscle control and balance. The bird may no longer be able to perch. It will display a strange variety of twisting and other distorted body movements that appear quite uncomfortable. At the time of this writing, there is evidence of a recessive genetic defect having been found in the bodies of some birds that showed these signs. If this mutated gene is truly the cause, there is no way to improve the situation. It makes sense to me that because this mutated gene is recessive and because the signs of twirling and star gazing are rarely present until adulthood, the breeding of birds with this mutated gene has continued unchecked.

Some years ago, it was suggested to me that I treat this condition by increasing the trace minerals manganese and iodine in the diet. Even though I had my doubts, I tried them by giving the effected birds ground nuts, and tea leaves, which are high in manganese. Australian finches, Gouldians specifically, are known to need larger amounts of iodine than other finches. A liquid supplement is needed to increase iodine which I added. This bird did not recover. I have also been told that star gazing and twirling, which have the same signs and symptoms, are different conditions and that star gazing is caused by an infection in the inner ear where balance is controlled. I was told to treat the bird for an ear infection. I tried that too. Again there was no recovery. I have come to the conclusion that no matter what the cause, this is an irreversible condition.
**Mold**

Be vigilant for moldy food or nesting materials. Moldy food has much less nutritional value which will lead to malnutrition. Worse, it contains lots of fungal toxins. These toxins can weaken the immune system and open the door to microscopic pathogens that would not normally be able to gain a strong hold in an otherwise well bird. Weaker mutations and overcrowded juveniles will be the first to become sick. I know of no remedy for the problems that are caused by mold.

**Conclusion:**

Once again, I repeat this important notice: I am not a veterinarian. My web site, newsletters, thoughts and book are not designed to dispense medical information or to give advice. I have written about my own experiences and what I have learned while raising Lady Gouldian finches. I do not presume to give advice or to replace information from a veterinarian.


*Jean Ferguson*
An Endangered Species

As a result of a continuous decline in numbers, the Lady Gouldian finch was officially listed as an endangered species in 1989 under Australia’s Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. In 2010, the number of wild birds remaining was estimated to be around 2,500, broken up into isolated colonies of only 100 birds each. The exact numbers remaining are not known.

One of the reasons Gouldian numbers declined so rapidly is attributed to the aviary trade, yet despite becoming illegal in 1982, the wild population has continued to decline. Today the primary enemy of the Gouldian is a combination of factors including the loss of habitat, the impact of fire on their seed resources, lack of suitable nesting sites, parasites, disease, the grazing of cattle, buffalo, and horses. Unlike other seed eating birds Gouldians have quite a restricted diet and they rely on patches of key wet season grasses to survive. Between fires and grazing these patches are becoming fewer and fewer, making it harder and harder for them to feed and breed successfully.

In Australia, the “Gouldian Recovery Team,” was established in 1993 to try to help solve these problems. They currently maintain a national database of wild Gouldian finch information. To help them maintain it, they actively seek assistance from the public to record and report sightings of the remaining populations. Public assistance helps them to understand the Gouldian finch better
and to design and implement plans to help this struggling bird survive and, hopefully, flourish. If you live in Australia and are able to assist, you can download a [Gouldian Finch Sighting Kit from WWF Australia (737kb)](https://www.wwf.org.au). The kit provides an outline of the information they require, how to collect and record it, and where to send it.

In the U.S a report was published in the Sep / Oct 2010 issue of the Journal of the National Finch & Softbill Society describing a three year study done in Australia on the reasons for the decline of the Gouldian finch in the wild. The study found there was a shortage of suitable hollows for Gouldians to nest in. It also concluded that the long tail finches were competing with the Gouldians for the same hollows and that the long tails would harass the Gouldians to the point of evicting them.

Researchers at [www.savethegouldian.org](https://www.savethegouldian.org), designed, built and placed in the environment unique artificial cavities to increase the number of nesting sites available for Gouldians. The results after just a few years showed that the breeding density of Gouldians increased by over 200% in the nest box enriched areas. It also showed that by designing nest boxes that are predator proof, the number of offspring that each breeding pair produced has nearly doubled.
Appendix A – Nonaggressive Companion Species

The following is a list of various species of small birds that are considered to be friendly to each other. These birds have been known to share a flight cage or an aviary peacefully with Lady Gouldian finches. Occasionally the personality of an individual bird in this list may prove to be different from the normally accepted behavior for the species.

- Bicheno
- Black-cheeked Waxbill
- Cherry Finch
- Cordon-bleu
- Dybowski’s Twinspot
- Goldbreast
- Green Twinspot
- Lavender Waxbill
- Masked Grassfinch
- Munia
- Orange-cheeked Waxbill
- Parrot Finch
- Silverbill
- Society Finch
- Spice Finch
- Star Finch
- Zebra Finch
- Green Twinspot
Appendix B – Nontoxic Plants

The following is a list of plants that are not harmful to Lady Gouldians and may safely be placed inside an aviary or cage. No plant can be considered safe if it has been sprayed with any chemical or pesticides. Wash, rinse and let dry any plant that is to be introduced to a cage or aviary with Gouldians thoroughly several times.

- Acacia
- Aloe
- African Violet
- Baby’s Tears
- Bamboo
- Begonia
- Bougainvillea
- Chickweed
- Christmas Cactus
- Coffee
- Coleus
- Corn Planet
- Crabapple
- Dandelion
- Dogwood
- Donkey tail
- Dracaena varieties
- Ferns (Asparagus, Bird’s Nest, Boston & Maidenhair, only)
- Figs (Creeping, Rubber, Fiddle Leaf, Laurel Leaf, Weeping)
- Gardenia
- Grape Ivy
- Hen and Chickens
- Jade Plant
- Kalanchoe
- Magnolia
- Marigolds
- Monkey Planet
- Mother-In-Law
- Nasturtium
- Natal Plum
- Norfolk Island Pine
- Palms (Areca, Date, Fan, Lady, Parlour, Howeia, Kentia, Phownix, Sago)
- Pepperomia
- Petunia
- Pittosporum
- Pothos
- Prayer Plant
- Purple Passion (Velvet Nettle)
- Schefflera (Umbrella)
- Sensitive Plant
- Spider Plant
- Swedish Ivy
- Thistle
- Wandering Jew
- White Clover
- Zebra Plant
Appendix C – Nontoxic Branches for Perches

The following is a list of the different types of wood that are safe for use inside a Gouldian’s cage. *No material* can be considered safe if it has been treated with chemicals or insecticides. Before exposing any material to Gouldians, wash it with a non-toxic disinfectant, such as diluted chlorine bleach, rinse well, and let dry before using.

- Almond
- Any Citrus
- Apple
- Apricot
- Ash
- Bamboo
- Dogwood
- Elm
- Grapevine
- Guava
- Madrona
- Magnolia
- Manzanita
- Nectarine
- Nut (except Chestnut and Oak)
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Plum
- Prune
- Thurlow
- Vine Maple
- Willows (Goat, Pussy & Weeping)
Appendix D - Toxic Plants

The following is a list of plant material that is harmful to Lady Gouldians. These plants should be kept completely away from them.

- Amaryllis
- Andromeda
- Arum Lily
- Australian Flame Tree
- Avocado
- Azalea
- Baneberry
- Beans, (Castor, Horse, Fava, Broad, Glory, Scarlet Runner, Navy)
- Bird of Paradise
- Bishop’s Weed
- Black Laurel
- Black Locust
- Bleeding Heart
- Dutchmans’ Breeches
- Bloodroot
- Blue Bonnet
- Blue-Green Algae
- Boxwood
- Bracken Fern
- Burdock
- Caladium
- Cana Lily
- Cardinal Flower
- Cherry Tree
- China Berry Tree
- Christmas Candle
- Clematis
- Coffee plant
- Coffee Bean
- Coral Plant
- Coriander
- Daphne
- Delphinium
- Devil’s Ivy
- Dieffenbachia
- Elderberry
- Euclayptus, (dried died or treated in flower arrangements)
- Euonymus
- Felt Plant
- Four o’clock
- Foxglove
- Golden Chain
- Heliotrope
- Hemlock
- Holly
- Honeysuckle
- Horse Chestnut
- Hyacinth
- Hydrangea
- Ivy
- Iris
- Jasmine
- Kalmia
- Lantana
- Larkspur
- Laurels
- Lily of the Valley
- Locusts
- Milkweed
- Mistletoe
- Mock Orange
- Morning Glory
- Oak
- Oleander
- Parsley
- Philodendrons, (Split Leaf, Swiss Cheese)
- Poinsettia
- Privet
- Rain Tree
- Red Maple
- Rhubarb Leaves
- Rododendron
- Laurel
- Tobacco
- Trumpet Vine
- Virginia Creeper
- Wisteria
- Yews
Appendix E – Green Foods and Vegetables

The following is a list of green foods and vegetables that are safe to feed to Gouldians.

- Alfalfa
- Brussel Sprouts
- Cabbage
- Celery
- Carrots, (and carrot tops)
- Chickweed
- Clover
- Collard Greens
- Corn
- cucumber
- Dandelions
- Kale
- Mustard greens
- Peppers, (green, red and yellow)
- Radish tops
- Romaine Lettuce
- Sheperd’s Purse
- Spinach
- Turnip greens
- Watercress
Appendix F – Egg Food Recipes

Egg Food Recipe #1

Ingredients
1 jumbo egg boiled (20 minutes)
1 cup CeDe Eiover Egg food, (dry and crumbled)

Method - Remove cooked egg from shell. Dry and sterilize the wet egg shells by putting them in a microwave for 3 minutes or by boiling them for 15 minutes and the spreading them out on paper towels to dry completely. Place shell in food processor and crumble or manually crush. The original recipe says to mix all ingredients and serve. I do not put the shells in the egg food. I serve them in a separate cup. Keep the freshly mixed egg food refrigerated. For convenience, store excess egg food frozen in small portions if convenient.

Egg Food Recipe #2

Ingredients
3 jumbo eggs boiled (20 minutes)
1 box high protein baby cereal
3 tbs. wheat germ
1 tbs. Nekton “S”

Method - Remove egg from shell. Dry wet egg shells in a microwave for 3 minutes or boil for 15 minutes. Lay out on paper towels to dry completely. Crumble dried egg shell. Mix all ingredients and serve.
Appendix G – Timing for Full Spectrum Lighting

Full spectrum lights set on timers can be set to match the number of daylight hours the birds would have if they were in Australia. I shut the lights off one by one over a 30 minute interval and always have night lights on.

Estimated Average Daylight Hours for Brisbane, Australia
(Not corrected for Daylight Savings time)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Month</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
<th>Total hours of sunlight (rounded off)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>6:45pm</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>5:35</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6:20</td>
<td>5:10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4:45</td>
<td>6:35</td>
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Appendix H Common Health Problems

The following is a list of illnesses and conditions known to affect Lady Gouldian finches.

It is my hope that this list will assist those who desire to research and to learn about the health issues that commonly affect Lady Gouldians

- Aflatoxins
- Aspergillosis
- Campylobacter Infection
- Coccidiosis, (can be a common problem)
- E. coli Infection, (can be a common problem)
- Megabacteria Infection
- Ornithosis (Chlamydophila) Infection
- Polyomavirus
- Salmonella Infection, (can be a common problem)
- Streptocaccal Infection
- Thrush (Candidiasis)
- Cochlosoma
- Yersinia Infection
- Protoza
- Worms
APPENDIX I: For other common health issues I am including my free report that you may already have, but putting it inside this book just makes sure that you have a quick all-in-one reference guide in case of emergencies.

14 Health Care Tips

For

Lady Gouldian Finches
**Tip #1  Bleeding:**

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 overgrown 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:**

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 Weight Loss:**

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 Twirling:**

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:**

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.

**Tip #6 Diet and Nutritional Requirements:**

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 Mold:**

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:**

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 Soaked Seed:**

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:**

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:**

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 Intensive Care Cage:**

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 No Grit:**

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 Euthanasia:**

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 you 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 guide 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 website FAQ form:


Jean Ferguson

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**By Jean Ferguson**

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