

R Nature Notes

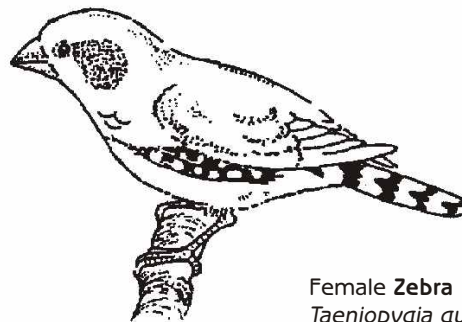
Junior Ranger

FINCHES

Groups of these chirpy, little birds are a common sight near roadsides or Territory waterholes.

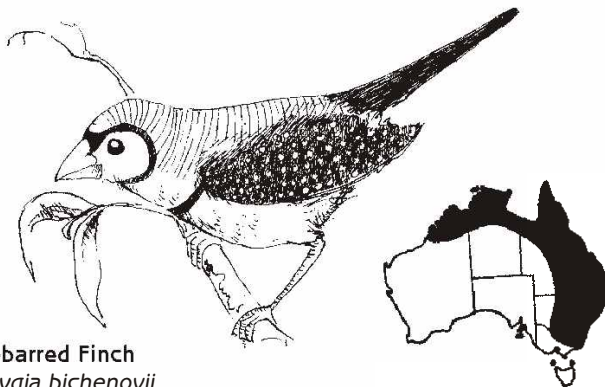
Finches are small birds with short, sharp beaks designed for cracking the seeds on which they feed. They need to drink several times a day between feeds. So you may spot them around waterholes, cattle troughs or garden sprinklers.

The **Zebra Finch** is the one you're most likely to see in Central Australia. It has an orange-red beak and its tail has black and white stripes, like a zebra.



Female Zebra Finch
Taeniopygia guttata

The **Crimson Finch** lives in Pandanus and paperbark trees around Top End swamps and wetlands. These birds have a long tail. The female has a red face like the male but her stomach is brown.



Double-barred Finch
Taeniopygia bichenovii

The **Double-barred Finch** has two distinctive black stripes across its stomach. It is a bird of scrub, rather than forest, but is common along rivers or in Top End gardens.



Female Crimson Finch
Neochmia phaeton



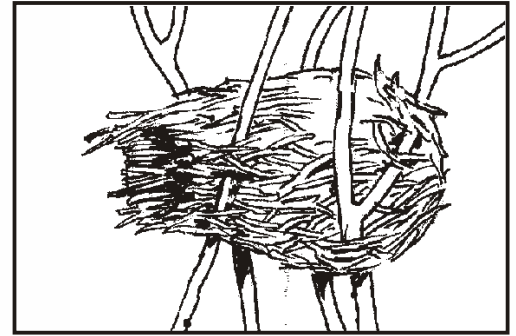
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FINCH NESTS

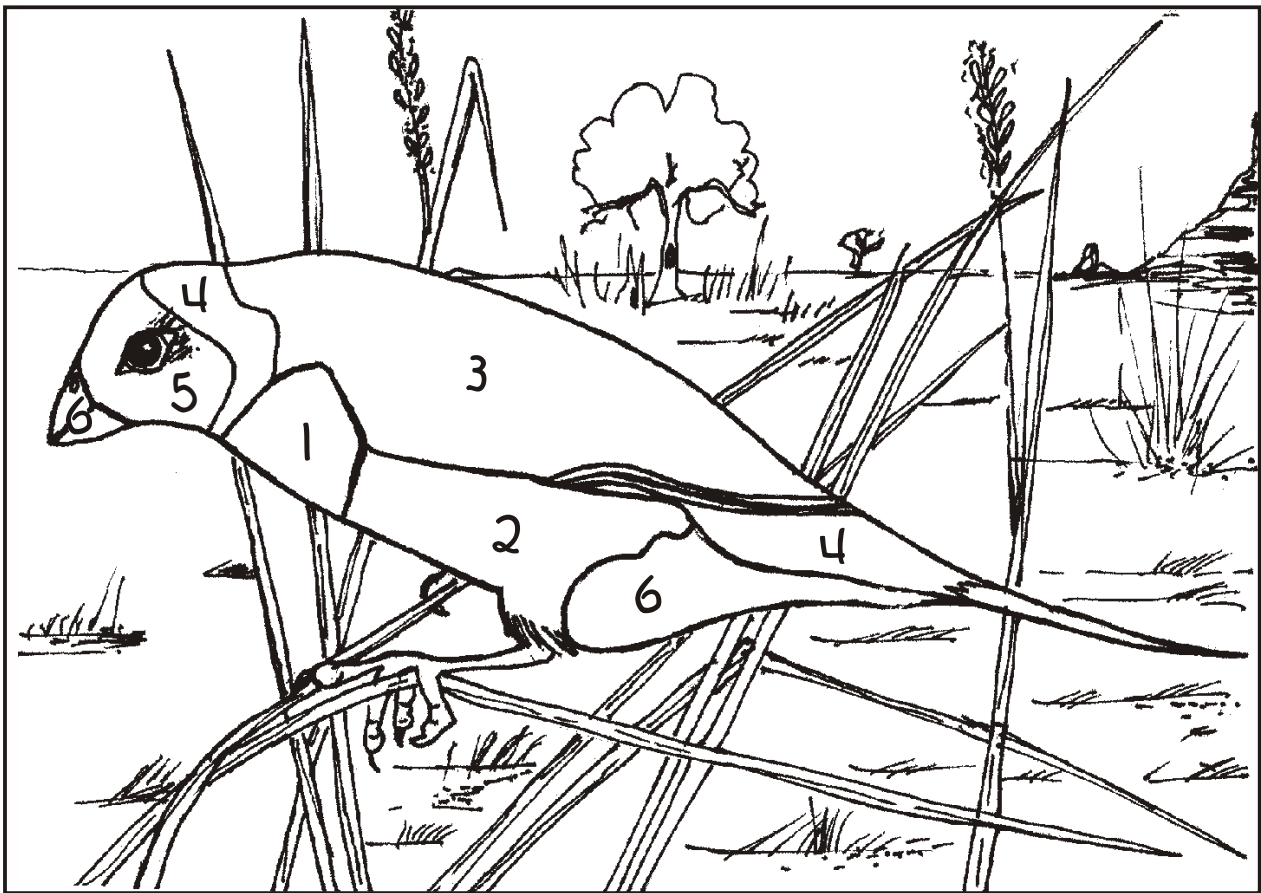
Finches build round nests from grass and twigs. They make a bed inside with feathers. The nests have a side entrance.

The nests are usually hidden among the branches of a bush or low tree.



AN ENDANGERED FINCH

Use the number code to colour this beautiful, male Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae* from Northern Australia. It is a popular aviary bird, but has become quite rare in the wild.



1 = mauve 2 = yellow 3 = green 4 = light blue 5 = black 6 = white

During the past 30 years, **Gouldian Finch** numbers have dwindled rapidly. It is only found in a couple of places in the Top End. Scientists are not sure exactly why it is endangered but fire, feral animals, grazing and changes to its habitat have all taken a toll on these birds.

Gouldian Finches live and feed on Speargrass seeds.

From December to March they perch on the grass stalks and pluck off the seeds. By April most of the seeds have dropped off and the birds then feed on the ground.

Unlike other finches, this one lays its eggs in hollow trees. But it is very choosy. It prefers Snappy Gums and Salmon Gums.

Want to learn more about finches?

Check out the affordable field guides *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by either *Simpson & Day* or the one by *Pizzey & Knight*.