

Canary Calendar

by Charlotte Nierenberg



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Suggestions for Separating, Sorting, and Selling.

Recently I have received many inquiries concerning the advisability of separating the sexes at various times of the year.

A novice may indeed become confused at the contrariety of advice received from two or more experienced breeders. Also, it is admittedly difficult to reformulate the ideas given by the large breeder and adjust them to his own smaller level of performance and requirements.

Each breeder has his own type of facilities and motives for breeding. Some breed indoors, individually and selectively — others have large outdoor aviaries and many are more concerned with commercial gain than the actual hobby.

I feel that a beginner needs some guidelines to start with and can eventually develop his own unique system. Suggestions will be offered from my own experiences in the hope that they can be made applicable to the needs of new breeders.

Although I constantly repair, refurbish and add new equipment every year, I have long ago settled on a system of indoor, individual cage breeding according to heritage, type and feature texture. I am always striving to improve my stock and this can only be accomplished by adequate record keeping and mating each hen with a cock of my choice. The birds I choose to retain for the next breeding season fly in my two-section, outdoor aviary during the summer months.

The following are questions received by mail recently and their answers:

Q. "A breeder in my neighborhood allows his canaries to fly together in one large aviary. Although he has tried to be helpful, he does not observe the birds closely enough to answer my questions. (I have two pair of canaries — in two indoor breeding cages.)

If the chicks are still in the nest, or still being fed, when do I separate the parents so that they will not start a third or fourth clutch?"

A. In order to preclude the possibility of coition and further fertilization, the parent birds should be separated when the last-round chicks are approximately ten days of age. The more "eager feeder" should remain until the nestlings are completely weaned. If this method is used, both parents and young will be flying freely by July. A limit of two clutches per season for young hens and three for older hens will assure longevity and robust babies.

Q. "My cock annoyed his hen while incubating and picked at her head feathers constantly. The eggs did not hatch. Could this be the reason, and if so, should he have been removed and when?"

A. Yes — this could have been the reason if the eggs were fertile since the embryo needs the almost constant body heat of the hen in order to develop. Any cock can be removed after the second egg is laid — especially a culprit like the one you described. If the hen is a good feeder, she is capable of raising her own chicks but if the male behaves himself, he may be returned to help feed his family after the babies are four days old.

Q. "When do I separate the baby canaries from their parents? Do they need any special food and for how long?"

A. On a rotation basis, my chicks are weaned at approximately four weeks of age (as soon as they are seen to be picking up food for themselves). They are placed in medium-sized cages for two weeks. My weaning cages have wire bottoms and the youngsters receive egg food or egg biscuits, condition/nestling food, gravel, cuttlebone and fresh water containing water-soluble vitamins. The wire bottoms are especially useful at this stage because scattered egg food falls to the tray beneath, eliminating any concern about spoilage. At six weeks, they are ready for an adult diet.

Q. "What is your method for distinguishing the young males from the hens? Some of my young ones started to sing at a very young age but then stopped. After awhile I was thoroughly confused."

A. As soon as a young male begins to "throat" a song (usually at four to six weeks of age), I place an additional plastic colored band on his leg. The young that do not sing are temporarily assumed to be females. Facilities permitting, the known young cocks should be removed and placed in a large flight cage. Many times a young cock starts to sing later on but he is easy to spot among the quiet hens.

Q. "After the breeding season, can I place the adult males with the young males — same for the hens?"

A. Yes. Young canaries grow rapidly and are usually capable of taking care of themselves in an ample-sized flight cage. A bully (young or old) should be removed and either caged separately or placed in another flight. Many times a bird will act differently in strange surroundings or with new companions.

By October, all the birds should be resplendent in their new coats of feathers — the annual moult complete. Experienced breeders will choose the best prospects and train and groom them for Show. The balance is sorted and separated — some for sale and the others for next year's breeding activities.

We all like to keep our best birds (and should). However, I urge all breeders to be fair when selling their excess stock. We are still a small group of breeders within a given community. A good or bad reputation can be established swiftly. There is still the element of chance, of course, and we cannot guarantee the performance of any young hen. However, the small price of a hen who is a known "dud" cannot compensate for a bad reputation or the disappointment of a novice who deserves more than a wasted season from

a nonproductive hen!

I always guarantee the sex of any bird I sell, if it is returned to me in good health. Frankly I have rarely, if ever, been asked to exchange a cock that was mistakenly sold as a hen!

Accurate records are kept of all my birds and a buyer's name and address is noted accordingly. When a person buys a singer for a pet, I include a small jar of the seed my bird has been accustomed to, plus a list of basic instructions for those who admit "they haven't owned a canary since childhood."

I will be happy to answer specific questions via this column or directly, upon receipt of a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please direct your inquiries to: Mrs. C. Nierenberg, P.O. Box 2095, Sepulveda, Calif. 91343.

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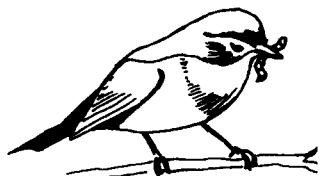
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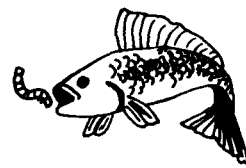
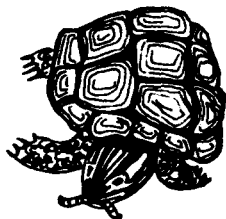


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