

Basic Roller Canary Care

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Food

It is best to feed your bird the type of food it was raised on, so be sure to find out if that was seeds or pellets. Most breeders include a food sample when they sell a bird.

Pellets are more nutritionally complete than seeds and less mess because they do not have shells. However, if your bird was not raised on pellets, it might not recognize them as food and it can be difficult to get a bird to accept this artificial diet. There are several brands of bird pellets available. Pellets contain vitamins and more protein than seed, so no other supplements are needed.

If you feed your bird seeds (canary seed, rape, flax, thistle, oat groats etc.), buy a seed mix just for canaries, not finches or parakeets. One bird eats about 1/2 to 1 tablespoon of seed each day. Spread the seed in a thin layer in a large dish so it does not get buried in empty seed shells. If you feed a small amount daily, the bird will eat all the types of seed in the mix for a balanced diet. However, it will not hurt the bird to have access to large quantities of seed if you are gone for a few days.

Get a vitamin-coated seed mix so you will not have to add vitamins in the water. If you want to give a vitamin supplement, the best is Nekton-S which is a water-soluble powder. You must mix it fresh every day and clean the water tube or dish each day if you give vitamins in the water.

The cage should always have a cuttle bone or a mineral block for calcium. Grit is not necessary for canaries because they shell their seed. (Claims that grit is needed for birds were based on studies of poultry and pigeons.)

If your bird eats seed, it is important to supplement this about once a week with higher protein food. A good source is egg biscuit, which you can buy at pet shops or at pet supply stands in stores. Soften the egg biscuit with water before serving and the bird should eat it right up.

Canaries like to eat greens and can have some every day. Lettuce is too watery, but a small piece of leaf lettuce is all right if nothing else is available (about 1" across). Broccoli is the best. A 2" piece of the top will keep a canary busy all day pecking the buds and chiseling at the stem. Dandelion leaves are good, and so is kale. Tiny pieces of fruit (apple, orange, melon, grape, papaya) are good too. Corn and peas can be fed fresh, or thawed from a frozen bag. Chocolate and avocado are toxic to birds.

Water

Clean drinking water must always be available. Do not use covered cups that are large enough for the bird to climb in, because it may get trapped and drown. Drinking tubes are the best way to provide water.

Bathing

Canaries love to take baths. A shallow bowl with about 1/4 inch of room-temperature water will do. You can let them take a bath every day, but in the winter, once a week is better. Early morning is the best time. After the bath, they like to preen and dry in a sunbeam, so setting the cage on a windowsill that gets morning sun is good. The window should be closed so the bird will not be in a draft.

Housing

Canaries need to fly to remain healthy. Never clip the wings of a canary. They do not climb like parrots and parakeets, so they only get exercise if they can fly, not just hop, between perches. A tall, narrow cage does not give them the correct type of flight. The proper canary cage is a long rectangle. HOIE makes a flight cage that is 24" long, 16" deep, and 18" tall, that I think is an ideal pet canary cage. A wire grill above the bottom of the cage will keep the bird from eating spoiled food that has fallen. It will also prevent a hen canary from tearing up the cage paper for nesting material. However the grill itself can be hard to clean and I do not think they are necessary for pet canaries. The HOIE cages come with grills that can be removed. The cage should be set up with one perch at each end to maximize the flight distance. A swing near the top in the middle of the cage is good. Get the type of swing that hangs from one point in the middle. It is less stable, but canaries seem to prefer that and have a lot of fun hanging on.

Perches

Perches of different diameters 1/4 - 1/2 inch are best because the feet get more exercise. Get several perches and rotate them for variety. The easiest way to clean perches is to soak for a few minutes to an hour in hot, soapy water. Then scrub clean with a sponge, cloth, or nylon brush. Rinse well, and let air dry for at least a day, preferable two days. If you have at least four perches, then it is easy to keep a clean pair in the cage at all times. Do not cover the perches with sandpaper, it is bad for the soles of their feet.

Molting

Canaries normally molt once a year in the middle of the summer. All the feathers are replaced over a 2-3 month period. A molt can also occur if the bird is under a lot of stress, like moving to a new home. If the bird is used to a cool room, and then moved to a warmer room in the winter, that can trigger a molt. The most common cause of off-season molting is too much light. Canaries should not be kept up past sunset, especially in the winter. When molting, feed the bird extra egg biscuits because it needs extra protein to grow new feathers. Dark greens like kale or broccoli leaves are important for developing a deeper color in the feathers. Once formed, the feathers cannot change, so this is the only chance to give the bird the proper nutrition to grow them right. Male canaries usually don't sing much when they molt.

During the molt season, you should include more fat in your canary's diet such as Flax (highly recommended) and Niger seeds or even some lamb fat. Cucumber is especially good during molt too. After molt, cut back on the additional fat, and feed your canary niger and hemp seeds as their treat for song.

Cage Placement

The cage must never be in a draft, so do not put it in front of an open window. The bird can overheat in the sun, so make sure at least part of the cage is always shaded if it is at a window. Canary hormones are regulated by daylight length. If the bird is kept up late in the winter, it will go into a molt because its body will think it is summer (which is molting time). In the evening, it is best to keep a canary in a dark room, or else cover the cage with a blackout cover.

Canaries are very sensitive to chemical fumes. They should not be exposed to smoke, room deodorizers, scented candles, bug sprays, oven cleaners, or the fumes from any strong cleaning agents. Teflon and other non-stick polymers will break down if overheated and create toxic fumes that can kill birds anywhere in your home. Avoid using nonstick coated cookware, especially if you keep birds in your kitchen.

Toys

Canaries are not as playful as parakeets, but they will show interest in mirrors and bells. Generally, any toy that is safe for a parakeet will probably be OK for a canary. Be aware that a mirror in the cage may cause a male to stop singing.

Toenails

A couple of times a year, it may be necessary to trim their toenails. If the nails get too long, it is hard for the bird to perch and they can snag themselves and hurt their leg. Use fingernail clippers to remove the lower part of the nail below the vein inside. If you accidentally cut into the vein, you can stop the bleeding by applying septic powder that you can buy at pet shops. You can also apply pressure by pinching the tip with your fingers until the bleeding stops.