

IN SEARCH OF CANARIES...

Save the Best

by Glenn A. Mitchell, Sunnyvale, CA

I am back! In fact I'm sitting in a beautiful condominium in Kona, Hawaii looking out over the ocean and enjoying the birds as they fly and dive and beg for crumbs to enlarge their morning feeding routine.

These days seem a lot different than the ones we had all this past Winter and Spring. Those days add to just one more year of "unusual" weather. The manifestation of this was shown in the breeding of the birds. On the average – pretty poor!

People are prone to fault the Canary hens in a time like this – but don't. They are attuned to nature and are governed by laws that they know nothing of – but just respond to.

Don't find fault with the hens. Save them. Next year may bring better weather and you will find the hens working like they should. Many of the young stock came from late hatches. If you were trying newly purchased

stock there was really no way of telling the age of the bird.

Now that the season is over, naturally the birds that were late hatches are trying to work. It is not a good idea to work them late as you will just be continuing the problem. They will soon molt and leave the nest anyway.

Flight your hens separately from the males to give them a chance to "cool off" and not be bothered. The young chicks can be placed with them without causing continued breeding symptoms. As the young males start to sing and begin to display young male aggression, they should be placed in the flight with older males – or, better yet, a flight with a great tutor.

Now is the time to rethink the breeding system you followed. Try to discover what you could have done to improve the general overall of the procedures. Many times you can recall a practice that could cause problems. If you are satisfied that you have done your best – role up the rug, clean your equipment, and pray for a better next year.

Now is the time to start culling your flock. Right off the bat you see birds that are too small – poor confirmation – poor color – and an unstable temperament.

After these birds are set aside to dispose of, then it is time to relax and take your time selecting your breeding stock. This should be done carefully and if you have banded your birds it will make it easier for you. Hens from good producing mothers should be saved.

Here, a word of caution. Be sure to save enough hens. Too many times people dispose of extra hens only to find that they are needed. Emergencies usually arise at the wrong time and you need to replace a good hen. Too little stock and you are stuck with the problem. Since the hens carry the song be sure and also save the hens from excellent singing males. Remember – you can raise better than you can buy because no one will sell you the best he has. He keeps them himself - just as you should do.

Every year it helps to add one or two birds to your aviary – and since the hens carry the song – it is best to add hens. Buy early while the selection is great, and listen to the quality of

the song you hear. If you do not like what you hear, do not buy. Go to another breeder whose birds sing what you like to hear. Best you make your selection early so the new bird or birds will become acquainted with how you feed, the kind of feeds your use and, best of all, to become acquainted with you – all of these things affect the breeding and will have a bearing on your success.

Feeding is still the greatest asset to a good flock. Fancy foods, "junk food," poor food, and, of course, too little food all affect the bird's actions and health. A healthy bird will produce strong chicks and will give you a crop that you will be proud of.

Birds like regimen. Keeping a schedule plays a big part in health and success of birds. Early feeding of greens and veggies is important as the birds should be able to devour their limit before the greens wilt and start to decay. Early morning – before the real heat sets in – is best. By noon on warm days the balance of greens, veggies and egg food left should be removed.

If you have other types of birds – ones using sunflower and safflower you can empty their trays in for the canaries as they dearly love to pick out the little piece of seed the larger birds drop. Safflower if rolled or cracked in any way is a good food for them. This is great in the fall through winter as it gives them a great body boost and adds much to their breeding condition. Also, sourdough bread is good for them – I feed it dry and rolled into crumbs – and it vanishes as if by magic.

Breeders seem to be afraid to tell of their successes in learning and doing. I fail to understand this and beseech you not to follow this path. If a novice comes to you, or even an older breeder, with a question give them a truthful answer. Many people seem afraid to share their insight for fear the other person may raise a better bird. More power to them. Later you can ask them and expect the same courtesy you gave them and the whole system will benefit. Breeding secrets should be made known. We will not last forever and what knowledge we learn should be shared to the benefit of all. Only then will we be able to say that we have done our best. 

