

Alternative Nest Boxes for Budgies

Frederick Wilson, Madera, California

When I first made the decision to breed birds no one told me that one of the most difficult things I would have to deal with would be choosing the proper nest box. Of all the decisions this one appeared to be the simplest. After all, how hard could it be to zip out to the next Bird Mart, go to a nest box vendor and pick up half a dozen parakeet nest boxes. Well, that is just what I did, and then the problems began. I had purchased wooden boxes intended to mount inside the cages. I soon found that they were almost impossible to check, took up a lot of the limited cage space and were difficult if not impossible to really clean. So at the next Bird Mart I replaced the boxes with ones that would mount outside the cages. I also picked up a couple of English parakeet style boxes. I thought I had beat all my problems, but like most assumptions I was to learn better.

At first it seemed I was right. The external boxes were easy to check, allowed maximum cage space, but were difficult to clean. During this period (late spring 2000) I decided to move the birds into an outside Aviary. This I did while keeping the same cages and nest boxes. I also set up several pairs of Cockatiels and some Lovebirds, again using wooden external mount nest boxes.

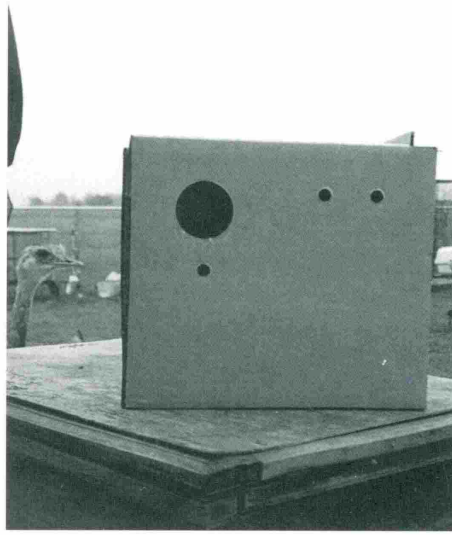
At about this time one of our local club (Central California Avian Society) members, Frank Zamrock, began talking about a new design for parakeet nest boxes he was working on. Since Frank was a long time parakeet breeder (I think he apprenticed as a bird keeper on the Ark), I listened with great interest. Frank was insistent that these new boxes would solve all my problems. They would never need cleaning because they would be disposable, they would be disposable because

they would be made of cardboard.

To say I was skeptical wouldn't be quite accurate. I was in fact interested, but wondered if perhaps the idea was a little bizarre. Winter arrived and I found that with the wet weather a whole new set of problems arrived to plague my nest boxes. The trees that had sheltered my aviary from the furnace heat of Central Valley summer, now conspired with the fog and rain to create the perfect environment for molds and mildew to flourish. I found I had green algae, gray mold, black mildew, and even mushrooms sprouting on a daily basis. Of course one of the favored places for all this growth was the wooden nest boxes, and I found that I was cleaning boxes, what seemed like every day.

Spring finally arrived and with it came Frank's new nest boxes. They were a simple English budgie style, die cut from 1/8 inch cardboard, measuring 11.5 inches wide, 10 inches high and, 6.5 inches deep and assembled using a regular household hot glue gun.

I immediately set up four cages of parakeets using the boxes, and at first was quite pleased. The birds all took to them, they didn't chew them up right away, and all appeared well. After about two weeks I dis-



A simple English style Budgie nest box made of cardboard and assembled with a common hot glue gun.

covered a problem. I had hung the boxes high in the cages and one hen decided to chew through the bottom of the box, and then to lay her eggs in the hole.

This had an easy solution, I simply moved the boxes to the bottom of the cage, setting them directly on the bottom wire. While this didn't prevent chewing holes in the bottom, it allowed me to slip a piece of sheet plastic under the box, thus preventing the loss of any eggs or chicks. All four pair produced clutches and raised their chicks in the boxes without further problem.

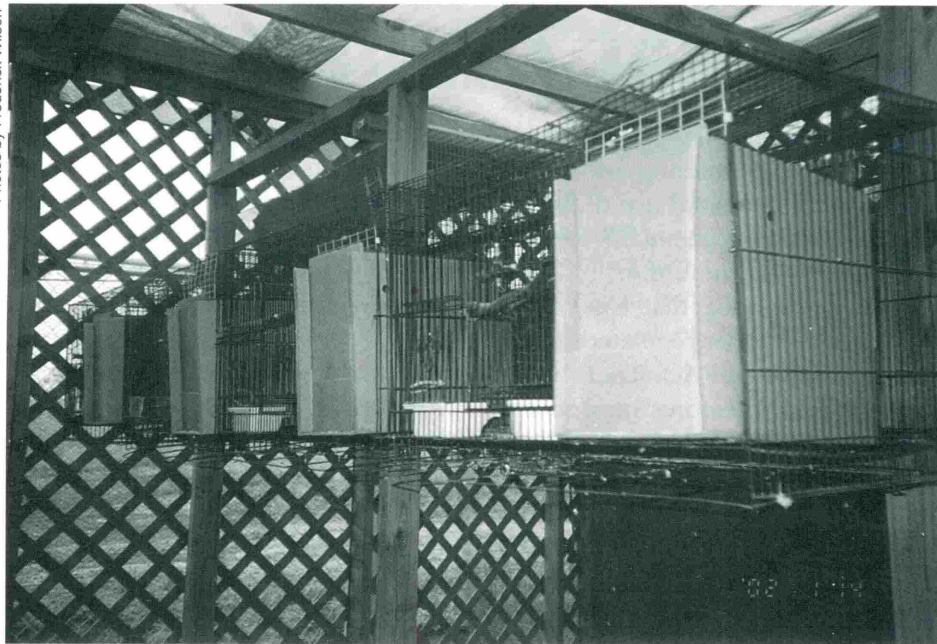
When the chicks had fledged I removed the boxes and simply slid

new ones in, throwing the old ones into the trash. At this time I also set up my remaining parakeets with the cardboard boxes. I went through the summer using them and found they seemed to stay as cool as the wooden boxes had, even with temperatures soaring over 100° F. The only difficulty I experienced was when the mist system was on. Unless I positioned the nozzles carefully the boxes would get wet and begin to come apart.

Summer past and as winter approached I became concerned that the rain and fog would create even more problems with the new boxes than I had with the wooden ones. I was in for a pleasant surprise. While I had the same conditions as the previous winter, I found that the cardboard boxes didn't mildew. Nor did I have problems with the boxes coming apart from the moisture, even after several days of heavy fog. The cardboard boxes proved more durable than I had expected.

In summary, I have found the cardboard boxes to be a significant improvement over the traditional wooden boxes. While the overall cost is higher, at \$2.50 each assembled, a cardboard box costs a little less than half what I pay for wooden boxes, I feel the greatly improved sanitation more than offsets that. For me at least it has been well worth it to not have to worry about inadequately sanitized nest boxes spreading disease, or about mold and mildew killing my chicks.

One potential problem should be considered if using these boxes. While I do not have any problem with disposal, someone with a larger facility might well. Since I have only a few pair of Budgerigars set up, I can simply crush the used boxes and dispose of them in the regular trash. A large facility that changed out many boxes each week could encounter increased costs for disposal. For more information about where to buy these nest boxes contact: faw@ix.netcom.com ❖



Photos by Frederick Wilson

Parakeet cages with the cardboard nest boxes mounted.