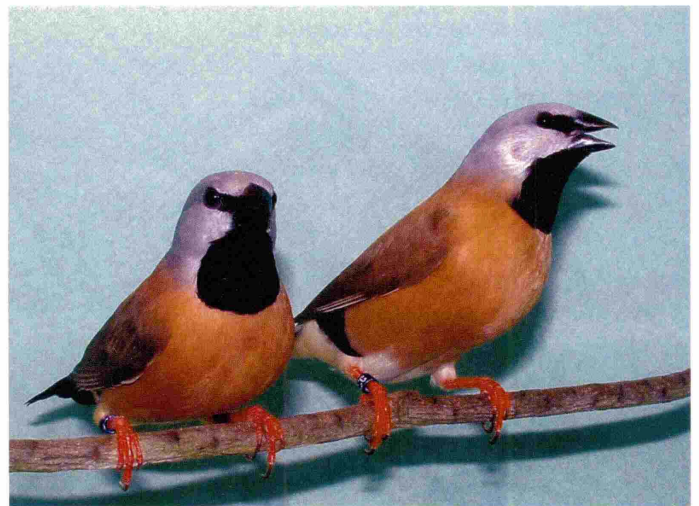


Preparing Finches for Winter

Text and Photos by Ron Castaner, West Palm Beach, Florida

It is time again for our little feathered friends to get ready for another winter. I hope this will help you to get ready and to prepare you in case of any emergency: such as power loss etc. Finches do not do very well in a cold climate, especially the waxbills and the gouldians. They come from a very dry and warm climate, so if they are not properly adjusted to their current climate, they may not survive. The change of weather plus a brisk wind is enough to send them into shock. So please, keep them out of any draft of any kind. Also, if any nest boxes are exposed to the weather, make sure to cover them because if the parents are not keeping them warm they will die in a matter of minutes.

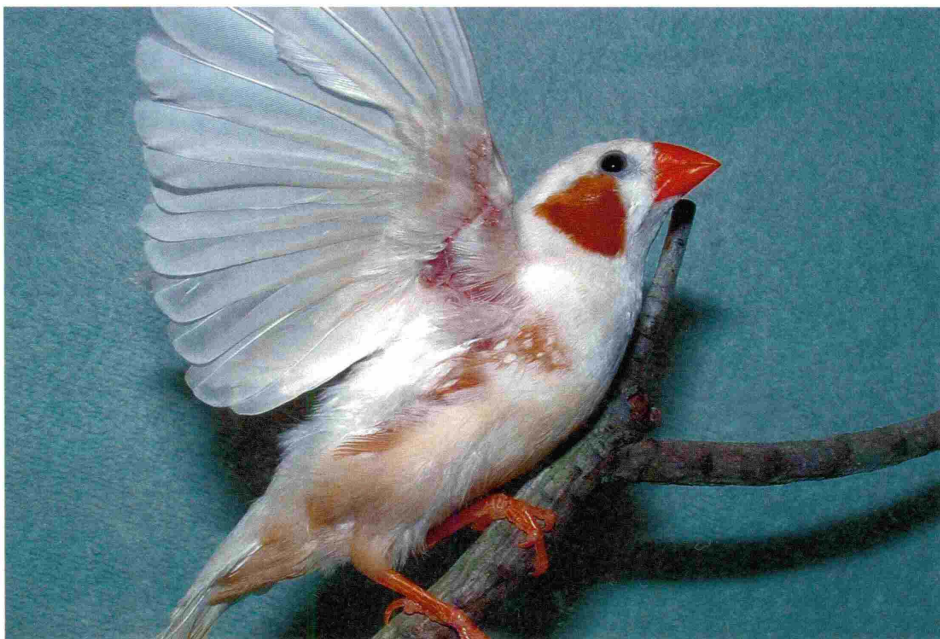


Above: Parson Finch pair. Left: Blue-capped Finch. Left bottom: Zebra Finch on the wing.

Outdoor flights should be covered. I use visqueen, a brand name of plastic sheeting, and place portable heaters in each flight if the temperature is expected to be very low. Remember to make sure the heater is not close to the front of anything; and that there is a grate in front of the element. Place it in a convenient but out of the way place where the finches will not be in any danger of getting burned. Also, make sure it is not too close to the wire on the front of the flight, this will get very hot also, and could burn their feet. You can pick up some portable heaters in a thrift shop or good will. Normally they are priced between five and fifteen dollars. Do not wait until the last minute as they sell quickly. Ask the sales person to plug them in to see if they work properly before you buy them.

Cold winds and dampness are one of the main enemies of finches in outdoor aviaries, not just low temperatures. Warmth is a serious necessity at night. Finches will feel better and are much happier in an outdoor aviary in the summer, and it is also less trouble for the aviculturist. But

the winter does create a problem, so be sure to give yourself enough time to prepare to meet their needs. Living in South Florida, I cover all my outdoor flights by the end of November. Heat produced by an open gas flame or smoking oil lamps is likely to prove disastrous to birds and should therefore be avoided. Remember to give them plenty of fresh air. If the heated air lacks humidity, the birds will lose the luster of their feathers and individual feathers become dry and brittle. Humidity may be supplied simply by placing a pan or dish of near boiling water in some part of the aviary. You can place a piece of wire over top to avoid any accidents. I also leave a



forty watt red bulb on with perches close by so they can get the extra warmth if needed.

When finches that have been living in an outdoor aviary for some time suddenly refuse to enter the sheltered area, it is almost certain the sheltered area does not have enough light. Finches object quite strongly to entering a dark area. So it is of great importance that the sheltered area be bright enough to attract them inside. I also place several night-lights so they can navigate with ease during the night. Strange noises will send the whole aviary in to an uproar.

The correct temperature at which finches are kept is a matter of considerable debate. Although acclimated finches will tolerate lower temperatures, I recommend the lowest should not be less than sixty (60) degrees. Below this, the finches utilize a considerable amount of energy simply keeping the body warm and I feel their general condition and breeding performance will suffer. Make sure if you cannot control the temperature outside, specifically for Gouldians and waxbills, bring them inside until it warms up. Another item to consider is if they have a container for bathing. Make sure to give it to them during the warmest part of the day. If it does not warm up then avoid it all together, or use warm tap water and use a heat lamp so they can dry faster and not get a chill. Be sure and check for any type of openings because snakes, rats, etc. like to be warm also.

In cold weather finches require more carbohydrates since this is the chief promoter of body heat. Just to list a few: millet, canary seed, niger, dandelion, chicory, and lettuce. Basically, any of the oily seeds. Not only are the carbohydrates important, so is a diet high in protein. Both are equally important. Build them up on a good egg mixture, soaked seed, fruits, vegetables, and vitamins. All are a must to get them through the winter.

In the event you are hand-feeding babies, make sure to have some heating pads on hand. Also, just in case, you may want to think about a warmer you can plug into your cigarette lighter. Then if there is a loss of power, you can still heat formula etc. At most pharmacies today they sell the chemical heating pads that work great. Any one of these ideas should enable you to save the babies.

One of my main objectives I have been striving for is to develop a hardy strain of finches. One that can live and breed well in lower temperatures than provided in many bird rooms. If you have a good, selective breeding program, disease free, strong, healthy birds, which have proven to be of good quality for a couple of years, you might be able to keep them in a cooler climate. I can only relay what I have found to work for me.

I would like to wish each of you a healthy and successful winter with your little friends. GOOD LUCK!! ♦



Above: Black-cheeked Waxbill. Below: Cuban Melodious Finch.
Bottom: Pin-tailed Nonpareil Parrotfinch (*Erythrura prasina*).

