

The Goldbreast Waxbill (Amandava subflava)

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By Nancy Ingram

Goldbreasts will be among the first finches to disappear from the bird trade should their importation be interrupted or stopped. Domestic breeding does not keep up with demand. We need to share successful husbandry ideas. Recently my finch breeding program coincided with my annual seed treatment---- and I think this made a big difference.

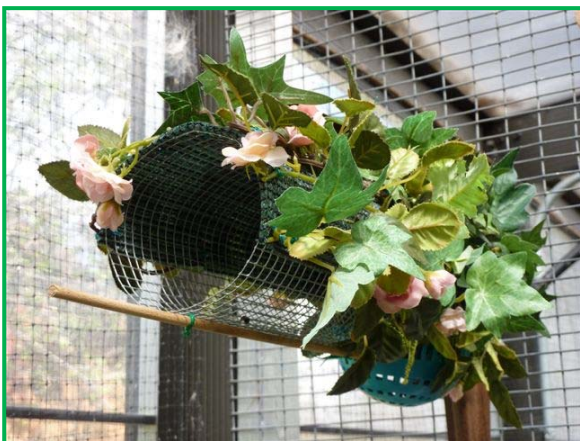
I bred this species on my sun porch for several years in a collection of other small finches. The Goldbreasts then started having trouble with egg-binding. I was afraid I would lose the females because every time I put them in my sun porch to breed they would get egg-bound. They ended up in a hospital cage until they passed the egg. Then I put them in a cage in the house to recover. Fortunately, a small change in their feeding regimen during breeding seems to have solved this problem.



“Adult Goldbreast Cock”

I breed my birds on a temperature controlled sun porch. I try to keep my sun porch between 60° F. - 90° F. (66° F. when there are chicks). I have 2 full spectrum lights in each flight. The ceiling and walls are translucent. This space is heavily planted with bushes, food plants, and medicinal plants. Composts in each 10’ x 15’ flight support small moths, gnats, etc. I raise fruit flies in screen covered bowls suspended from the ceiling. I don’t have any birds throwing out babies due to lack of protein.

I introduce softfood to newly purchased birds during their quarantine period. The softfood I give every other day includes mashed eggs, chopped greens like broccoli, cilantro, carrots and carrot tops, chard, mustard and Romaine lettuce, pulverized turkey starter, vitamins, cod liver oil, crushed egg shells, etc. (I mix the greens together but everything else is in separate piles.) Indoors in a cage situation Goldbreasts eagerly eat this mixture. Out on my sun porch these birds seem to totally ignore the softfood!



“Nesting Tube”

My Goldbreasts are housed in cages indoors for most of the year. I start the breeding season about February 14th. This year we had been out of town for a month and my birds had been on an austere diet of just seeds. I put 2 pairs of Goldbreasts in a flight on my sun porch and at exactly the same time I stirred a little cod liver oil into their seeds (just enough to barely coat the seeds). Fish oil is a commonly recommended treatment for egg-binding. Finches shell their seeds but some of the oil must be ingested during the process. Adding the cod liver oil to my seeds ended my problems with egg-binding.

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I put a variety of nesting sites around the aviary at about eye level. This species is happy with the extra privacy provided by some versions of my “corners”¹ and “tubes”². (More timid species might require a “tube” in a “corner.”) These structures have bamboo or plastic nests attached. I put blades of fresh grass out so the birds can line their nests.

I have one or two pairs of Goldbreasts in a flight with other small finch species. Goldbreasts are native to much of Africa. They are dimorphic so it is easy to tell the sexes apart. I have observed that the female spends a little more time in the nest than the male although both parents sleep in the nest at night.



“Corner”

The eggs are incubated for 12 days. Sometimes I use a borescope to check on the progress of a nest.³ I have made a chart to keep track of how long incubation takes for this species, days to fledging, and the length of their dependence on their parents. I write these details on a calendar so I am able to anticipate their needs.



“10 Day Old Chicks”

I place closed cell foam or straw on the floor below the nest, when the Goldbreast chicks are due to fledge, to soften their landing. I band the chicks of this species after they fledge. These are tiny birds and I have had closed bands (NFSS, size A) fall off adult birds. I remove the ½” deep tray of bath water-----after watching a young chick land in it. I put the newly fledged birds inside the house the first night to prevent them from getting too chilled on the cement floor of my sun porch. The fledglings perch on a branch after about 36 hours. The parents constantly feed and groom them.

The chicks fledge 21 days after they hatch but are dependent on their parents for another 28 days after leaving the nest.

These are gentle birds in a mixed collection of small finches.



“5 Newly Fledged Chicks”

¹ My “corners” are made of 10” square sides of ½” wire screen, wire triangle top and bottom, rough edges smoothed with abrasive disc, top and sides covered with shade cloth and artificial foliage. A bamboo nest is fastened high in the corner.

² My “tubes” are rolled ¼” wire screen about 11” square, upper side covered with greenhouse cloth and artificial leaves with a short entry perch and a small open nest fastened at the far end.

³ A borescope is a fiber optic tool used to see into small spaces.

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