



TITLE: Songbird Husbandry

SOP Category: Husbandry

RUAC SOP #: 3.13

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Approval: Lisa Antonucci

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SCOPE:

This document provides directions and guidance on the daily husbandry and care of songbirds (zebra finches and canaries) housed in Rutgers University animal facilities. This SOP applies to all Animal Care Staff (ACS), ACS Supervisors (ACSS), Veterinary Staff (VS), and Research Staff members (RS) at all Rutgers animal facilities.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this SOP is to ensure that all songbirds are cared for in a humane manner and in accordance with *The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* and Animal Welfare Act regulations.



PROCEDURES:

Animal Receipt

- Upon animal arrival, the ACS will:
 - check newly arrived birds for evidence of disease or injury
 - house birds in cages based on guidance below
 - attach 1 cage card per cage with number of birds listed



Housing

- Small cage: up to 10 finches or 2 canaries per cage
- Large cage: up to 20 female finches, 12 male finches or 10 canaries per cage
- Wall-mounted flight cage: up to 5 finches per compartment
 - up to 4 units can be combined, and dividers removed, to allow for a maximum of 20 finches per flight cage
- An empty small holding cage is kept in each room
 - If a bird is found loose in the room, return it to its home cage.
 - If that cannot be determined, place in the holding cage with food and water and *notify the investigator and ACSS*.



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Routine Husbandry and Health Care

Daily Observation and Duties

- Upon entering the room, wait for one to two minutes before beginning observations of the birds to allow animals to acclimate to human presence.
- Check the room environment
 - temperature (should be 76 +/-2 degrees Fahrenheit), humidity, lighting and air handling system and report any deviations to ACSS
- Check cages for abnormal stools
 - Normal stools will be target shaped with a formed brown center, a ring of white, and a small water ring around the stool.
 - Abnormal stools may be looser or appear different.
- Check feeders to ensure the birds have been eating
- Check birds for signs of illness or health concerns
 - on the floor of the cage, not moving
 - ruffled feathers
 - open-mouthed or labored breathing
 - moving or perching with a tail-bobbing effect
 - half or fully closed eyes
 - discharge or crusting in the eye-nasal area
 - stained, wet or raw ventral area
 - feather pecking, particularly on back of neck, cap of wing or breast
 - long or abnormal beaks and toenails
- Report sick, injured or dead birds using health RFID card on room wall and identify cage with a Sick Card.
 - See SOP #3.21 QR Card Scanning Process

****Do not disturb or open the nest boxes in breeding cages***



Feed

- Birds are fed songbird seed mix ad libitum in various style feed cups
 - check feeders daily and remove any seed husks
 - refill feeders as needed
 - replace any soiled feeders with clean ones and replace monthly
 - do not place feeders directly under or over a waterer to prevent contamination
 - do not place a feeder or a waterer under a perch
- Investigator may feed special nesting diets and supplements, including boiled egg, maize, and soybean
- Birds must always have access to seed as they have a high metabolic rate and cannot survive without food for even short periods of time.
- ***Each compartment of the flight cages must have its own feeders and water bottles, even if the partitions are open.***



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Water

- Water bottles are checked daily and refilled as needed.
- Water bottles are rinsed, refilled and replaced on same cage 2x/week.
- Water bottles are sanitized and replaced weekly.
 - soaked for at least 10 minutes in a 1:10 bleach dilution
- Ensure an adequate amount of water bottles are on each cage.
 - 1-6 birds: 2 water bottles minimum
 - 7-12 birds: 3 water bottles minimum
 - 13-20 birds: 4 water bottles minimum

Enrichment

- Investigator is responsible for placing cuttlebone in each cage.
 - check cuttlebones to ensure the soft side is facing into the cage
 - if a cuttlebone is soiled with feces or other matter, scrape it until the surface is clean again
- See SOP #6.10 Zebra Finch Environmental Enrichment

Cage Maintenance

- Papers under cages are replaced 3x/week.
- Trays under cages are sanitized and replaced weekly.
- Perches are replaced as needed.
- Nest boxes are washed every breeding cycle, or every 3 to 4 months, *by the investigator*.
- Small and large cages are washed every three months by ACS.
- Flight cages are washed every six months by ACS *when not breeding*.



Room Maintenance

- Floor is swept daily.
- Floor is mopped and/or hosed and squeegeed 3x/week.
- See SOP #3.01 Room Check/Care Procedures

