

Basic Information on Canaries

Canaries, *Serinus canarius canarius*, make wonderful pets. When first discovered in the late fifteenth century in the Canary Islands, for which they were named, these birds did not look too different from ordinary sparrows. They have been bred to appear more distinctive, and today, canaries may be brown, red, green, or the familiar yellow. They have always been best known for their fanciful singing.

Anyone can appreciate a canary's song, but a canary connoisseur can distinguish a breed just by listening. Roller canaries are bred for distinctive closed-beak singing, while Chopper canaries sing with open beaks. The American Singer was developed by crossing Rollers with Choppers, creating a bird with a diverse singing repertoire of open and closed beak notes. Most canaries can even mimic simple melodies and human speech – although these traits are usually more appreciated by doting canary owners than by judges at canary competitions.

Baby canaries do chirp an occasional note or two, but only males, as they age, develop a strong singing ability. They sing to attract females, to make other males aware of their presence, and when they feel good.

Cage

A canary's cage should be as large as your budget allows. A proper canary cage is a rectangle around 24" in length. Since they do not climb like parakeets, canaries only get exercise if they fly, (not hop) between perches. Set up one perch on each end of the cage. Perches of different diameters 1/4 – 1/2 inches are best. Different size perches will give more exercise to their feet. Unless you wish to breed, keep only one canary to a cage.

Cage Placement

Since a canary's song is stimulated by people's movement, place your bird in a area where he will be part of the family's daily activity such as a family room or breakfast nook. **Never** place your bird in a drafty area such as near an open window. Test for drafts from



ceiling fans before leaving a cage for any extended length of time. Birds can tolerate low temperatures, but never a draft. A bird can also overheat from the sun if left by a window. Make sure that at least part of it's cage is covered.

Canary hormones are regulated by daylight length. If the bird is kept up late in the winter, it's body may believe it is summer and may start to molt. *In the evening, it is best to keep a canary in a dark room, or else cover the cage with a blackout cover.*

Never place your bird in a room where others will smoke. They have very sensitive lungs and are prone to respiratory infections if subjected to the stress of a smoky room.

Never place your bird in the kitchen. Nonstick cookware, such as Teflon®, when overheated releases a gas which is TOXIC to all birds. Smoke from burning food will also leave your bird's respiratory system vulnerable to infections.

Never leave your bird in a room where fabric fresheners have been used. Remove your bird from the room and return it only when the product has dried.

Never leave your bird in a room where any aerosol product is being used. This includes perfumes, hair sprays, room deodorizers, spray paint, and strong cleaners.

Maintenance

We recommend cleaning the bottom of the cage on a daily basis. Using litters such as CAREFRESH® and crushed walnut shells make this task easier. Remove all soft food after a couple of hours. Washing the food and water dishes on a daily basis will prevent unwanted bacterial growth.

Tip: Place dishes above perches to prevent accidental contamination.

Because birds may pick at the bars of their cage, we recommend scrubbing weekly. Use a brush to remove all droppings from the bars and clean using a product like "Quick Clean" by Canopy Scientific to disinfect. "Cage Shield" by Canopy Scientific will coat cage bars and prevent feces and food from sticking. After

scrubbing all stuck on matter, rinse with a 10% bleach solution to kill germs and sanitize. Remember to rinse well several times with clear water.

Scrub perches weekly. Allow the perches to dry completely before returning them to the cage. We recommend two sets of perches just for this purpose.

Diet

Your canary's diet should include a premium seed mix blended for canaries only, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Spinach, kale, dandelion leaves, and broccoli are relished by many birds. These along with a mix of tiny pieces of fruit, (apple, orange, melon) comprise a good diet. In addition, once a week, supplement with a high protein food such as egg biscuit, Peak Health Formula® or a molting and conditioning food. Your bird may enjoy iceberg lettuce, but it is watery and offers no nutritional value. *Chocolate and avocado are toxic to all birds.*

We also recommend pellets for canaries. Pellets are more nutritionally complete than seeds and, since they do not have shells, are not as messy. Since pellets contain vitamins and more protein than seed, other protein supplements are not necessary. If your bird was not weaned to pellets, changing him over will require patience. We recommend soaking the pellets and mixing with seed. Gradually withdraw the moisture and mix with less and less seed. Remember soaked pellets will sour quickly in hot weather, so change frequently during the heat of the day.

When you convert your bird to a pellet diet, go slowly and watch your bird's weight carefully. If your bird loses weight, discontinue immediately and return to its normal seed diet. Since molting is a very stressful time for your bird, we recommend a change in diet only after the molt is complete.

Canaries also enjoy a cuttlebone or mineral block in their cage, and they need the calcium it offers. Like most caged birds, canaries need these items to help keep their beaks trimmed.

Even though a pellet diet is complete, we still recommend a vitamin supplement for your bird's water. Most vitamins are added to the bird's water so make sure you see your bird drink from its water cup! Some birds may not like the taste of a particular vitamin in its water so go easy – don't over do it. By adding vitamins to its diet you can be certain your bird is getting the nutrition it needs.

Nutritional problems are the most common reasons a male canary will stop singing. Recovery from these problems may take up to 12 months.

If your bird does suffer from dietary problems, a positive sign of recovery is the reestablishment of molting. As health improves, old feathers will be replaced

and eventually song will start again.

Molting

It is normal for a canary to stop singing while it molts, or loses its feathers in order to grow new ones. Molting can be quite stressful, and the canary may take a small vacation from performing. If a canary does not resume its singing, it may not be completely happy or healthy.

Canaries normally molt once a year in the middle of summer and the molt may last 2 to 3 months. A molt can occur if the bird is stressed, or moved to a warmer area, or allowed to stay up past sunset. Molts which are triggered by events other than summer weather will be light and short in duration. But nutritionally, treat this period as you would a "real" molt.

During a molt, feed your bird a high protein food daily along with a calcium supplement. When your bird is molting, a crumbled hard-boiled egg or some other high protein food (as a supplement to his normal diet) offers extra nutrition. We carry several seed supplements such as egg biscuit, molting and conditioning foods and Peak Health Formula®. Even though it may be on a pelleted diet, still offer crumbled hard boiled egg (with the crumbled egg shell) or egg biscuit daily during the molt.

With good nutritional care, your canary may live 10 years or more.

Grooming

Canaries enjoy a daily bath. We recommend misting the bird or using a bird bath with 1/4" of water. Remember to remove the water quickly at the end of bath time to prevent the bird from drinking the bath water.

Since canaries must fly in order to stay healthy, never clip their wings.

Toenails should be trimmed on an "as needed" basis. Look at the nail when the bird is at rest. If the nail leans to one side, it needs to be trimmed. If you do not feel comfortable with this task, we here at B&B Pet Stop trim bird's nails, or you may contact your local avian vet. There is another alternative to frequent trimming – concrete perches. The rough quality of the concrete will actually file the tips of the nail as the bird grips the perch. (V.I.P. Club members enjoy free nail clips as often as necessary. Ask any member of our staff for more information about our Very Important Pet Club.)

Please Note: The information in this handout is meant to provide basic information only. There are several good books available on the care and maintenance of canaries. For further information please see a salesperson.