doing this for two weeks and the problem seems to be worse. What do you suggest that I do? "Paco" is doing just great otherwise.

T. Pryce, Massachusetts

Answer#1: It sounds to me like your veterinarian has a good understanding of the current information on foot mutilation problems in Amazons. I recommend you contact your veterinarian again, however, as additional therapies might be tried. I think a biopsy is probably a good idea, and a culture depending on the appearance of the lesion. I like using combination creams under a bandage (steroid antibiotic combinations). Many veterinarians like to bandage the foot or apply an Elizabethan collar when signs worsen. A change in diet is sometimes recommended to rule out food allergies. Fatty acid supplements can be tried for birds on pelleted diets.

Louise Bauck, DVM
Montreal, Canada

Answer #2: By your description, it sounds like "Paco" most likely has a condition called Amazon Mutilation Syndrome. The cause of this syndrome is unknown. It is possible that it has an underlying allergic component, as it tends to be very bothersome to the affected birds. It often is somewhat seasonal, in that even though it may never completely resolve, certain individuals may have certain months or seasons in which the condition is noticeably worse. Affected Amazons severely attack and chew on their feet and ankles. They are often presented to a veterinarian with scaly, bleeding feet. Biopsies and other diagnostic tests to date have generally been inconclusive as to a cause and cure. Some veterinarians feel that the condition is more prevalent on the West Coast. A variety of treatment options can be considered, with none being curative. I find that acupuncture and topical sprays applied to the feet, are the most helpful to these birds. Hope this is helpful to you and "Paco."

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian
West Hills, CA

The Society Finch: a Wonderful Worker

by Peggy Dalrymple, Galesburg, IL

Photo by John Wise

Green Avadavat baby with its Society Finch foster parent.

The Society Finch, or Bengalese Finch as it is called in some countries, is neither rare nor difficult to breed. It can't carry a tune and, while it may be charming and comical, it is not an avicultural beauty. Its main claim to fame is its controversial ability to incubate and rear the young of other finch species.

Whether the desired result is a clutch of Society Finches or the fostered young of another species, the Society Finch is usually up to the challenge.

Society Finches seem to enjoy their assigned duties of incubation and rearing, but they cannot be expected to perform them without good lighting (16 hours daily), a moderate temperature (around 75°F.), and an excellent diet.

In addition to their seed, they need a soft food supplement at least once a day. This not only adds vitamins, minerals, and protein to their diet, it gives the parent birds a food that is easily regurgitated to feed the nestlings. The soft food content can vary depending upon the nutritional requirements of the nestlings.

Possible soft food contents are many but may include: commercial dried egg food, petamine, cooked rice or small pasta, chopped greens, grated carrot, cooked lentils, and a vitamin/mineral supplement.

After two or three clutches in a breeding cage, Society breeders can be transferred to a flight cage for a well deserved rest.

Breeding Society Finches may be relatively easy but an advancement to a standard of perfection is important with any bird that can produce a large number of young in such a short period of time. Bird exhibitions in the U.S. and around the world give bird breeders a comparative method of quality control.

Fostering the young of other species of Estrildids under Societies has been a subject of controversy for years. This controversy need not continue. modern fostering methods were perfected in several European countries in the 1970s, to the point that almost all of the Australian finches coming from Europe to the U.S. during that time were the result of fostering under Societies.

American breeders used those imported fostered finches (whether they knew it or not) to produce the domestically bred Australian finches available today.

Natural vagaries and variations in parenting behavior and unmet requirements for individual species can cause parenting failures more often than does fostering.

The Society Finch is an integral part of aviculture. U.S. breeders can and will continue to advance finch aviculture with the help of this bird and its never-ending contributions to both novice and experienced aviculturists.

Finch aviculture would be decades behind its present state but for the willing hard work performed by this plain and simple little bird—the Society Finch.