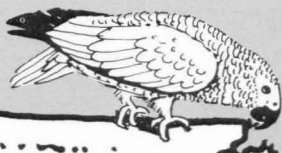


# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BREEDING BIRDS

by Darden W. Vaughan

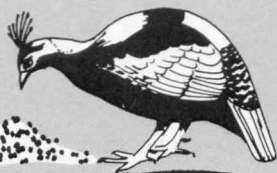


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In the wild state the breeding of birds is governed by a number of variables. Among these variables are such things as the cock bird who gives the most impressive feather display or courtship dance, the color scheme that best suits the hen's fancy, the love gifts that a male presents to his intended spouse, the strongest defense of a territory, or the loudest, most raucous mating call.

In addition, birds in the wild are subject to the influences of the environment, both beneficial and detrimental. These influences are manifested in weather patterns, food availability and quality, fluctuations in predator-prey populations, destruction of habitat and subsequent elimination of proper nesting sites. With all of this in mind, it is not difficult to understand the decreasing numbers among many species of birds in the wild.

In a captive situation the prospective bird breeder must do one of two things in order to achieve breeding results. The first is for the breeder to duplicate as near as possible the birds' natural breeding environment. Construction of a suitable habitat complete with naturalistic temperature, light, and other seasonal indicators can be costly, and is usually possible only for progressive zoological gardens or independently wealthy individuals.

The second is for the prospective breeder to offer an alternative set of breeding circumstances which, though different from the bird's natural environs, are so acceptable to the birds that they will proceed with breeding activities. For the private aviculturist the second choice is obviously more practical.

But, what constitutes the "alternative set of breeding circumstances?" Surely one of the most important components is the provision of an atmosphere in which the birds feel comfortable. Threatening stimuli, abrupt changes of location, and drastic changes in lighting should all be avoided. Birds thrive and feel comfortable when a routine is established and strictly followed.

Another component of the alternative breeding circumstances is space. Birds need freedom of movement and ample area in which to exercise. Cramped cages or efficiency type flights are forerunners of poor breeding results. In addition, ample space provides the birds with a visual barrier, a "safe-retreat" distance that all higher animals subconsciously establish. This safe-retreat distance serves to

alleviate instinctive fears of predator attack and contributes to an overall feeling of security.

A third important component, and probably the most important, is diet. Every effort should be made to provide a diet that is: a) nutritious, and b) varied. Quite frequently a prospective breeder will expect optimum production from his birds when providing little more than dry seed and water. Certainly a dairy farmer would not expect peak milk production from a herd of cows that is fed only on grass and water; nor would a canine breeder expect peak litter production from dogs that are fed only on canned meat and water.

A nutritious diet is closely akin to a varied diet. Birds from whom one expects good breeding results need a nutritious basic diet augmented with appropriate supplementary additions for the species involved. Such additions might include greens, seeding grasses, soaked and sprouted seed, brewer's yeast, dry or water soluble vitamins, commercial conditioning preparations, fresh and dried fruit, small amounts of raw or cooked meat, adult or larval insects, honey mixtures, fresh vegetables, wheat bread soaked in milk, salted crackers, and more. Depending on the species, these supplementary foods can mean the difference between healthy productive birds, and unproductive, malnourished birds.

Through experience the breeder will acquire a perspective in which all of the aforementioned components combine to provide a psychological pattern that offers the potential for consistently significant breeding results. Once this perspective is established, the breeding of birds in captivity takes on new meaning for the individual involved. To contribute to the survival of a species through a well-managed captive breeding program is to prevent the extinction of yet another of nature's priceless feathered creatures.

### About the Author

Darden W. Vaughan is an instructor in biological science, holding a B.S. degree in biology and a masters degree in science education. Married to a veterinarian, Mr. Vaughan is a life-long aviculturist, member of the Parrot Society of England, and member of the American Federation of Aviculture. His articles have appeared in the Magazine of the Parrot Society and in American Cage-Bird Magazine. His particular area of interest is the parrots of Australian origin.

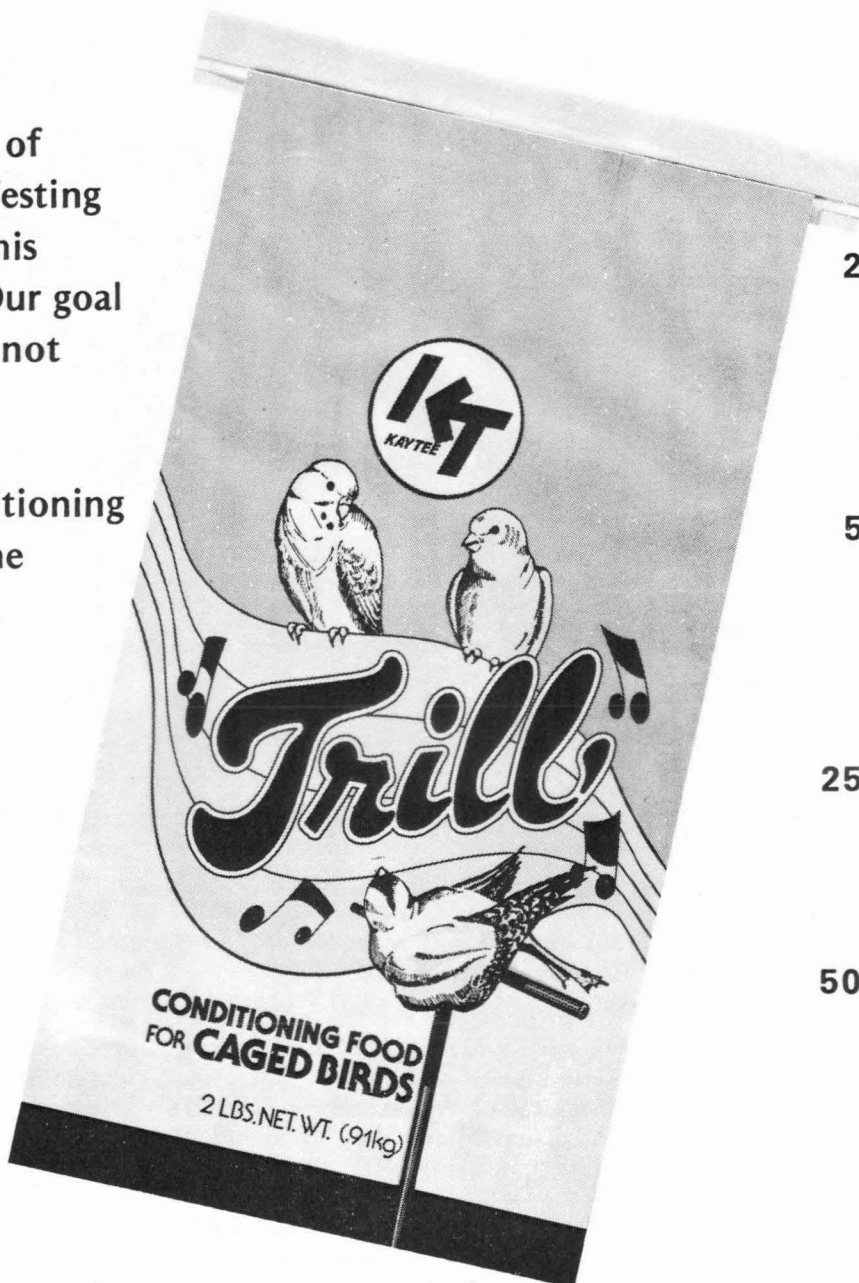
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