

Bloedel Bird of the Month – The Zebra Finch



Zebra finches are small birds native to Central Australia, with subspecies in Indonesia and East Timor. They are sociable and often fly in flocks.

It is easy to sort male and female adults. Both have zebra-like stripes at the ends of their tails and black ‘tear drops’ from each eye. Females have orange beaks. Males have red beaks, brown/orange cheek patches and a black chest band. They also have thin throat stripes and brown feathers with white spots around the front. Young birds look like females with black beaks.

In Bloedel Conservatory, there are usually one or more Zebra finch nests in the Bunya-Bunya Pine, next to the feeding station for small birds.

Zebra finches usually lay 2 to 7 eggs with 5 eggs being most common. The two chicks in the nest opposite have beaks that are changing colour. Some chicks, such as the one below, leave the nest while they still have a black beak. The beak and adult colors are usually complete when the birds are 90 days old.¹



This description is of the ‘classic’ or ‘wild type’ Zebra finch.² There are slight natural geographical differences, but for over a hundred years, people have selectively bred Zebra finches, to vary their colour, size and shape. Efinch¹ lists 26 different named colour variations. There are also ‘German’, ‘English’ and ‘American’ varieties where here the name refers to the different size and shape standards for display birds in England and Germany, not their country of origin. ‘German’ birds are the largest, ‘English’ are not as big and ‘American’ birds are the closest to the ‘wild’ shape and size.

¹ <http://www.efinch.com/species/zebra.htm>

² <https://www.pbspettravel.co.uk/blog/beginners-guide-looking-zebra-finches/>



Bloedel Conservatory has 'wild' type and 'white' variation Zebra finches, of both sexes. The two birds on the left are both female. The tail bands on the white birds are faint but visible.

In addition to all the variations possible between Zebra finches, sometimes Zebra finches will breed with other finches, particularly Owl finches and Society finches. The bird opposite is the offspring of a Zebra finch and an Owl finch, showing some of the characteristics of each. Usually such breed crosses are sterile.³



³ <https://ainawgsd.tumblr.com/post/144396259328/hybrid-birds-finches-1-zebra-finchow-1-finch-2>