

# Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia guttata*) Species Profile: Personality, Diet, and Housing

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Over half of all known birds are within the order Passeriformes, which are identified by having one backward and three forward facing toes - the perfect perching foot structure. Zebra finches are found throughout Australia as well as being a favorite among avian keepers and breeders because they are extremely colorful, relatively easy to take care of, and to breed.

Zebra finches have been the subject of much study relative to how songbirds learn to sing. This research has revealed interesting relationships involving mimicry vs natural "programming" in the brain as well as the effect of song on choosing a mate. Researchers have learned that songbirds do require auditory exposure to learn their songs and when deprived of that exposure, the sound produced may be similar but degraded in tone and quality or absent all together. Females judge a male's song when determining with whom to mate - the more robust the song, the more likely to be chosen € a kind of natural selection process ensuring the best singers produce more progeny.

Zebra finches love to fly and need a minimum of 20 inches of horizontal space to accommodate this natural behavior. They appreciate as big a flight zone, as you can give them. Although very social with their own species, in fact, needing this social interaction, finches do not like to interact very much with humans. They should be kept in pairs, at least, and thrive in larger groups. The average cost of a Zebra Finch is \$20-\$100, depending on coloration.

## Quick Stats: Zebra Finch

**Family:** Fringillidae

**Origin:** Australia

**Size:** Up to 8" (including tail which may be long)

**Coloration:** Gray back and white underbelly; bright orange or red beak and legs; black "teardrops" on the edge of the cheek patch (males); small black band crossing the chest; brown and white spots just beneath folded wings; white horizontal marks on black tail feathers. There are many light colored mutations. Females lack cheek patches.

**Diet:** Pelleted foods are available, and contain the appropriate nutrients and vitamins. Finches also enjoy and benefit from greens in their diet. These may include dandelion greens (no pesticides or herbicides!!), kale, parsley, and spinach. Very small amounts of apple, apricots, and bananas can be offered. The earlier in their life finches are introduced to new foods, the more likely they will eat them. Cuttlebones or crushed oyster shells can also be included in the diet, especially if pelleted food is not fed.

**Grooming:** Trim nails to 1/16" longer than quick

**Compatibility/Disposition:** Social, flock birds - enjoy company of other finches. Shy and reserved with humans. Usually do not like handling.

**Vocalization:** A staccato, nasal series of chirps.

**Playfulness:** Interact with other finches, especially during breeding. Enjoy bathing.

**Life Span:** 5-17 years

**Age at Maturity:** 3 months

**Nesting Sites in the Wild:** Open grasslands on the ground; can involve groups of 20 to 1,000 birds. Nest boxes should be 4.5" square - use coconut fiber, (clean) hay, or grass as nesting material.

**Breeding Season:** Year-round in captivity. Spring and summer months in the wild.

**Sexing:** Males: Red beaks and cheek patches. Singers.

Females: Orange beaks. Do not sing. No cheek patches.

**Special:** Prolific breeders. Sensitive to changes in their environment. Always

**Cage Size:** 16" H x 24" L x 16" W.  
Need a minimum of 20" horizontal  
room for flight.

provide calcium supplement to laying  
hens.