

# Happiness comes in tiny packages...

Zebra finches have blossomed to become the most popular parlour birds next to budgerigars and canaries. That's quite something, in view of the strong competition among colourful exotic birds. Why, then, is this little trumpeter so much loved? The experts from the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo answer the question.

They first came to Europe from distant Australia. No one knows exactly when. Who brought them and first bred them is also a mystery. What is sure, though, is that zebra finches in Europe, after their scientific designation in 1817, were only sparsely represented commercially. But by the end of the 19th century, they had become one of the most frequent and popular estrildid finches on the continent. This development is not so astonishing. These pretty songbirds with their colourful plumage are very easy to look after, making them ideal birds for beginners.

## LOW MAINTENANCE, BUT SHY

The tiny birds don't make too many demands on their feeding. As a basic food, they get on fine with ready-mixed seed for exotic birds. Give them some greens in their daily menu, some occasional fruit, fresh drinking water each day and your finches will be quite happy. Like their fellows in the wild who



always stick together in swarms of up to 100 birds, domesticated zebra finches are also very gregarious. That obligates pet owners to keep them in pairs at least and never one on its own. A duty to be relished as what could be nicer than watching their fosterlings fondle each other's feathers and flattering one another? It's all behaviour which constantly tightens the lifelong bond between the little couple. The birds will never behave this affectionately towards their owners. They'll trumpet for them, perhaps nibble a few seeds out of their hand but their true love is reserved for their partner.

Once the pair has got to know each other, it's not long before the young are on their way. But then, zebra finches are noted for their exceptionally high proliferation rate - an adaptation to the dryness of Australia, their country of origin. Whenever favourable feeding conditions prevail due to sudden rainfall and warmth, they're instantly ready for pairing off and breeding. In the ideal conditions of an inside aviary this will always be the case. So remove the eggs if you don't want offspring.

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## THE ZEBRA FINCH'S FAMILY PROFILE

- Species: zebra finches are divided into two sub-species: the Australian zebra finch and the Timor zebra finch (very scarce here).
- Body length: around 11 cm
- Characteristics: beak, eyes and feet are red; their trademark, as the name implies, is the black and white zebra markings on the chin, throat and breast front which is absent in the female; they are likewise missing all the red-brown insignia e.g., the reddish cheek patches; through breeding, there are now over 50 recognised colour markings.
- Age: well looked after, they can live for up to 10 years
- Brood: a clutch of four to six, occasionally up to nine eggs; incubation takes 12 to 14 days; the young fly the nest at about three weeks.



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