



## **The Gouldian Finch**

### **Erythrura gouldiae**

#### **(Problemus Maximus)**

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**By Bill Boyd**

For the coming 1985 season, I decided I would like to try Gouldians (again) having had only limited success with them previously for reasons too numerous to mention.

I ordered four unrelated pairs from a very successful Gouldian breeder who is an old friend of mine and I was very anxious to collect them when he rang me with the news that they were ready in November 1985. There were two black faced hens, one of which carried yellow which was betrayed by her yellow tipped beak, two red faced hens and four red cocks. The hens and cocks were separated and placed in holding cabinets in my bird room (garden shed) until early January. An aviary containing [Princess parrots](#) was chosen and the parrots removed and placed in with a pair of [Elegants](#) for the "off" season. This aviary was the southern most of a block of six facing east and measured 1.3m wide by 2.0m high and 3.5m deep. It is fully roofed with fibre glass sheeting over the flight and southern wall, and the rear wall of the shelter is of fibro and excluded any cold westerly winds. The floors have four inches of river sand over the natural earth and some tall wild grass of some description are growing profusely at the front wire adding to the aesthetic appeal and also helping as a windbreak.



Gouldian Finch

(Photo courtesy of [photobucket.com](http://photobucket.com))

With this cosy aviary I believed I would be off to a good start.

Wrong!!!

One of the cock birds decided he did not want to eat, drink or sleep with, or near, any of the other seven after they were released into their aviary. They were placed in this aviary as unpaired males and females with the idea that they would pick their own mates and this would ultimately be more successful than forcing birds together. The male who did not want to cooperate became very good at imitating objects. He could imitate a tennis ball really well and died about four days after he learnt how to do it, no matter what equipment or medication was used in trying to prevent his death.

Eventually with three cocks and four hens left and seven nest boxes positioned around the aviary, things began to happen.

All three cock birds paired up and all wanted the same nest box!!!!

This box was the centre box of the three positioned about .300mm apart with partitions between them. These boxes were on a shelf at the rear of the aviary. The other four boxes were positioned on a similar shelf along the side wall. The birds made no attempt to go near these boxes which received quite a fair amount of light through the fibre glass roofing. A sheet of steel roof sheeting was positioned over the fibre glass sheeting to shade these four boxes and the birds immediately showed interest.

Two of the rear boxes were then chosen and one of the four along the side wall. At this point I was given another hen who was twelve months old and who had lost her mate. This gave me two unmated hens in with three mated pairs. The unmated hens came into breeding condition along with the mated pairs and promptly started laying in every spare nest box. Clutches of seven and eight were usual and up until 31st March these two birds had laid over forty eggs between them.

The first successful pair was the yellow beaked black faced hen and her red faced cock and she laid four eggs in my roughly built nest before any nest was built for them. The clutch was eventually eight and of these five hatched. After three days I found one tiny bird dead on the aviary floor well away from the nest box. Closer inspection saw both parent birds hissing at the nest box with open beaks. The intruder in their box was the cock of the second successfully mated pair whose nest box was on the other side of the partition and contained four eggs and a sitting hen. He and his hen and nest box were placed in an aviary containing a breeding pair of [Hooded](#) parrots. This aviary is identical to the first although a little more open but still roofed over. The clutch of four eggs soon became seven (so the shift didn't bother them) and although all were fertile two did not hatch. Three chicks in the first nest were coming along fine with the fourth being found dead after the "nasty bad" male and hen had been removed. I now had eight young Gouldians in total in two nests in separate aviaries.

The third pair by this time had built a very elaborate nest (for Gouldians) and were sitting tightly on nine eggs which they deserted after six days incubation for reasons unknown.

A new male was purchased and placed in the original aviary which still contained the two unmated prolific layers and he eagerly displayed and danced and sang at any and every hen regardless of her condition or position.

The third pair who deserted their first nest built a new nest in one of the boxes on the side wall and again laid nine eggs. Both birds sat tightly until the day before the eggs were due to hatch when they were again deserted due to one of the unmated hens successfully laying three eggs on top of the original very fertile nine. Why the nest owners did not repel this hen is a mystery and she was seen to enter the nest only after it was too late. I had no other birds in a position to foster the eggs and hoped that the new hen might hatch them but this was not to be and all nine were lost.

Meanwhile, the first three flew and one is showing yellow facial feathers already, so apparently the cock also carries the yellow factor. The other two have red faces and as I am not proficient in Gouldian genetics and not knowing the full colour history of the parent birds, I would only be guessing as to their inherited factors.

The pair in with the Hoodeds turned out to be very good parents and their five young flew on the 12th April, 1985 and are very sturdy birds. The third pair has built another nest and the hen is laying again and hopefully this time will see it through. The first successful pair immediately went back to nest in a different box and are busily rearing seven from their eight eggs laid. The cock Hooded is puzzled as to how he suddenly has five brown finches snuggled up against him as he sleeps on a perch beside this nest box, he makes no attempt to harm them and will, or should, have four babies of his own by the 18th April.

After starting with four pairs of Gouldians and getting three pairs nesting, two pairs successfully and now having a total of twenty four, I feel I am getting somewhere.

Pair three is now trying something different by laying eggs from the perch so that they smash in the seed dishes, but I did notice the hen in the just completed nest today so maybe the cock bird couldn't build quickly enough.

All the young will be rung with split plastic rings to enable me to keep them unrelated for the next year when I will endeavour to breed from tens pairs if they survive.

All are healthy and well protected from draughts. These finches are fed plain [millet](#), [Japanese millet](#) and [canary seed](#), separate and dry. The same seeds mixed and soaked in a water containing "Ornithon" are also supplied (courtesy of Doug Bailey and the N.S.W.A.S. Review). This mixture is soaked for 48 hours and fed at the same interval. All my birds, parrots and finches receive Ornithon soaked seed (sunflower and oats, etc.) all year round. (If soaked seed is beneficial to aviary birds then why restrict it to breeding season or nesting birds?)

The Gouldians receive very little green feed and they are my only birds that are so restricted. The reason for this is that Gouldians tend to gorge themselves if copious quantities of greens are supplied and this then starts digestive trouble, diarrhoea and other associated ailments.

Plenty of [cuttlebone](#), fresh eggshells and [rock salt](#), along with [charcoal](#) and grit in the form of river sand from the floors, make up the necessary inclusions.

One hen showed signs of distress after a little hard flying when I caught up the first young and so air sac mite was suspected. Shelltox mini strips (three) were hung directly above where the birds all roost and after three weeks there are no signs of this parasite whatsoever. The strips will be replaced at three monthly intervals.

There is no doubt that this beautiful bird does not need some special attention but its needs are basically simple.

1. No winds or draughts of any kind.
2. Access to early morning sunshine particularly in winter.
3. Roofed over or box type aviaries.
4. Green feed restricted to seeding grasses only - and rationed.
5. Plenty of eggshells, cuttlebone, rock salt, charcoal and fresh soaked seed.
6. More nest boxes than pairs to each enclosure.
7. Keep aviaries clean and supply clean fresh water daily.

Although some problems have been encountered as have been previously mentioned, most of them are not unique to Gouldians, and although they did occur and will probably occur again, I do not believe they are due to diet or management inadequacies.

Losing only one bird in six months and breeding fifteen so far, shows that Gouldians are prolific.

If the above seven points are adhered to then there is every chance of success. Open flights and draughty places are their worst enemies along with damp and dirty aviaries.

There is no denying that the Gouldian can present some problems and I know of some aviculturists who have sworn never to have them again. If this trend continues (especially since now, there will be no fresh, wild-caught stock available legally), then the Gouldian has a dismal future indeed. But if we provide for its needs and give it a fair go, this beautiful finch which is a prolific breeder, will not decline in our aviaries as it surely has in its natural environment.

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