

Zeolite for Cleaner Lory Boxes

Lloyd Marshall, Northbridge, Western Australia

People who keep birds are always looking for better ways to do things and a solution to messy lorikeet and finch nestboxes has been found in Western Australia.

Some birdkeepers use gravel on their aviary floors, with others preferring sand, dirt or a covering of straw.

A red mineral called zeolite has been crushed and used in fish tanks for a long time and when I bumped into Ron Gresswell at the Perth Garden Show and he told me about his experiences with the little red granules I realized they could be very useful for birds.

Ron, who keeps Gouldian Finches at his home in Albany, on Western Australia's south coast, had overcome the problem of wet, messy nests by putting little bags containing zeolite under the nesting material in his nestboxes.

"Zeolite is a great absorbent material," Ron said, "and it removes smells as well as moisture.

"More importantly, it removes ammonia from the nests and ammonia can be harmful to for young birds."

Ron is the distribution manager for SuperSorb, the Western Australian company that mines zeolite and crushes it for use in fish tanks and as kitty litter.

"It is also used in cattle feed lots, where the odors can be overpowering," Ron said, "as well as in poultry sheds."

He said some cattle feed lot operators who mix zeolite with cattle feed had noticed less smell, firmer droppings, and increased weight when the beasts were sold.

"The same thing happened with poultry," he said, "with reported weight gains of 10 per cent and additional eggshell thickness."

Ron said it wasn't a case of the mineral sitting inside the animals and adding weight.

"When they were dressed the gain was appreciable," he said.

He said he has had no problems with his birds eating the zeolite.

"It's a natural product with plenty of calcium, which is good for the birds," he said.

When Ron told me about zeolite's absorbent properties I gave it some thought and decided it could be the answer for the three-day Perth bird show in June this year, where we were going to have hundreds of parrots and finches on display in small cages.

Sand had been used in the cages in previous years, but it was not easy to handle and went rock hard when it got wet.

Ron agreed to supply enough zeolite to do all the cages and aviaries at the show and it worked really well, with no smells this year and a much easier job cleaning out

the cages afterwards.

The show includes a sale section where people bring birds in their own boxes and leave them to be sold by the organizers.

This section in past years became very smelly after a day or two and the problem was overcome this year by placing containers of zeolite under the staging, where it absorbed the unpleasant odors.

I knew that breeders of lorikeets often ended up with very messy nests and it occurred to me that they could also benefit by using zeolite-filled pads under the nesting material.

I approached Frank Parker, who has bred many lorikeet species for a long time, to see if he would give the mineral-filled pads a trial run.

He said when he had lorikeet chicks in nestboxes they become a sloppy, disgusting mess.

"In the hot summer months I have taken chicks from sloppy nests that contained many large maggots," he said, "and our lorikeet nestboxes are set up with 50-75mm of clean, fine wood shavings and all goes well until the chicks hatch.

"Then, depending on the number of chicks, I empty, clean, and refill the boxes two or three times every week until the birds fledge."

Occasionally he would forget or be too busy and didn't clean and refill the boxes for six or seven days – then when he checked the nest he could find the chicks standing in a sloppy, revolting guano.

"I felt rotten that I allowed that to occur and I'm sure some breeders have found chicks drowned in this mess," he said, "Not a pleasant thought is it?"

Frank agreed to the trial and his next two lorikeet nests were Little Lorikeets and Red-collared Lorikeets.

"I cleaned out the Littles' log, placed a nylon bag of zeolite in the bottom and covered it with 25mm of wood shavings," he said, "and the Red-collared box I filled as normal – with 75mm of wood shavings."

The Littles hatched and each time Frank checked the nest the shavings were discolored but not messy.

After the Red-collareds' eggs hatched, the nest soon became the usual "slop bucket," which he thoroughly cleaned out, dried, and refilled with clean shavings.

The Little Lorikeets' log never became messy, instead remaining quite dry and when he sold the youngsters Frank was pleasantly surprised to find the nest still as dry as a bone.

"In the past I have sometimes found this same log

with slop dripping from the bottom," he said, "and I found that using zeolite resulted in a more hygienic environment for the chicks as well as saving me the time and effort of continually removing chicks, then cleaning and refilling nests."

"When there are many lorikeet boxes or logs containing chicks, the time taken to remove chicks and clean and refill the nests at least twice a week is considerable."

He said using zeolite in the base of all lorikeet nests he felt would be of great benefit to the chicks and to the aviculturalist.

"Any product we can use that results in a better environment and also saves us time I feel is beneficial," Frank said.

After Frank's experience I tried zeolite on the floors of some of my finch and small parrot aviaries and found it to be very good and really easy to keep clean.

It's much easier to remove because, unlike sand, it moves smoothly when raked and doesn't end up like cement when it gets wet.

Putting it in is also simple - it spreads much easier than sand and can be pushed around with no trouble.

Perth Cockatiel and lorikeet breeder Spencer Stewart does a lot of hand raising and uses zeolite in the bottom of ice cream containers where he keeps his chicks.

"I found it really useful," Spencer said, "because when it gets dirty you just take it out, rinse it off with hot water, let it dry and put it back, which definitely beats paying for all the paper towels I used to use."

He said all his birds have zeolite in the bottom of their cages because it cuts down the smell.

"This is particularly the case with the lorikeets," he said, "where they spray droppings everywhere and the mineral absorbs it and removes the odors."

OZINFO

More information on SuperSorb

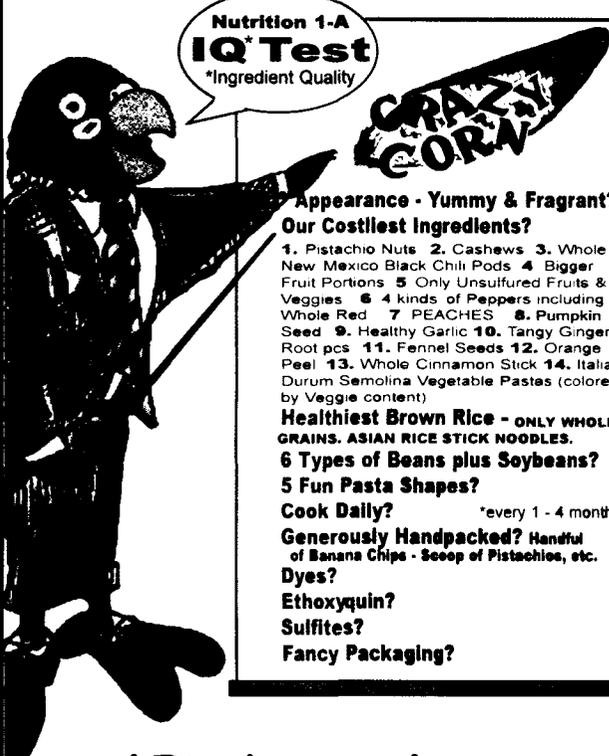
zeolite, together with stockist details, can be obtained from Ron Gresswell on 08 9842 1955, fax 08 9842 1644, email ron@albanyis.com.au

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More information on SuperSorb zeolite, together with stockist details, can be obtained from Mark Baty at Euremica Environmental Limited on 012 8720 4020, email markbaty@euremica.com ❖

"Quiz: Why Do Birds Have Dry Tongues?"*

(Hint: It's The Same Reason They Need Real Food).



Nutrition 1-A
IQ* Test
*Ingredient Quality

		Competitive Products	
Appearance - Yummy & Fragrant?	YES		Varies - Pellets dissolve into brown liquid
Our Costliest Ingredients?	YES!	NO	- Costlier items deleted from most imitations
1. Pistachio Nuts 2. Cashews 3. Whole New Mexico Black Chili Pods 4. Bigger Fruit Portions 5. Only Unsulfured Fruits & Veggies 6. 4 kinds of Peppers including Whole Red 7. PEACHES 8. Pumpkin Seed 9. Healthy Garlic 10. Tangy Ginger Root pcs 11. Fennel Seeds 12. Orange Peel 13. Whole Cinnamon Stick 14. Italian Durum Semolina Vegetable Pastes (colored by Veggie content)		NO	
Healthiest Brown Rice - ONLY WHOLE GRAINS. ASIAN RICE STICK NOODLES.	YES	NO	
6 Types of Beans plus Soybeans?	YES	NO	
5 Fun Pasta Shapes?	YES	NO	
Cook Daily? *every 1 - 4 months	NO*	YES	- most
Generously Handpacked? Handful of Banana Chips - Scoop of Pistachios, etc.	YES	NO	
Dyes?	NO	YES	- in some
Ethoxyquin?	NO	YES	"
Sulfites?	NO	YES	- often, i.e. coconut
Fancy Packaging?	NO	YES!	

*Find out the answer and why birds need real food at **CRAZycorn.com**

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