

Gouldian Finches— Care, Breeding & Genetics

By Tony Hanks

REVIEWED BY **SAM DAVIS**

THE GOULDIAN Finch will be well known to readers of *BirdKeeper*. It is, after all, one of the world's most popularly kept finches, alongside the ubiquitous Zebra Finch (and, arguably, the canary if you include them alongside finches).

I've been keeping and breeding Gouldian Finches for most of my life—about 50 years, give or take. In earlier decades, they were considered a very fragile species to keep alive, let alone breed. I recall trading about a kilogram of Zebra Finches, Diamond Doves and the like for a single pair from my local bird dealer, a Mr Wardrop at Gladesville, a suburb of Sydney. Sadly, the hen from that first pair succumbed just as she began exploring the breeding box.

CHANGING FORTUNES OF GOULDIANS

In the early 1980s, I bred a few Gouldians and lost about the same. By the 1990s, things began to change, and they became much easier to breed—and that has remained the case ever since.

Mutations appeared, many offered at what seemed outrageous prices at the time. I recall the first white-breasted Gouldians I acquired being a major investment. Then came the blue Gouldians—some sad tales from me there, as I eventually gave up on them. I believe they have now been 'cracked' and, based on current prices, that certainly appears to be the case.

Normal birds and the more common mutations now breed readily and are considered well-suited to new aviculturists—provided they follow the rules.

THE RULES TO SUCCESS WITH GOULDIANS

This is where Tony Hanks' book really comes into its own. It sets out the rules in a no-nonsense, commonsense way that will resonate with both beginners and experienced keepers alike. If you follow Tony's management advice, I'm confident your Gouldian Finches will be both healthy and prolific.

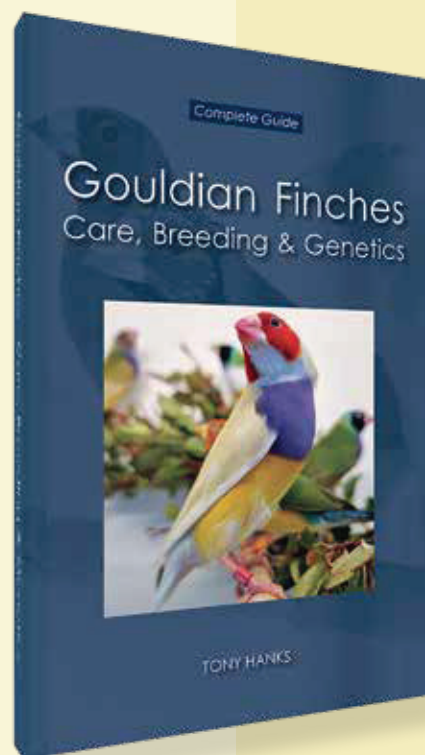
Gouldian Finches—Care, Breeding & Genetics is a very readable guide that moves progressively from the basics of Gouldian management in the 'Getting Started' section, building logically through housing and then nutrition. The section on health addresses common ailments and treatments, including a particularly useful flowchart and a table summarising diseases, symptoms, causes and recommended treatments.

BREEDING AND HUSBANDRY ESSENTIALS

The section on breeding emphasises the importance of genetics alongside the critical husbandry practices required to prepare birds for what is, after all, a demanding and stressful period.

Selecting suitable pairs to ensure the best progeny, while at the same time maintaining genetic diversity within your flock, is strongly encouraged—an area that, in my view, is not always given sufficient attention in other texts.

Creating the optimal breeding environment is discussed throughout, with numerous practical tips drawn from Tony's extensive experience. Aviary or cabinet design, nest box selection, introduction of pairs, breeding nutrition and its role as a trigger, recognising birds in breeding condition—all of these key elements are covered in detail.



RECORD KEEPING

Record keeping is a consistent theme throughout the book, with a range of templates included and additional resources available via the author's website. Tony is very thorough in this regard.

He explains the advantages of recording not only the phenotype, but also the genotype of each bird in your collection. This allows you to predict offspring outcomes and identify whether birds are split for particular mutations. Careful pair selection, supported by good records, is very much the hallmark of an experienced aviculturist.

The pages covering line breeding and the differing breeding success of head colours and mutations are particularly interesting and will no doubt generate some lively discussion among Gouldian breeders. For example, whether red-headed birds dominate, and whether pairs with the same head colour produce more offspring. Studies—including the author's own—suggest that both assertions hold true.

THE GENETICS SECTION

The genetics section is very thorough. It begins with an explanation of basic Mendelian inheritance and how it applies to birds, before moving into detailed descriptions of each mutation.

This is followed by extensive colour-coded tables showing breeding expectations for a wide range of mutation combinations—almost every scenario imaginable.

For those less scientifically inclined, this section may require some effort, but it is well worth the time, particularly if breeding mutation Gouldians is your focus.

The tables, illustrations and photographs throughout the book really highlight just how wide the range of colour variations has become. It is, quite literally, an enormous palette for breeders to work with. That said, on a personal level, I still find it hard to go past nature's originals. I hesitate to call them 'normals', as the term hardly does justice to these truly stunning birds.

CONCLUDING CHAPTERS
The guide concludes with a chapter on 'Challenges and Solutions.' As I worked through this section, I found myself thinking, 'I've experienced that' on more than one occasion. Issues such as chick tossing,

baldness, twirling and predation are all covered, with practical and effective solutions provided. The book finishes with a series of commonly asked questions, along with a summary of essential care and breeding tips. Together, these provide

an excellent quick-reference guide. I also strongly agree with Tony's recommendation to join a finch club—there is simply no substitute for learning from, and sharing with, other like-minded aviculturists.

FINAL THOUGHTS
I have no hesitation in recommending *Gouldian Finches—Care, Breeding & Genetics* to anyone with an interest in breeding this remarkable species. There is a great deal to be learned from Tony's knowledge, whether you are just starting or have been keeping birds for many years. Copies are available directly through BirdKeeper.uk

