

BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to ... Gouldian Finches and their mutations

The Gouldian Finch has been described as the jewel of Australian birds and in fitting style John Gould named the finch in honour of his wife. The Gouldian is clearly one of the most stunning birds and deserves a book devoted to its care and preservation. As with too many birds in Australia, indeed around the world, there is significant destruction of native habitat and resultant reduction in wild numbers of the birds. Without sustained effort in drawing the public's attention to this jewel and engendering support it is likely that the wild Gouldian will be lost to future generations.



This book opens with an account of the finch in the wild describing food sources and research that is being undertaken. For aviculturists this provides a perspective on the conditions that the finches thrive in. It also reminds us of what led us to keep birds in the first place.

The "*A Guide to...*" is a complete revision of the earlier 1991 book of the same name. Various parts are written by leading authorities: Dr Rob Marshall, Dr Milton Lewis, Ron Tristram and Dr Terry Martin. It is pleasing to see that the diverse views expressed in aviculture are also recognised with the authors having different views on the use of Bengalese Finches to foster Gouldians.

The book contains sections on: the Gouldian Finch in the wild, the Gouldian Finch in captivity, mutations and colour breeding, health and disease, and a useful bibliography.

Housing is covered comprehensively with good photos and commentary on the requirements for healthy birds. Suspended aviaries and cabinets are included although from a personal view seeing Gouldians in full flight or browsing on seeding grasses in a conventional aviary is something that is very satisfying. All areas of aviary hardware are covered including feed stations, water, perches and

nesting. These are areas that those new to Gouldians will value highly and where some 'old birds' may learn new ideas.

I found the area of nutrition particularly useful and challenging. Whilst we can all buy the standard finch mix from the local grain store is this meeting the needs of our birds? Yes they breed, but are they strong and healthy birds? Are we providing the nutritional needs to optimise the potential of our birds and their offspring? This section brings together understanding of what happens in the wild, technical information and sound practical experience. Understanding and putting in place better feed regimes distinguishes the bird keeper from the thoughtful aviculturist.

Some may read the potential issues with soaked seed and get worried about the ramifications however, following the basic cleanliness precautions the rewards of nutritious soaked seed will be reaped.

The courtship display is described although the first time that it is seen will be a memory for years- no book can do justice!

The section on mutations will meet most mutation breeders needs. The various mutations are described with their form of inheritance. The photos are truly remarkable and demonstrate many years of dedication by mutation breeders. However on seeing the white Gouldian I can't help but think that our beautiful bird deserves more (no offence intended).

The guide finishes off with a comprehensive section on health and disease. In introducing the section the author proposes that "A drug free approach to Gouldian Finch rearing is a desirable goal which can be achieved if the birds' needs are catered for and there is a strong level of gene-based immunity present in the flock". Whilst there is no substitute for appropriate professional veterinary care the section provides sound information to assist in understanding what may be potentially affecting your birds.

This "**Guide to Gouldian Finches and their mutations**" helps to make information accessible to many and draws attention to a wonderful jewel. Thank you to the authors and ABK publications for the review copy (which will be in the library for loan) and continuing to promote aviculture.

Reviewed by **Chris Oerman**