

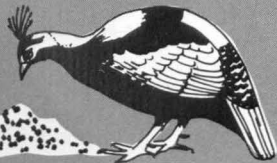


THE FEED BAG

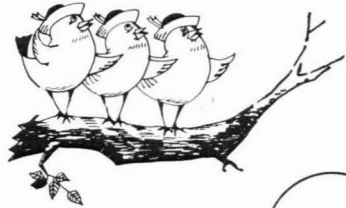


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Canary Calendar

by Charlotte Nierenberg
P.O. Box 2095
Sepulveda, CA. 91343



Charlotte Nierenberg

Whether breeding operations start early (January/February) or later in colder climates, most canaries have successfully completed their annual molt by October. The period of summer relaxation is over and the serious business of choosing and training potential winners for show competition is here.

There is also a flurry of buying and selling activity since it is wise for the buyer to have his choice of the "cream of the crop" and also for these new birds to adjust to different quarters well before the breeding season commences.

BUYING NEW BIRDS ("Caveat Emptor" – Let the Buyer Beware)

The novice invariably asks where to buy new birds, what kind, how much to pay, and how to be reasonably certain his newly-purchased birds are in good health.

Where To Buy – It may sound trite to advise "buying your birds from a reliable source" but it is a fact of life that there are unscrupulous dealers.

Recommendations and referrals pave the way to honest dealers and one of the best sources of this information is another bird breeder. Bird clubs and societies provide the opportunity to meet many experienced breeders, share ideas and learn new methods, thereby avoiding disappointing and sometimes futile breeding seasons.

What Type of Canary to Raise – After a season or two of raising "typical little yellow songsters" you may have seen a larger "Type" bird or become intrigued with the art of "color breeding" after seeing the enchanting new hues on display at a bird show. Breeding the unique and operatic Roller canary is decidedly a specialization in "Bird-dom" and one that requires the time and patience for the different training, food and development of show winners.

How Much To Pay – There are many conscientious breeders who produce top quality birds of the variety you decide to purchase. Their prices will usually be competitive with other breeders. The range of prices will vary but there is little doubt that you will find some birds at honest appraisal value that will suit your budget.

Every breeder likes to keep his best birds – and should. However, long experience will result in a quantity of "best" birds in a breeding establishment and the

owner cannot keep them all. You should expect to pay a little more for potential show winners and less for those birds that lack in some ways but are still good, healthy birds.

Beware of ridiculously low prices offered by some dealers who want to unload their culls and misfits. These birds are not bargains at any price!

Ascertaining "Obvious" Good Health — Although it is understandably difficult to maintain an absolutely seed and feather-free aviary, the novice should note the general cleanliness of the quarters his new birds have been raised in. He should take the time to observe the birds of his choice and adhere to a few important check points:

1. Avoid a listless, puffed-up canary. He should be actively flying or pertly hopping from perch to perch.

2. Handle the bird. If he feels very light or drops loose feathers in your hand — forget him. Note the vent area — it should be clean and unstained. Hold him to your ear. If he is "wheezing" or making a "clacking" sound, choose another. Legs and feet should be clean and unscaled.

3. It is best, of course, to hear the bird sing before you buy him. This assures the fact that he is a male. However, this is not always possible and most birds require a period of adjustment to their new homes before they sing. Inquire about the policy of the breeder regarding the guarantee of sex.

4. To keep the bird healthy, find out what he has been eating. If purchased in an area distant from your own, take home a bottle of water for gradual mixing with your own. **BE WISE** — quarantine new purchases for a period of thirty days before allowing them to join your flock!

Pairing Your Birds to Best Advantage — If this is your first breeding season, stick to the "basics".

1. Mate "hard feather" to "soft feather". The hard-feathered birds will appear sleeker and tight feathered, showing deeper color. Lift one or two feathers with your finger. It should show color down to the very end of the feather. Conversely, the "soft-feather" bird will appear fluffier. Examination of one or two feathers will show a white tip on the end. The combination will assure good feather texture in the offspring.

2. Never breed two crested birds which will likely produce bald babies.

3. Until you gain more experience, breed two similarly colored birds together but be sure to stay with the "hard feather to soft feather" concept.

SORTING AND SEPARATING

If you had success with your first season of breeding, decide how many pairs you can breed comfortably. In a good season, the production from a number of hens requires adequate time, space and flight cages to house both parents and babies after weaning. If individually caged for breeding, the cleaning, feeding, water changing and record keeping can be overwhelming to a novice.

Choose the birds you intend to keep and sell the rest. Place a competitive price on your birds and deal honestly with customers. A reputation (good or bad) can be acquired swiftly.

If you have bred mediocre birds and want to upgrade your stock, it is usually not necessary to discard the whole lot and start all over again. Attend shows as a spectator and observe the stance, conformation and winning points of the types you admire. Compare them with your own birds and pick the best you have for the next breeding season. The purchase of just a few new birds of high caliber can upgrade your stock after a few seasons. Choose the cock for size, the hen for conformation.

If your facilities are minimal, choose the largest flight cage or aviary for your hens. Cocks may be kept separately in your vacated breeding cages after the season. With the addition of a colored, plastic band, each male may join the hens on a rotation basis for adequate exercise.

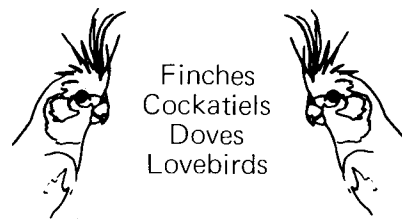
Dietary Suggestions from October Through December

When your birds have finished their molt, the offerings of all rich, conditioning foods should gradually cease. A good grade of canary mix, of course, is always essential, minerals in the form of cuttlebone and gravel should be a standard offering, and have fresh, clean water always available. The addition of vitamins (either water-soluble drops in the water, or in powder form added to seed according to directions) will assure a healthy flock of birds.

The exception to this "rule-of-thumb" pattern of feeding during the winter months preceding the breeding season is when your birds are wintered in outside, unheated aviaries.

Under these conditions, it is advisable to add a good conditioning food (containing oats or oatmeal) to the above staple diet. Outdoor birds in a cold climate need a richer diet and will throw off any excess fat by free-flying facilities. ■

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