

# Canary Calendar

by Charlotte Nierenberg

(Mrs. Nierenberg is the author of "So You Want To Breed Your Canary" and countless articles on canary care and breeding. She will gladly answer questions through this column and by mail. For a personal reply, please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to her at P.O. Box 2095, Sepulveda, Calif. 91343.)



Charlotte Nierenberg

## FEBRUARY FACTS FOR FINE- FEATHERED FLEDGLINGS

St. Valentine's Day has been accepted by many breeders to be an appropriate time to start breeding operations. The best guideline for pairing your birds, however, is your hen.

A novice can best ascertain her readiness by observing her actions. A hen coming into breeding condition will fly pertly from perch to perch, answering the song of the male. Her abdomen will appear rounder than usual and she might tear furiously at the newspaper lining the floor of the cage and fly around with little strips in her beak.

Every breeder has his own system for "setting up" hens depending upon facilities, the number of birds bred and whether individual pairs will stay together or a cock is used to service several hens.

On a "one-to-one" basis, the double breeding cage is most convenient. The birds can be placed in the cage and the wire divider inserted to separate the two. When the cock starts to feed his hen through the bars and she accepts the food, the courting phase has started and the divider may be removed. The nest should be placed half-way between the top and bottom of the cage since the parents need head room to feed their young while perching on the nest edge.

When breeding one cock to several hens, the hens should be kept in a large flight with a few "trial" nests in place. As each hen shows an interest in the nests or picks up little bits of paper, she should be placed in her breeding cage with the nest and a few strands of nesting material. When she starts building seriously, the cock can join her. He remains with her until the second egg is laid.

Waiting until the hen is ready prevents serious squabbling, the cock does not harrass his mate needlessly and he will not wear himself out chasing a hen for weeks. He may also lose his enthusiasm or get so attached to a hen that he will not breed readily with others.

### OUTFITTING THE BREEDING CAGE

Although some extras are required, no "frills" are necessary. Perches should be made secure — no swings permitted during breeding.

Cages should be cleaned and sprayed in advance of the season, and newspapers cut to the size of the trays. New mothers can furnish an endless supply of baby food jar tops for small servings of soft egg food. Other plastic-lined jar tops, glass and plastic ash trays are handy containers for the extra "goodies." Avoid pottery dishes as these can be poisonous if manufactured with a lead content.

Other useful accessories are the nesting material and "dummy eggs." (See Figure 1.) Also shown is a nest pad which can be purchased commercially. A flat-napped carpet square will serve the purpose when cut into a 5½" round and snipped strategically to fit the nest. If a plastic nest is

used, the felt liner can be glued to the bottom of the nest to avoid shifting. (Use a non-toxic white glue.)

Burlap is a safe and economical nesting material. For a few birds, as little as 1/4 yard may be purchased in any yard goods store.

The "dummy eggs" pictured in Figure 1, are used to replace the real eggs each morning until the entire clutch is complete. The real eggs are stored in a small dish of seed until the "blue" egg is laid, usually the last egg. The real eggs are then replaced in the nest, removing the dummies.

I feel the advantages to the "removal method" make the extra effort worthwhile:

a. The breeder adds 14 days to the morning the eggs are returned and knows the day the chicks are due to hatch.

b. All chicks will hatch the same day, giving each an equal chance for survival.

c. If the hen lays only two eggs, they can still be returned on the fourth morning, leaving two dummy eggs in the nest. Many hens will not bother to incubate only two eggs, but will commence on four, even though two are dummies. The dummy eggs can remain in the nest after hatching, giving the babies more air space if the hen broods too closely.

### OTHER BREEDING SUGGESTIONS

- Clip nails before breeding.
- Keep the hen's diet simple during incubation — seed, gravel and water.
- Moisten the eggs on the 13th day of incubation — either by offering the hen a bath or by spraying the eggs sparingly with tepid water.
- If the cock annoys his hen during incubation, remove him to a nearby cage. He may be returned after the babies are four days old.
- Lengthen the daylight hours by turning on the lights at 6 a.m., and off at 8:30 p.m. — especially after hatching.
- Keep a night light burning always.
- Try not to disturb the hen too much — however, try to offer food when the hen is off her nest and make a quick check for babies pulled out accidentally and the same number of wobbly necks rising daily.
- If the cock is left with the hen, make sure she is feeding her young. Many times a hen will find it easier to accept food from the male and may not feed her babies often. In that case, remove the male for a few days. If she has to get her own food, she will most likely be more eager to feed when she sees the babies on her return.



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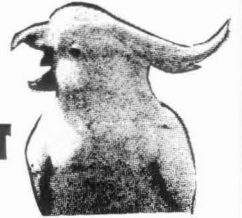
Figure 1.

Shows felt liner, dummy eggs and 2½" squares of burlap, stripped down and used as nesting material.

- Be generous with minerals (cuttlebone, boiled and crushed eggshells), and provide a vitamin supplement.
- Average time to band babies with closed bands is seven days. This may vary according to the size of the bird.
- Offer the hen a variety of foods while feeding — in addition to the basic seed and gravel. Petamine, song food, raw oatmeal, shredded wheat and soaked seed are all good nestling foods in addition to the soft egg food. I do not offer greens until the fourth day after hatching.
- Babies leave their nest usually from 18-21 days of age. If the parents pluck their head and tail feathers, move them to the other side of the breeding cage and they will be fed through the vertically-wired divider.
- When the chicks are seen to be picking up food for themselves (at about one month of age) they can be moved to a small flight cage. Food in the same nesting cage should consist of the same nestling foods they have been accustomed to, egg food or egg cake, gravel and water with a few drops of water-soluble vitamins. After they reach six weeks of age, hard seed and greens may be offered and egg foods discontinued.

Best of luck to all breeders! ■

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