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Canary Culture

by Tony Bucci
San Pedro, California

Practical Suggestions For Beginners During Molt Part II

During the month of August, the molt may continue and come to an end during the month of September. My last article dealt with molt, color-feeding and other related subjects. I will continue with the same subject of molt and related problems during this period.

One problem that plagues canary breeders during molt is feather picking or, better described, "feather breaking." This type of feather picking should not be confused with feather picking encountered with psittacine birds, which is self-inflicted. Canaries never pick their own feathers but do inflict damage to other canaries.

There is nothing more discouraging, irritating, and frustrating—and I could add more descriptive adjectives—that a canary fancier experiences than to come home and find his best young canary tailless and bleeding. The bleeding comes from a feather stub left there after being broken by an offending canary. The feather stub must be removed as soon as possible using good tweezers. Once the feather stub is removed, the blood will coagulate, and the bleeding will stop. Unless that broken stub is re-



A young adult badly damaged, the results of feather picking by its cage mates.



These fledglings display typical damage caused by a mother attempting to build another nest.

Photos by Tony Bucci

moved, it will continue to bleed.

Bleeding will attract more offenders to cause more damage. To prevent further damage, the injured bird must be treated as mentioned above and placed in a separate cage.

To prevent other birds from being damaged, the offender must be found within that flight. The flight in question should be observed until the offender is spotted attempting to do more damage. This is easier said than done! If you have twenty yellow canaries within the flight that all look alike, it is very easy to lose the criminal while you are trying to catch it. The process can become very time-consuming.

I have solved the problem by wetting the offender during the time he or she is attempting to do the number; i.e. drenching him or her until he or she can no longer fly. This is easily done using a good squirt gun or squirt bottle, which holds more water. The squirt bottle should be adjusted so that it will squirt a solid stream of water. Once the criminal is wet, it can be easily identified and finally apprehended.

It is interesting to note that when this same canary is placed in a flight with other canaries with the same criminal habit, they will not inflict the same injuries on each other. I guess they are wise to each other. Observing them, you can see the mistrust they have for each other, as they escape when approached. I normally assign a separate cage just to hold these hoods.

Feather picking is more prevalent among Red Factor canaries and smaller breeds, in general. Among the large Type canaries, such as Yorkshire, Norwich, and Parisian frills, the problem is less frequent or nonexistent. These large breeds are less vigorous and less mischievous. It is wise to keep them apart from the smaller ones, especially during the molt.

Among the theories which explain the reasons for feather picking are insufficient protein in the diet, lack of certain minerals and vitamins, and boredom or over-crowding. Observing canaries dur-

ing this period, one can note that once a canary picks a feather (always from another canary), it proceeds to manipulate the feather in its beak and ends up chewing the quill. Is the canary trying to obtain some nourishment from the part of the feather which was embedded in the skin?

If the feather is accidentally or intentionally broken during the attempt to pick it, the remaining stub will bleed. I have seen drops of blood on the floor of the cage being drunk by the offending canary—a case of a vampire canary! Perhaps chewing on the quill and the drinking of blood is an indication of a desire to obtain animal protein?

I have experimented by placing a strip of bacon in the flight. The bacon was slowly consumed by the inhabitants of the flight. Feather picking was reduced, but not totally eliminated. Perhaps the bacon served as a diversion, something to do?

I have heard from fanciers that placing string or hemp rope (never use synthetic materials such as nylon string) in the flight would help the picking problem. If placing string and rope will help, then the problem could be behavioral.

I tend to accept the behavioral theory because my large breeds do not pick feathers, yet they receive the same diet. They are calmer in contrast to the small breeds which are more active and mischievous.

Placing small breeds, such as Red Factors, Rollers, and other non-Type canaries, in larger flights gives them more room to expend their energy. Small breeds can be compared to children which are more energetic and mischievous.

Birds that exhibit possibilities for the show should be placed in individual cages which would obviously eliminate feather picking totally. I use my breeding cages for this purpose, as they are no longer needed for breeding during this time. A breeding cage, especially the box type, offers maximum privacy and gives that choice canary a chance to finish the molt undisturbed and unharmed. ●

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