**YVCipedia AVIAN**

Canary Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Canaries are small, melodious finches best known for their beautiful singing and vibrant plumage. Originally from the Canary Islands, these birds have been bred in captivity for centuries and now come in a wide range of colors and song variations.

At YVC, we find canaries to be ideal companions for those seeking a quieter, low-maintenance bird. Unlike parrots, canaries are generally hands-off pets who don’t crave direct interaction, but they thrive with visual stimulation and consistent care. With proper housing and nutrition, they typically live **8–12 years**, sometimes longer.

## **Housing & Environment**

Despite their size, canaries are active flyers and benefit from as much horizontal space as possible. A **rectangular flight-style cage** is far preferable to a decorative round cage, which restricts movement and can cause stress.

We recommend a cage at least **24” wide**, with **½-inch bar spacing** or less. Include a few **natural perches of varying diameter**, positioned to allow flight without wing-clipping. Mirrors, swings, and soft rope accessories can be used in moderation, though overstimulation should be avoided.

Because canaries are sensitive to fumes and drafts, place the cage in a well-ventilated but **draft-free area**, away from kitchens, candles, and chemical cleaners. Consistent **light cycles** (12 hours light / 12 hours dark) help maintain health and hormonal balance. Full-spectrum lighting is helpful if natural sunlight is limited.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Canaries are granivores by nature, but a seed-only diet is nutritionally inadequate and shortens lifespan. At YVC, we recommend a **balanced approach** that blends formulated foods with fresh options.

### **Daily Diet Recommendations**

* **High-quality formulated finch/canary pellets** (e.g., Mazuri or Roudybush)
* **Small amounts of fresh vegetables**: leafy greens, grated carrots, broccoli florets
* **Occasional fruits**: apple, pear, or melon (very limited quantities)
* **Treat seeds** (like millet) can be offered 2–3 times weekly, not daily

Soft food blends such as **egg food** (especially during molting or breeding) and occasional cooked grains like quinoa can add variety. Fresh, clean water must be available at all times and should be changed daily.

Avoid avocado, chocolate, caffeine, and high-fat or processed human foods.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Canaries are not typically hand-tamed birds, and most prefer to observe rather than interact physically. However, with patience and consistency, some individuals may become comfortable enough to perch near humans or accept treats through cage bars.

**Singing is typically a male behavior**, and males may sing vigorously to claim territory or attract a mate. Sudden stops in singing can indicate stress, illness, or hormonal changes.

Canaries generally do not require out-of-cage time but will appreciate a safe, enclosed space to fly if available. Always supervise closely if letting them out of their enclosure.

## **Enrichment**

While they don’t require the level of stimulation parrots need, canaries still benefit from variety and activity in their environment. We find that simple, gentle enrichment can make a big difference in their well-being.

Rotate toys every few weeks, provide soft bathing dishes 2–3 times weekly, and consider placing the cage where they can **observe daily household life** without being in the middle of noisy commotion.

A nearby radio, soft music, or exposure to sunlight can help keep them stimulated, especially for single birds.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Canaries can be quite resilient but are also good at hiding signs of illness until it becomes serious. At YVC, we recommend **annual avian wellness exams**.

### **Common Health Issues**

* **Air sac mites**, which cause wheezing, tail bobbing, and respiratory distress
* **Egg-binding** in females, especially if dietary calcium is lacking
* **Feather cysts**, especially in color-bred or frilled varieties
* **Obesity** from lack of exercise or excessive seed intake
* **Foot issues** from dirty perches or poor cage hygiene

Prompt veterinary attention is needed if your canary shows changes in singing, activity level, breathing, droppings, or feather condition.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Male canaries are the singers; females may chirp, but rarely sing full songs
* Bathing helps keep feathers in good condition and should be offered regularly
* A sudden loss of song often indicates illness or stress
* Canaries can coexist peacefully with other canaries but should not be housed with parrots or aggressive species
* With proper care, many live well beyond a decade

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Rectangular cage with horizontal flight space
* 2–3 natural perches of varying size and texture
* Formulated finch/canary pellets
* Weekly fresh greens and limited fruit
* Shallow dish for bathing
* Nail trimmers and emergency styptic powder
* Cage liner paper or easily removable tray
* Bird-safe disinfectant and cleaning supplies
* Mineral block or cuttlebone for calcium
* UVB light or full-spectrum bulb if no sunlight access

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*