



Amazing Animals Fact sheets

Finches

Finches are one of the smallest types of birds that exist on our planet.

Gouldian Finch

The brilliant colouration of the Gouldian finch makes it one of the most beautiful finches in the world. Despite its popularity in our culture this amazing bird is critically endangered throughout its natural range.

Habitat

Once widespread through the grassy subcoastal woodlands of northern Australia, from Kimberleys to Cape York Peninsula, it has now withdrawn from nearly half its range. The colonies around the Gulf of Carpentaria and on Cape York Peninsula have almost gone. Even the Kimberleys and Arnhem Land, where it is still locally common in savannas dotted with tall trees around permanent waters, the flock of thousands that flourished 50 years ago have dwindled to tens and hundreds. The causes may be trapping for the bird trade and too-regular firing of feeding grounds.

Diet

Gouldian Finches feed on range of seeding grasses, not on the ground but by climbing and clinging to vertical spikes to pick out grains as do the manikins. They are also experts at catching flying ants in midair and during breeding become almost entirely insectivorous, feeding young on a protein-rich diet. Following their food, Gouldian Finches are partly migratory. In the winter dry season they sift coastwards as grasses die off inland, then follow the rejuvenating rains back in the summer wet to breed. The Gouldian Finch drink from pools by sucking.

Breeding

Gouldians are the only Australian finches to nest exclusively in hollows in trees or termite mounds. They are poor nest-builders – putting together only the rudiments or not even that – but they do nest socially in loose colonies. Up to six pairs will nest in a single tree, some in the same hollow together. Each rears two or three broods a season. Both parents incubate and brood in shifts, relieving one another inside the nest; only the female sleeps in the nest at night.

Endangered Species!

Very low numbers are left in the wild. Finches are at risk of extinction within the next ten years.

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