

## **FIRE FINCHES: *Lagonosticta senegala***

The diminutive little fire finch is a tiny bird that can easily slip between the wires of a standard parakeet cage. There are several species of reddish finches native to parts of Africa and southern Asia which are classified in the “fire finch” group but the one you are most likely to see in the U.S. is *Lagonosticta senegala*. This one scientific name describes a single kind of finch which goes by two different common names. Some people call it the “Senegal fire finch” while others refer to it as simply the “common fire finch”. It is for this reason that scientific names are important. Although common names for a given species are likely to differ from one area of the world to another the scientific name is the same no matter where you live. What is even more confusing is when separate species share the same common name. For example, the bird in Europe referred to as a robin is an entirely different bird than the American robin.

Fire finches are not as common as they once were. Decades ago they were readily available at low cost in pet shops. Now they must be diligently looked for, and when found, command much higher prices. The reason for this is simple supply and demand. When an item is difficult and time consuming to produce the price will go up to reflect the higher cost of production. That means less people will want to pay the price and numbers will drop. With fire finches and many other small delicate species there are dedicated people who are successfully breeding these birds. Many can be found in bird magazine ads, the Internet, and the like. In general, breeders are very willing to give guidance to anyone wishing to join in the endeavor of breeding any of the exotic finches in captivity so future generations may also see and appreciate these little avian jewels.

Fire finches may be small but they are active and need a lot of room. Ample flight space must be supplemented with twigs. Natural twigs are better than perches that come with the cage since they vary in size and thickness and allow the birds a sense of variety. The birds will appreciate a finch nest. The opening can be partially hidden behind a small shrub, fronds or the like. This will give the birds privacy and may well stimulate breeding.

Diet is crucial for long term success. In addition to finch seed give them seeding grasses, dandelion greens and similar items. For protein hard boiled egg is great, if they will eat it. Otherwise other forms of insect fare will be required for feeding babies.

Fire finches are a nice bird for the home. They are not noisy but have a pleasant little song. If a large roomy cage is set up you can enjoy these birds much as you would an aquarium. The natural behavior and antics of these ever-active finches will bring relaxing pleasure to your life.