Canaries
Serinus canaria

NOTE: If you tire of caring for your pet, find a good replacement home. DO NOT release your pet into the wild. This is not a wild bird and will NOT be able to survive outside as those who were raised in the wild can.

NATIVE TO: The Canary Islands, off the northwest coast of Africa.

WILD HISTORY: Some of the first written references to canaries date back to 1555! Modern canary species can be traced back to Victorian era England and Germany, where many of these favorite species were developed.

LIFE SPAN: Typically 8-15 years

AVERAGE ADULT SIZE: 4-6 inches

AGE OF SEXUAL MATURITY: 9 months

MALE OR FEMALE?: Canaries are not sexually dimorphic, which means males and females are not visually different. Mature male canaries do usually sing, which will usually reveal the sex of the bird. Females have a simple, sweet “cheep” sound.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Canaries are small passerine songbirds; they are in the finch family. Canaries exist in a wide variety of colors including white, red, yellow, green, beige, black, rose, bronze, brown and orange. A canary has roughly 2000 feathers. Male canaries learn their sweet, intricate songs from their fathers and other male members of the family. They can also pick up pieces of songs from outside songbirds or from recordings of canaries. Each segment of a tune that they learn will be incorporated into their own personal song.

DO NOT PURCHASE A MALE CANARY SOLELY FOR ITS ABILITY TO SING. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE YOUR BIRD WILL INDEED SING, AND HE STILL NEEDS A LOVING HOME IF HE DOES NOT!

NOTE: Male canaries sing to attract a mate, so if a male-female pair is kept together, the male will stop singing. Canaries will also become quiet during the summer molting season. Absent the introduction of a mate or the onset of molting season, if a male canary suddenly stops singing, he should be taken to a veterinarian, since this can be a sign of illness. Also, a canary molting outside of season may have a health concern and the bird should be taken to a veterinarian. Possible causes of an out of season molt may be that the bird is receiving too many hours of daylight or that temperatures are too warm.

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL: A healthy canary should be perky, active and alert with bright clear eyes, cere and “nares” (nostrils). You should observe your canary eating and drinking throughout the day, although this activity is most apparent in the morning and early evening or when you are eating. Feathers should be neat and well groomed. Feet and legs should be smooth and free of bumps and rough scales. A healthy canary should be chatty and happy!

NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION: Canaries are energetic, sweet tempered birds. They will happily hop from perch to perch and are a joy to watch. However, they can be territorial, so if you have a group of canaries, be prepared to separate one or two out into individual cages if they begin to pick on one another. Canaries do not enjoy being handled, although some keepers have trained them to sit on a finger.
DIET: Canaries DO NOT live by seed alone! Recent studies regarding companion bird diets have revealed that seed only diets can be extremely dangerous. A seed only diet can result in nutrient deficiency and diseases such as liver disease, kidney disease, obesity and cardiac disease, all of which can severely shorten the life expectancy of your pet. Seed can be very limited in nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Even the new “fortified” seed diets on the market are still lacking, as the bird will only eat the inside of most seeds, leaving the “hull” behind. Therefore, the bird never properly ingests the good nutrient coating on the outside of the seed.

Canaries benefit from a good quality pellet diet in addition to their seed mix. As seed can be used as only part of the diet, it should be balanced out with other offerings, such as the pellet diet, an “egg food” diet, and fresh vegetables and fruits. Pellet & egg food diets (available at Pet Supplies Plus) have been carefully formulated to meet the specific needs of the pet bird, therefore properly meeting the majority of the dietary needs of your bird. Some canary diets are also fortified with specific nutrients, such as vitamin A foods that will enhance the colors of some of the red, orange and yellow colored canaries. These are excellent foods, and the best ones also have a product called “egg food” as an ingredient.

Your bird should also be offered fresh vegetables (especially leafy greens), fruit and grain as often as tolerated. Be sure to chop the greens finely for your little bird. Please see our sheet that outlines the fresh foods your pet will appreciate. Remember that vitamin A foods (carrots, sweet potato) will enhance the color of a brightly hued canary. Never feed your canary chocolate, sugar, fried foods, avocado, or junk food.

NOTE: Be sure to remove any fresh foods that have not been eaten within a 24-hour period.

SUPPLEMENTS: The only supplement that should be necessary if you are feeding your parrot correctly is calcium. Calcium can usually be offered in the form of a cuttlebone or calcium treat that attaches to the inside of your bird’s cage. If you notice that your bird does not touch his cuttlebone or calcium treat, a powdered supplement such as packaged oyster shell can be added directly to your pet’s food. Follow the directions on the supplement package. Also make sure your pet is getting a good intake of vitamin A in the form of red and orange fruits and vegetables.

- For optimal physiologic use of the calcium you are giving your bird, the bird should be exposed to UVB light for at least 3-4 hours a day (or more or less depending on the species). Please see our UVB Lighting for Companion Birds and Reptiles handout for further information about UVB light.

WATER: Fresh water must be available to your canary at all times. Because your pet will often even bathe in his water, it must be checked and changed several times a day. It is recommended that the bowl be wiped clean with a paper towel at every change to prevent a slimy film from collecting on the inside of the bowl. This ‘slime’ will harbor bacteria, which can be dangerous for your bird. Thoroughly wash the bowl with a mild dishwashing detergent and water at least once a day.

All water given to birds for drinking, as well as water used for misting, soaking or bathing must be 100% free of chlorine and heavy metals. (Not all home water filtration systems remove 100% of the chlorine and heavy metals from tap water). We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water; never use untreated tap water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a de-chlorinating treatment. If you do not want to chemically de-chlorinate the water, you can leave an open container of tap water out for at least 24 hours. The chlorine will naturally dissipate. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions.

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT: Canaries need a clean, warm, mentally stimulating environment.

One bird should have a cage no smaller than 18”x18”x18”. Two birds should have a cage measuring at least 24”x18”x18” inches. Do not purchase a round cage.

The basic rule of thumb is the bigger the better! Canaries are very active and like to flit back & forth as much as possible. Remember that birds fly horizontally, not vertically like a helicopter! Choose a cage that allows that natural movement. The spacing between the bars of the cage should be no wider than 3/8 inch to a ½ inch. If the bars are too far apart, your crafty bird is very likely to try to squeeze through them and get stuck.

The cage should be placed in a family centered room where the bird(s) will feel a part of the “flock”; however the back of the cage should be positioned against a wall to provide security. Your canary will feel threatened and nervous if it is in direct traffic. Avoid drafty areas and any placement that will get too much direct sun for any portion of the day.

Do not place your bird’s cage in the kitchen, as cooking fumes and even a small amount of smoke can be fatal. Average room temperature will be fine for your bird, not to exceed 78 degrees. Be careful of drafts from air conditioning, especially when bathing and misting.

Perches of varying materials and types should be included in the cage. We recommend having at least three different types. Having different types will exercise the feet and prevent sores and foot related health issues. See the recommended supplies section.

At least three clean bowls should be ready for use: one for fresh water, one for seed/pellets and one for fresh foods.
Your bird may appreciate a cage cover for nighttime. The cover can block out any extraneous light and create a more secure sleeping place. Be careful not to use any fabrics for your cover that your bird might catch his claws or beak in, or that he might pull strings from and eat.

- **DO NOT USE SANDPAPER COVERED PERCHES OR FLOOR PAPER. THESE PRODUCTS ARE DANGEROUS AND CAN CAUSE SEVERE DAMAGE TO YOUR BIRD’S FEET.**

- **DO NOT USE “BIRD DISKS” or “MITE DISKS”. THESE ARE NOT EFFECTIVE AND MAY HARM YOUR BIRD. SEE YOUR AVIAN VETERINARIAN IF YOU SUSPECT PARASITES.**

- **DO NOT USE BIRD GRAVEL. BIRD GRAVEL IS USED FOR BIRDS WHO DO NOT CRACK THE HULL OR SHELL OF THE SEEDS THEY EAT. IT IS MEANT TO GRIND THE SEEDS IN THE CROP OF THE BIRD. DOVES AND PIGEONS CAN BE GIVEN BIRD GRAVEL, BUT CANARIES, PARAKEETS, AND ALL SPECIES OF PARROT WILL CRUSH THE SEED OR NUTS BEFORE INGESTING THEM AND THEREFORE DO NOT BENEFIT AT ALL FROM GRAVEL. GRAVEL CAN BE SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS FOR BIRDS OTHER THAN DOVES AND PIGEONS – IT CAUSES SEVERE IMPACTIONS, WHICH ARE OFTEN FATAL.**

- **CORN COB BEDDING CAN QUICKLY BREED MOLD AND MILDEW, WHICH IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR BIRD. BIRDS CAN ALSO BECOME IMPACTED FROM SWALLOWING CORN COB BEDDING.**

**ENRICHMENT:** In the wild, birds spend most of their day from morning until night foraging for their food. In our homes in a cage, their food is right at their beaks, no need to go hunting. Because of this, it is very easy for our pet birds to become bored and lazy. A cage mate and toys will break the boredom.

**TOYS:** Canaries will enjoy picking at small toys made of leather strips or sturdy string.

**BATHING:** Be sure to offer your bird a shallow dish (2-3 inches deep) for bathing at least two times a week. While they are drying, be sure to keep them out of drafty, cold areas.

**RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:**

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<th>Clean, rust-free square or rectangular metal cage. Minimum 18x18x24 long, with bar space no larger than 3/8 to ½ inch (0.9 to 1.3 cm) apart.</th>
<th>A selection of at least 3 different perches, such as wood dowel, natural branch type, a therapeutic perch or a cement perch. NO SANDPAPER PERCH COVERS!</th>
<th>A good supply of HIGH QUALITY packaged canary pellet diet, small amount of seed and Quicko Egg Food</th>
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<td>At least 3 different toys. Purchasing more than 3 can allow you to interchange them in your canary’s cage to prevent boredom.</td>
<td>Calcium supplement such as cuttlebone, calcium treat or oyster shell.</td>
<td>Treats such as millet spray &amp; fresh fruits &amp; vegetables. Avoid sugary treats like honey sticks.</td>
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<td>3 sturdy dishes. One for fresh water, one for pellet/seed mix, and one for fresh foods.</td>
<td>Misting bottle and bird-bath.</td>
<td>Canaries often enjoy a swing to perch on.</td>
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<td>A good canary book.</td>
<td>Nail clipper &amp; styptic powder. NOTE! Never use styptic powder on your bird’s skin – ONLY nails!!</td>
<td>A bird safe cage cover. Be careful of using towels and blankets from home, which can catch bird nails and beaks in their threads or create too warm an environment inside.</td>
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<td>Fluorescent UVB Bulb and housing</td>
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**CAGE MAINTENANCE:**

Your canary's cage should be checked daily for any dirt that is accessible to your bird. Feces and spoiling food should be wiped clean of perches, cups and cage bars consistently to prevent health problems. Cage paper (which should be under a floor grate to prevent access to droppings) can be changed every to every-other day. Check the metal parts & bars of your bird’s cage periodically for chipped paint and rust, which can cause serious health issues if your bird chews or swallows any flaked pieces.

The entire cage should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every month with:
• A mild dishwashing liquid in warm water (make a weak dilution), THEN
• Vinegar & water (1:8)
  OR bleach and warm water (1:32)
• Cage “furniture” should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
• RINSE OFF ALL SOAP AND BLEACH THOROUGHLY WITH PLAIN WATER BEFORE RE-INTRODUCING YOUR PET TO ITS ENCLOSURE!!
• NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH – IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION

GROOMING & HYGIENE:
All birds should be gently misted with a water bottle dedicated to this use only. The spray should be room temperature and misty, sprayed up and over the bird to replicate a fine rain. NEVER spray the bird directly in the face.
In addition to misting, a room temperature birdbath should be offered to your bird at least twice weekly. Monitor your bird while he is bathing, and remove the bath when he is finished.
During misting and bathing procedures, make sure there are no drafts that may chill your bird when he is wet, which can cause respiratory issues.
If your bird seems to stop grooming himself and becomes dirty and unkempt, contact your avian veterinarian. He may be ill.

Be sure to take your bird to your avian veterinarian for regular nail trims.

DO NOT CLIP YOUR CANARY’S WINGS. CANARIES AND FINCHES DEPEND ON THEIR WINGS TO FLIT AROUND THEIR CAGES FROM PERCH TO PERCH.

IF PROBLEMS ARISE, CALL YOUR AVIAN VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY!
It is also highly recommended to have your bird seen by an avian vet for a yearly exam to make sure your pet stays healthy. Birds hide illnesses well; yearly exams can catch small issues before they get worse.

• Fluffed feathers, missing patches of feathers, feathers being purposely plucked.
• Evidence that your bird has stopped grooming him/herself.
• Bird sitting still and low on perch with a puffed up appearance, drooping wings - may also stay at bottom of cage.
• Beak swelling or unusual marks on cere.
• Nasal discharge, eye discharge, wheezing or coughing.
• Any change in stools including color or consistency.
• Loss of appetite.
• Favoring of one foot, holding a wing differently, presence of any blood.

Courtesy of: Specialized Care for Avian & Exotic Pets
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