

Handfeeding Canaries, an unusual practice this day and age?

by Sabra Dulkan, West Bloomfield, MI

Why in the world would anyone want to hand feed Canaries in this day and age? All of our lives are so busy. I have two children that are very active and need my attention most of the time. They are in after-school activities that keep them busy which also keeps me busy since I am the designated driver!. I also help my husband run his business and I have a desktop publishing business of my own. We have a dog and I breed Fife, Lizard, Northern Dutch Frill and Hartz Canaries. Yes, I have to "come out of the aviary" so to speak. I do handfeed my Canary babies for the first week of their lives. Let me give you a few reasons why I engage in this practice followed only, usually, by the "big bird" people who are interested in selling "hand fed and tamed" birds.

My first but not most important reason is that I feel the Canary chicks that I handfeed are getting a little extra start in life that they may or may not be able to get from their mother/father. I've come to learn that the chick who can open its mouth and stick its head up the farthest get the most food. In Darwin's opinion, that means survival of the fittest. I'm not breeding Canaries to fight Goliath or some such enemy.

My birds don't have to be unusually strong to live the life that they're going to live. They have to be healthy but we as breeders keep the individual types exactly to specifications. (A good Gibber would get blown right off course by a stiff wind.) My birds have to look good and be good parents and show well and breed other birds that will do the same. Just because a bird can't hold its head up as high as its nestmates, in my opinion, is no reason for it to die. Many times that is exactly why a chick dies...simply because it wasn't as insistent as its nestmates about being fed.

The second reason why I hand feed my Canaries is because I don't know how to stop and smell the roses.

Confused? My life is very hectic. I have no time to do what I have to do let alone anything extra. I've heard about "smelling the roses" all my life but I never learned how. I am pushed and driven to achieve. I have tried many times to deal with this issue but to no avail—until I decided to start hand feeding my Canaries.

When I sit down in my birdroom and prepare what I need for feeding, take the nest and set it in my lap, I actually relax and, believe me, that's no small feat. I take a deep breath and for the next 10 to 30 minutes, I help Mother Nature and wonder at the miracle of it all.

I see the tiny little bodies of the Canary chicks and marvel that they can lift up their heads and open their mouths instantly after hatching. I've actually jumped the gun a few times and found a chick in the middle of hatching. I've even helped take off the shell once or twice. These are miracles and I have seen them!

Another reason to supplement feeding is to help the hen out. If the hen has a lot of babies, she can use the help, especially if the cock isn't in with her. It's exhausting work for a hen to feed five or six babies alone. Also, sometimes a hen won't start feeding until all her eggs are hatched. If there is a little lag time there, the first baby can die while the other ones are waiting to hatch.

What is it that I hand feed my Canaries? I believe 100% in Abba Products. Abba is a company from Elizabeth, New Jersey that sells to bird breeders and stores. They will send you a price list if you request one. The man who owns the company is a real expert in the area of bird nutrition and health. He has formulated his seed mixtures after years of research. In my opinion, his quality can't be beat.

I use the Abba nestling food with seed (I think the number is 92A). I mix 1½ cups of Abba nesting food with one hard boiled egg chopped fine. I add

about 2-3 tablespoons of water to the mixture, just enough to get it moist but not wet. Then I take a small cap or container just big enough to hold about 2 tablespoons of Pedialyte (an oral electrolyte suspension that is given to children to replace electrolytes after very bad vomiting and/or diarrhea). This is available in a generic solution also. I use the Arbor brand. I have a wooden match stick that I whittled down just a bit to fit into the little mouths but its not sharp or pointed. I simply dip the matchstick into the Pedialyte to wet it then dip the wet matchstick into the mixed nestling food and put a tiny bit into the chicks mouth. If it looks like a piece got in that is too big or not moist enough, I will give a drop of the Pedialyte plain—just enough to wash down the crumb. I don't fill up the birds until they're stuffed because I don't want the mother to get frustrated because her babies aren't interested in eating. I do this a few times a day for the first week.

After the first week, the chicks can see much better and they're too scared to open their mouths. That's okay though because I have given them a great start. If they don't make it after I've been supplementing their feeding for a week then so be it. But I sure try not to lose them in the first week.

My system has worked out well for all concerned. I have just banded my 40th baby bird and the breeding season is just half finished. Only one chick has been lost so far. I think I'm doing the best for the birds. I feel I'm giving the mother a helping hand. The babies are getting great nutrition. And last but not least, I'm relaxing!

Everyone wins in this situation. ➔



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