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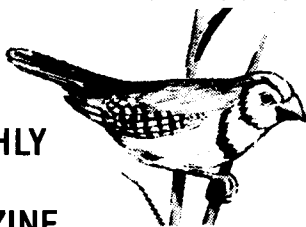
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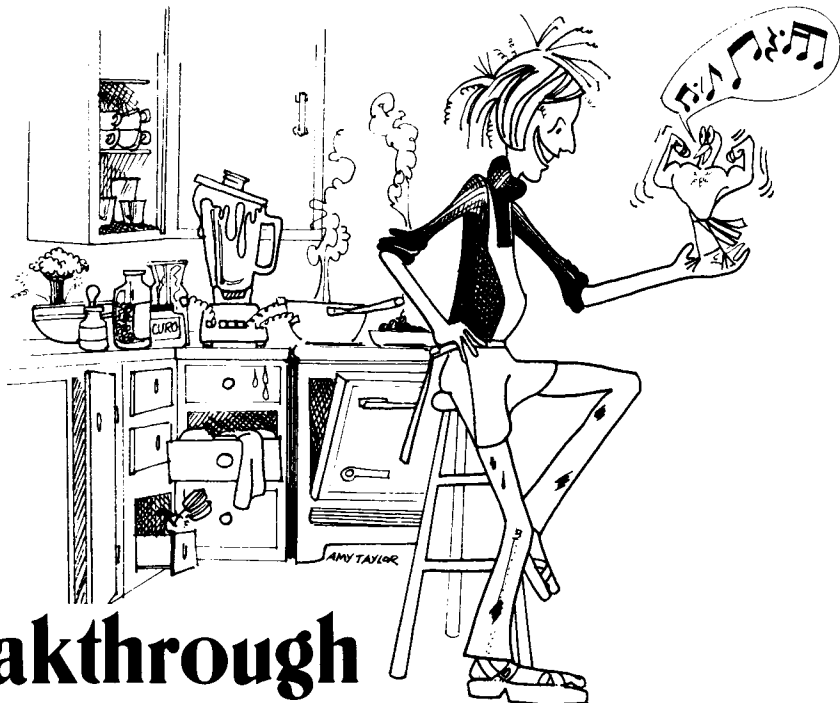


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Breakthrough for Canary Breeders

by Patricia McMullan

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because the A.F.A. membership is spread all across the U.S. and into Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa, the majority of individual members are not located in areas of avicultural density such as California, Texas, and Florida. In the few areas of avicultural concentration there are a number of good veterinarians who specialize in avian medicine. We always recommend taking an ill bird to the vet. In a great many areas of the world, however, there are no vets. In these areas bird breeders depend upon one another to share remedies, methods and techniques for overcoming various problems.

Now in the canary fancy there is a phenomenon known as "going light" in which a few canaries in the eight to twelve week level lose weight and die within a few days. This phenomenon is too familiar to canary breeders but not very familiar to many veterinarians, even if a veterinarian is available.

The following paper is not a scientific treatise based upon highly controlled experiments in a laboratory. It is one breeder's successful attempt to save a bird that was in the final stages of "going light." It did work, however, and deserves to be experimented with. If thousands of canary breeders across the world tried this method on just one or two doomed "going light" birds, considerable data could be accumulated. The author is willing to assemble the statistics if you canary breeders will send her your results. Patricia A. McMullan,

931 Harvard Rd., San Mateo, Ca. 94402.

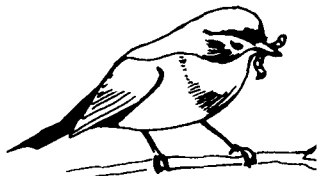
Attention, please, all canary breeders. I've just succeeded in saving and restoring to health a ten week old chick which had reached the terminal phase of the "going light" syndrome and I want to share it as quickly as possible.

This chick is a yellow, variegated Border who hatched out on April 11, 1981. He is the strongest and most aggressive of his clutch of five and developed normally until he was a week into the "baby moult." By that time he was housed in a nursery flight (42"x 23"x 36") with twenty-four others of his age group. Then, one morning, I noted that he was puffy, listless, feathers a mess (the other kids had been picking at his tail and flights and he didn't care enough to fix the feathers) and eating constantly. When I pulled him from the flight, I found that he weighed about one half of what you would expect of a bird that size. (No, I don't have a scale so I can't give you the exact measurement. Any breeder knows what amount of weight he expects to feel in his hand when he picks up a bird.) I switched him to another flight of similar size that was inhabited by only eight other birds, hoping that more room would help ... and knowing that it wouldn't.

This seems to happen to at least one chick every year and in years past I have tried putting them in cages by themselves, putting them in hospital cages on heat, putting them on antibiotics, hand feeding, etc. They have always proceeded on the same downhill course. They spend 3-4

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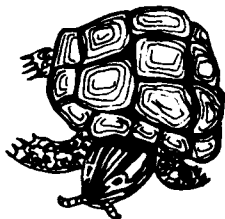
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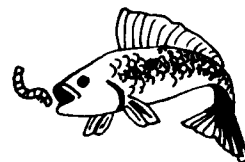
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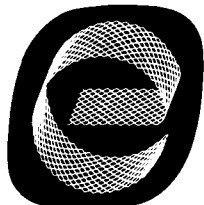
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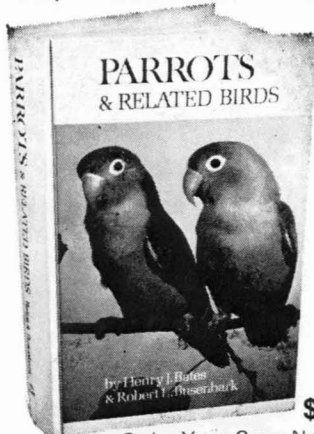
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days eating constantly to the exclusion of all other activities and losing weight just as constantly until, on termination day, they sit on the floor of the cage with dull eyes and wait to die. When I see that, I know the chick has about three hours, at the outside, to live. This one was no different and when he reached that terminal stage I left him alone and went outside to work out my frustrations on the weeds. Then, I got mad.

Old time breeders have told me for years that I might as well kill a chick when this starts because there is absolutely nothing to be done about it. Nobody has been able to tell me what the problem is, however, and the few victims I have had autopsies on just show dead chicks who have starved to death. I don't like "going light" as the name of a disease. It certainly is not contagious.

I decided to hit this one with everything I could think of and started by mixing up a batch of baby food (my corn bread mixture + Gerbers Hi Protein baby cereal + a sprinkle of dry gelatin + a sprinkle of Super Preen + a scraping of cuttle bone + a few drops of 8 in 1 iron and blood tonic, mixed with boiling water until thick enough to load into a syringe from the back end.) First, I gave him warm water with a few drops of the iron and blood tonic AND A SPRINKLE of the powder from a capsule of "Digestive Enzymes" directly into the beak. The Digestive Enzymes are so labeled and are available in my area at Payless Drug Stores. According to the label they contain:

Fungal Amylase 5000

(starch digesting enzyme) . . 30 mg

Cellulase 400

(cellulose digesting enzyme) . 6 mg

Papain NF

(Protein digesting enzyme) . . 6 mg

plus excipients.

I waited 30 minutes for this to get into the system and then force fed the baby food by syringe directly into the beak. I repeated this process 5 times the first two days, but the second time I picked him up for the treatment, I made an observation that had escaped me in previous years. This chick was cold! I don't have a thermometer probe appropriate for taking a canary's temperature but he felt cooler in my hand than a canary should. Therefore, I added Erythromycin to the pre-food feeding on the theory that the normal high body temperature of a small bird is what protects him from bacterial infection and, if that body temperature is decreased, then he must become susceptible to secondary infection from the first bug that comes down the pike.

After the first two days, he was flying to the perches, eating again and the eyes were

no longer dull and listless. At that point I stopped the force feeding of food but kept up the water, tonic, Erythromycin and Digestive Enzyme mixture three times a day for another 4 days. Then stopped the antibiotic. In addition, I put a treat cup full of boiled canary and rape seeds with the water, tonic, etc. poured over the seed and sprinkled some Vitamin B-12 powder over it twice daily in his cage. (For the boiled seed, I bring a pot of water to a boil and then put in 1 cup of canary seed and about 1/3 cup of rape; let it return to a bubble — about 30 seconds — and then turn off the heat and let it sit for five minutes. That trick was taught me by Margaret Roche and the birds love it.) To obtain the Vitamin B-12 powder, I purchased 250 mcg tablets and put them through the grinder. After the seventh day, I stopped the direct-into-the-beak feeding and just relied on the boiled seed mixture. By that time, this chick was gaining weight and beginning to care for his feathers again.

Now, two weeks later, he is normal. His weight and body temperature are just what you'd expect when you pick him up. His behavior is normal. He fights with the other kids in the flight. He flies as well as anyone. The tips of his flight feathers are still a bit ragged but he's working on it.

Since canaries are notorious for having hypothyroidism, I see no reason they might not also have an occasional episode of hyperthyroidism and had thought that this "going light" business was most likely just that. But nothing in my shotgun treatment program should have corrected a case of hyperthyroidism. And now I wonder if it isn't instead a malabsorption syndrome. When I was a bright shiny new R.N., we used to see babies (human, that is) who ate normally and lost weight. They were signed out on their death certificates as "failure to thrive" and nobody in medicine liked that diagnosis any more than I now like "going light." In recent years, we have discovered that their problem is an inability to assimilate certain nutrients . . . a malabsorption problem, and correction of their diets allows these children to survive and grow.

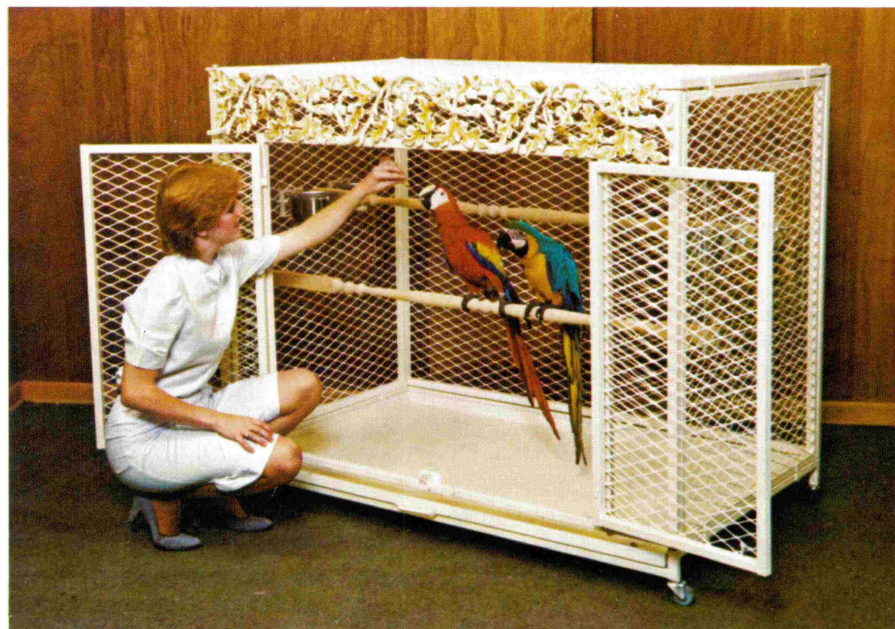
I have not observed big gloppy droppings full of undigested food in the cages where chicks are "going light" and that should have been seen if this is the problem but I really think that the digestive enzymes turned the trick. If that can be proven by somebody in a research program then we will know the "what" of this problem in canaries. AND THEN, if we can find the "why" we will be on our way to the solution. Meanwhile, don't lose any more chicks during the baby moult from "going light." You don't have to. ●

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