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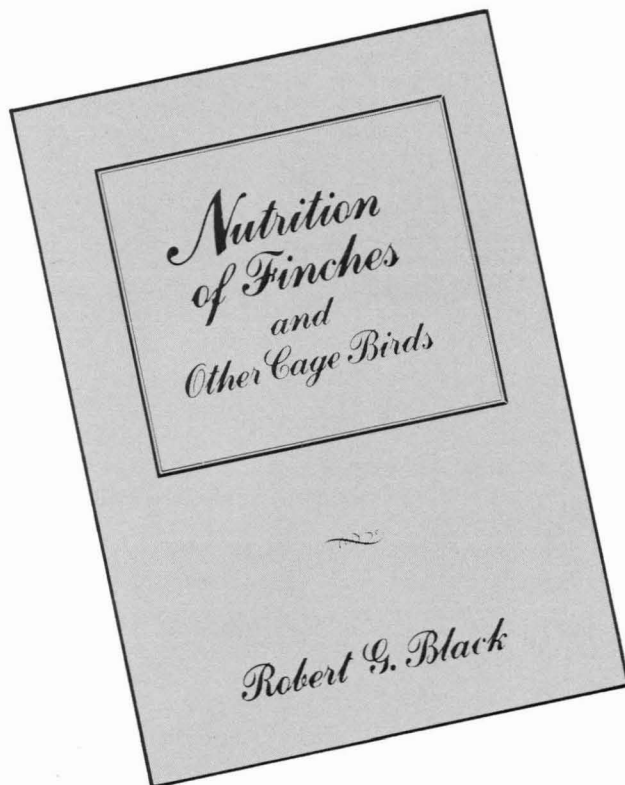
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BOOK REVIEW

by Pat Sutherland
Jackson Heights, N.Y.



Here is a far-reaching, unique and important book on avian nutrition that is extremely interesting, comprehensive and responsible. Robert Black's intense interest in the nutrition of his own collection of birds led him on a thorough and serious study of the available literature on the subject, both scientific and "popular". This book is a report of Black's findings relevant to avian nutrition. It also includes, where applicable, his personal observations on the subject gleaned from his experience as a finch specialist. Although Black provides specific information on finches and canaries, his writing on nutrition is applicable to birds as varied as pittas, pigeons, parrots, pelicans and penguins. Thus, this well-written book should appeal to everyone.

Nutrition (for short) is divided into three main sections. The first part describes the basics of nutrition and discusses in-depth water, proteins, fats and carbohydrates. Part two covers water and fat-soluble vitamins and other non-mineral nutritional factors. Part three explains the roles of bulk and trace minerals in the diet. Every nutrient is discussed

separately in scientific, yet understandable, detail: Black describes what the nutrient is, how it works and interacts with other nutrients, food sources, human and avian requirements (not RDA's), deficiency symptoms and other relevant information. A thought-provoking final chapter, extensive glossary and thorough index complete the book.

Nutrition is not breezy reading; most of it is very technical. If you want to sample the book, excerpts have been published. See: "Water in Cage Bird Nutrition" in WATCHBIRD (Oct./Nov., 1981); "Copper ..." in American Cage-Bird Magazine (June, 1981); and "Riboflavin ..." in Avicultural Bulletin (June, 1981). However, although the reading is not light, it is very absorbing. If you are seriously interested in birds, your interest will carry you through several readings. Unless you have a photographic memory, you will have to read the book more than once. Black, unfortunately, does not summarize the material into tables and such for easy reference, except in one case. Thus, I recommend a quick read-through followed by a note-taking ses-

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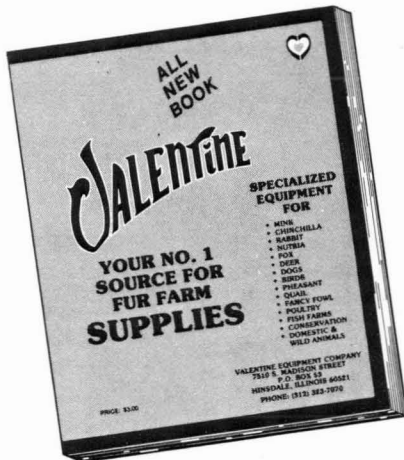
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sion. If, during your second reading, you keep handy a list of the foods making up your birds' diets and the containers of vitamin/mineral supplements (ingredients-side-up) fed to your birds (along with your own vitamins, if any), you'll find it much easier to "digest" the information in this book.

Aside from the superficial discussions of nutrition contained in many bird books, nothing on the avicultural market compares with this book, including the recent "Diet for Birds in Captivity" by Kenton C. and Alice Marie Lint. (See a review of this excellent book by Sheldon Dingle in the Oct./Nov., 1981 issue of WATCHBIRD.) Anyone who has this book should consider "Nutrition" as a companion volume, since the two books are complementary. The Lints' book does not provide any rationale for the diets suggested, beyond the implication that the diets are balanced and that the foods in it approximate the birds' natural diet preferences. The Lints also failed even to hint at possible substitutions for elements of many of the diets recommended in their book.

Black's book, on the other hand, provides the basis upon which one can evaluate any diet in terms of its nutrients content (provided, of course, that the analyses are available), making it possible both to judge "balance" and to select alternative foods. However, Black does not actually prescribe diets, although he furnishes a protein-rich egg recipe for finches and other birds. He does provide examples of avian-acceptable food sources for all nutrients. Thus, though both "Diets" and "Nutrition" embrace the same subject, the authors approach the field from opposite directions.

Black's book is clearly the more generally applicable. You don't need a varied collection of birds to justify purchasing this book. Nutrition is the main concern of every aviculturist, whether he owns a few pairs of breeding canaries or a vast bird ranch. Another aspect of this book that must be considered an extra bonus is its relevance to human nutrition. In spite of my own pitiful lack of interest in human nutrition, I learned a great deal about it by reading this book — painlessly, too.

I am very excited about the potential benefits this book holds for aviculture. **Nutrition of Finches and Other Cage Birds** is a genuine contribution, a sterling achievement, and an important reference. I recommend it highly. ●

Nutrition of Finches and Other Cage Birds by Robert G. Black, (Rt. 10, Box 131-B, Franklin, N.C. 28734), 1981; hardcover, 326 pp. \$19.50 postpaid.



Good nutrition is a key factor in keeping this Saffron finch (Sycalis flavola) looking healthy. (Photo not part of R. Black book illustration)