

Pet Care of a Canary



Canaries are small birds that came originally from the Canary Islands – which is why they are called ‘canaries’. They are usually yellow, though there are also red and orange canaries available. They were brought to the UK by Spanish sailors in the 1600s. They tend to make popular pets, as they are cheerful little birds.

Housing Canaries

Canaries can be kept indoors or outdoors. Canaries that are kept indoors must live in a cage. They need daily exercise which means they must be allowed out of the cage to fly around the room. Make sure all windows and doors are closed, and other pets are out of the room. The bottom of the cage must be covered with sand sheets, as these help canaries digest their food.

Canaries housed outside must be in a large, purpose-built bird house called an aviary. This needs to be big enough for the birds to fly around, with bars no more than 12mm apart.

Diet

In the wild, canaries would eat a range of seeds, grains and vegetation. In captivity, canaries need special canary food with other foods to give them all the nutrition they need. They can have small pieces of fruit and vegetable, but only as a treat. They must never be given lettuce, avocado or lemon, as these can cause illness. Giving a canary cuttlefish is a good way to provide extra calcium. Also, the grit in cuttlefish helps their digestion.



Did You Know?

- Canaries can live for up to 10 years!
- Canaries can lay between 3 and 7 eggs in one clutch.

Canary Company

Canaries are friendly birds, and they enjoy company with their own kind. They need to be kept in pairs, or in larger groups.

Behaviour

Canaries are playful so they need a range of toys to play with, for keeping them healthy and entertained so that they do not get bored. Canaries are unlikely to become tame enough to hop onto your finger and perch there unless they have been hand-reared. Canaries must be handled very gently. When you pick them up, cover their back and wings with one palm. Then carefully put your middle and index fingers around their neck, very loosely. Use your other hand to support the body and feet. Canaries can bite if they feel in danger or anxious, so be careful.

A Poorly Canary

Signs a sick canary might display are sitting hunched up, feathers fluffed out and not singing. Canaries are naturally nervous birds, so if you think your canary is ill, make sure it is not near loud noises or sudden movements. Your canary will need to be kept away from other birds, to stop the disease spreading. Give your pet fresh food and water, keep it warm, and then contact a vet or bird expert.

Note: If your canary is moulting a lot, it could be stressed.



Male canaries are the real singers. Females can sing, but not as sweetly or for as long.

Questions

1. Why do canaries have that name?
2. How did they get to the UK?
3. Explain the purpose of putting sand sheets in the bottom of the cages.
4. Why do you think the bars of the aviary must be no wider than 12mm?
5. Why might canaries need small pieces of fruit and vegetables?
6. What do canaries gain from having cuttlefish?

7. What does it mean in the text when it says canaries “enjoy company with their own kind”?

8. Explain why canaries need toys.

9. Your canary has just bitten you. How might it be feeling?

10. Imagine your canary has stopped singing. What other signs might you look for, to decide whether it is ill?