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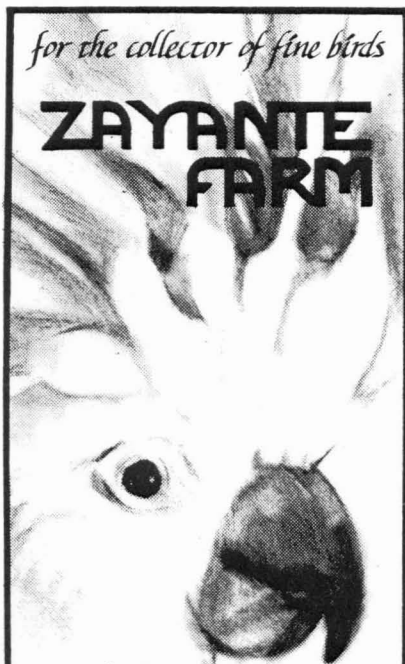
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Canary Culture

by Toni Bucci,
San Pedro, California

“Practical Suggestions For Beginners”

MOLT

Molting is the process a canary goes through of shedding feathers and growing new ones. The time of molt may vary depending on when the breeding was started. June, July and August is the most likely period when the molt will occur.

Molt can be early, normal or late. In general, early breeding anticipates early molt. Late breeding and low ambient temperatures will retard the beginning of the molt.

Molt can be short, regular or lengthy. The desirable molt is short. A healthy canary goes through the molt quickly. Four to five weeks is considered to be a quick molt. A warm ambient temperature (70°-80°) will speed the molt and help a great deal to reduce stress. Total replacement of feathers creates a great deal of stress to the individual canary. Some never make it through the molt. However, a healthy and well-fed canary survives the ordeal with no problems.

Proper diet during the molt is very important. A diet consisting of higher protein is recommended. Oily seeds such as niger, flax and rape should be augmented. These seeds have more protein which is needed to grow new feathers. Nestling food with eggs offers a good vehicle to supplement vitamins and minerals. Eggs provide protein, sulfur and many other nutrients needed during the molt. A small portion given daily should prove very beneficial.

Vegetables, such as broccoli, chicory, spinach, dandelion, and sow thistle, will provide additional vitamins, minerals and vegetable protein.

Young canaries hatched this season don't begin their molt until they are at least two months old. They go through the molt with much less stress as compared to the older canaries who exhibit a stressed condition. All of the males stop singing during the molt. Young canaries don't replace their tail and flight feathers. That is the reason a young

canary is referred to as “unflighted canary.”

A daily bath is beneficial during this time. It stimulates canaries to preen themselves and facilitates a quicker replacement of feathers.

Some canaries will insist on going on with breeding late into the season. In a case where a hen insists on making another nest, it should not be encouraged. Simply remove the nest and the male from the cage, and/or place the hen in the community flight with other hens. Two nests, or at the most three nests, is enough work for one year, especially if the hen has fed all of her chicks by herself.

In a case where the hen was used to only laying the eggs, five clutches of eggs will not stress her as much as if she had fed three clutches. At any rate, all of this work must stop some time in June or July, and rest must follow to give them time to molt and recuperate.

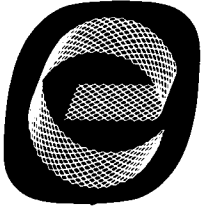
For those individuals who appear to be candidates for the show, it is wise to place them in individual cages to complete the molt. Canaries placed in community flights have the tendency to fight and damage each other's feathers. Individual cages solve this problem.

COLOR FEEDING

The subject of color feeding must be introduced at this time. It is during the molt that color feeding will be effective. There are two methods: one is by adding coloring agent to the soft food; and the other is by adding coloring agent to the drinking water. I find the drinking water method convenient and economical.

But why should we color feed our canaries at all? Not long ago, color feeding was a subject of much debate. Recently, color feeding was accepted by the canary breeders. When a red-factor canary is exhibited and judged using the score card method, it will never score high enough unless color-fed.

The high intensity of color can never be reached by color breeding alone. Color



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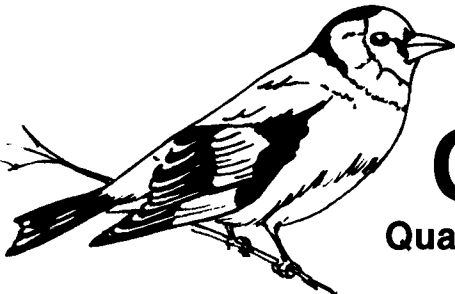
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A good feeding hen is worth her weight in gold. Allow her to feed only two nests of babies and save her for next year's breeding season.



*Non-frost/
red-orange
unflighted canary.
Note the flight
feathers.*



*Frost/red-orange
unflighted canary.
Note the flight
feathers and uneven
color distribution.*

feeding enhances the natural orange color to a bright red. There are type canaries whose standards call for color feeding. They are Norwich, Yorkshire and Lizard. These canaries when color fed do not become as red as color-bred canaries.

COLORING AGENTS

I don't believe there are any breeders in this country who are still using red pepper as a coloring agent. I believe some old-timers in England are still using it. I cannot give advice on its use since I have never used it myself. The agent used today throughout the world is a synthetic carotene-canthaxanthin compound.

The product is manufactured by La Roche Co. and marketed under several brand names, such as *Abba-Red*, *Carofil Red*, *Beta Thin*, *Perfect Red*, etc.

Synthetic canthaxanthin has been produced on a commercial scale since 1964. It is used in the poultry industry as a feed supplement to improve the color of the egg yolk. It is also used in human food as a coloring agent. Tomato soup, margarine, and many other foods contain this additive.

Most of the world's zoos use canthaxanthin as a color food for certain birds, and it is probably the only way to keep the birds' natural red color. This same carotene-canthaxanthin is now available to canary breeders. If used properly, you need only two ounces to color feed 50 canaries for a period of two to three months.

I administer carotene-canthaxanthin in the drinking water. In order for coloring to be effective, one must remove all of the regular drinking water, giving only the treated water to the birds. The hamster-type drinker with a glass spout (described in my last article) makes an ideal dispenser. By selecting the size of bottle to last one day, birds can get fresh treated water every day. Also, this type of dispenser will keep the water clean.

One half teaspoon of powdered carotene-canthaxanthin will make one gallon of solution. Unused solution is kept in the refrigerator and placed in drinkers daily.

It is recommended to start color feeding just before the molt starts, and it must be continued every day until the end of the molt. If color feeding is interrupted, uniformity of color throughout the body will not be achieved. Areas of different color intensity will be evident.

The young birds who are experiencing their first major molt will not get their flight and tail feathers colored. Only the feathers which are replaced accept the color. Pale orange flight feathers are a definite clue of an unflighted canary. ●