In breeding any species of birds, there are always critical periods. One of these critical periods, for instance, occurs shortly after hatching, because at that stage success depends not only on a steady and experienced breeding pair, but success also depends on the weather, on the health and strength of the youngsters and on an acceptable and nutritious feeding formula.

In lovebirds, the first anxious moments occur even before hatching. Thus, a common complaint is the high rate of dead in shell just a few days before hatching. Such repeated disappointments seem to give rise to many hypotheses, and the length to which some breeders go to solve the problem is remarkable.

Lovebird eggs, with the exception of those of the Madagascar, are very hard shelled. Rarely are they broken, punctured or otherwise damaged within the nest. I always marvel how a nest full of nearly fledged, active young can avoid breaking the eggs their mother had layed to start her second clutch.

Because of the toughness of the shell, it is easy to come to the conclusion that a dry, hard eggshell is the culprit of dead in shell. Most articles one reads emphasize the importance of moisture, and to assure high moisture many breeders have gone to absolute extremes. The first suggested remedy is the humidifier, but of course those would work only in an indoor facility. A second measure is the use of fresh material even during incubation. Some even immerse the eggs in hot water to which has been added bleach or any other effective cleanser through the action of fungi. Since the egg is quite susceptible to fungal growth of all sorts of mites, bacteria and especially fungi. Since the egg is quite...
porous, some contamination can take place and research shows that the spores of fungi are particularly vicious. Such contamination obviously can bring about the death of the embryo in the shell. The risk of contamination increases significantly with the continued use of a nestbox.

Breeding should never begin before the birds are in prime condition. They should be at least ten months old, in excellent feather, and if possible, of proven stock. For example, avoid breeding with birds whose parents were poor breeders, had low fertility clutches or were known feather pickers. I would also avoid in-breeding unless you have special goals in mind.

Finally, I want everyone to look closely at their feeding program. Improper nutrition, I feel, causes more problems in successfully hatching young than any other single cause. It’s what goes into the egg that counts. A healthy and nutrition-rich lovebird egg will most likely produce a healthy and strong chick which will have little trouble cracking the egg.

Although this is not the place to suggest in length a proper feeding program for lovebirds, I do want to emphasize that variety is still the best approach to assure proper nutrition for your lovebirds. Ordinary parakeet mix simply will not do. For example, I found that most lovebirds really like finch seed of all types. I also will add some oily seeds (safflower, sunflower, a little hemp), buckwheat and a good brand of wild bird mix. Occasionally I will also give a small amount of ground up dry dog or cat food, mixed right into the seed dish. Aside from a variety of seeds, I always offer clean, well-rinsed, sprouted seed, greens of all types (chickweed, dandelion, spinach, endive lettuce), some fresh or frozen corn and a little bit of apple. During the raising of young, I also offer some nestling food, shredded carrots and once a week, a hard-boiled egg.

A special, occasional treat for all my birds is a small piece of sod from my garden which I moisten slightly and place on the aviary floor. Fischer’s lovebirds in particular will literally attack the grass, the roots as well as the soil. Surely they must find something very nourishing in that treat.

Many of the suggestions I have given here may seem to many to be too much bother or busy work. It really isn’t. Good nutrition and hygiene should become a routine practice in a hobby or business, and once you are organized to do so, it isn’t really any more work. The rewards will convince you.