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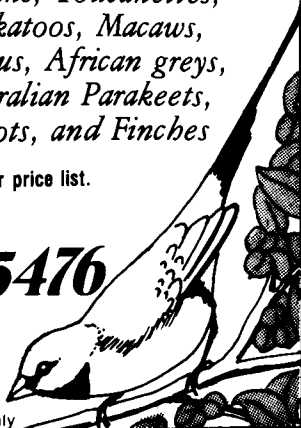
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Snags in Breeding Budgerigars

By Eric Peake
United Kingdom

Most people who start breeding budgerigars enter into it with the idea that it is easy. Perhaps it is easy to pair up the budgie and it is not very difficult to house them. But it is far from easy to breed *good* birds consistently.

In America, as in England, there is a strong budgerigar fancy. The exhibition budgerigar has a solid following and attracts many new fanciers each year. A certain percentage of the new fanciers drop out but there remains a strong nucleus of newcomers eager to learn about breeding budgerigars. Naturally, they seek advice from the more experienced breeders.

Not all the tricks, as you may know, are readily divulged to the novice mainly because the newcomer could not absorb so many details all at once. Usually an experienced fancier will give a novice just the major principles of budgerigar breeding and perhaps a list of prime snags that can occur. If all the snags were put down on paper the list would be so long that it would deter all but the most determined newcomers interested in taking up the hobby.

Experience is a wonderful thing, however, and eventually most of these snags will be taken in stride. But for the inexperienced newcomer the following discussion may be of some help.

FAILURE TO PAIR is one of the first problems of the year. Many reasons exist but one or both of the birds being out of condition is often the cause. The birds also may have been put together while too young. This, of course, is the fanciers fault as he should know all the details of

the bird's background including their ages. Sometimes even a too-young pair will go ahead and hatch out some babies but then fail to follow through with proper feeding and the young will suffer. If two birds do not bond together within a few days they should be separated and repaired at a later date. Or you may change the partners and possibly clinch a pair sooner.

CLEAR EGGS can be frustrating especially if the clutch is a large one. Generally in this case the mating has not been successful due to wrong conditions. Examine the situation. Is the nest box secure? Is it large enough and the right shape? Was it put in too early after the birds were put together? Is the hole too small? These items are very important to a pair of budgerigars. If these factors are all in good order then one must keep an eye on the birds. Observe the pair to determine their attitude toward one another. Does the hen pay too much attention to the nest box and ignore the cock? Check your records. Perhaps one of the birds is too old. Sometimes the pair can be used as foster parents provided they have been good feeders.

DEAD IN THE SHELL is an equally frustrating problem that can have several causes. Chilling of the eggs can result in half formed babies. Chilling at the end of incubation can kill fully formed babies still in the egg. During the breeding season keep a sharp watch on your birds, especially the hens to see how tightly they sit.

Another main cause of dead in the shell babies is the lack of humidity. Do

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When medicating birds by mouth be sure to place the dropper behind the tongue.

not put the eggs directly in water. If the egg is cracked the chick may drown. Too little humidity causes the eggs to dry out and become too tough for the chick to break through thus causing its death.

PLUCKING OF BABIES can be upsetting if the parents overdo it. A light plucking of the down is not such a horrible problem but if heavy plucking of the baby's feathers occurs then one must take quick action. The plucked young can be fostered out to other parents or the of-

fending parent can be removed. If neither method is practical then, as a last resort, you may place a frame of wires (half an inch apart) between the chicks and the entrance hole. When the chicks cry out for food the parents will feed them through the bars but when the parents go to pluck the chicks they, the chicks, back out of reach.

SICK BIRDS will be found in every fancier's birdroom at one time or another. When a sick bird is detected it must be



A bad case of scaly-face. Notice the scale creeping around the lower mandible of the bird.

isolated in a warm cage and watched carefully. Prevent the birds becoming chilled by heating the cage but do not stress the bird by placing it too near an open fire or heater. If it is necessary to medicate the bird, the dropper should be placed *behind* the bird's tongue so the medicine will be swallowed rather than dribble out of the bird's beak. Some experienced fanciers manipulate a piece of rubber tubing directly into the crop of the bird but I do not recommend this method to newcomers.

SCALY-FACE is a snag one must be constantly alert for among budgerigars. It is a form of infestation by microscopically small mites that burrow into the skin layers causing a thickening of the skin and scab formation. The area around the birds beak, cere, and nostrils is most often attacked. Some mites infect the feet and legs also. When scaly-face is detected the bird must be isolated into a clean cage and treated. There are many products available for successful treatment of scaly-face and your veterinarian will recommend one or two. Do not put the bird back with the others until you are sure the scaly-face is totally cured. Scaly-face mites are often found on newly purchased birds or birds from aviaries where unhygienic conditions and nutritional deficiencies occur.

DAMAGED BIRDS are simply birds that have had an accident that produced physical trauma. There are two categories of damage—temporary and permanent. The temporary damage, of course, cures itself in time. The permanent damage can be divided into two categories. One that permits the bird to breed but to be useless for showing. The other that prevents the bird from even breeding. Often a fright will cause a bird to fly into an obstacle and do itself damage. A genetically excellent bird may become a good breeder even though it has a poorly healed wing that droops. Of course it would not do well on the show bench. On the other hand, a cock bird that has lost a leg may be useless for breeding although years ago I had a hen with just one foot who mated successfully on the floor of the cage. You'll have to evaluate each damaged bird individually to determine how best to use it or whether it is useable at all.

The list of snags that can occur in a breeding program may well be endless, as many old-timers will testify. I have highlighted a few of the more common snags in the hope that once alerted, you newer members of the budgerigar fancy can avoid some of them. May your breeding season be as snag-free as possible. ●

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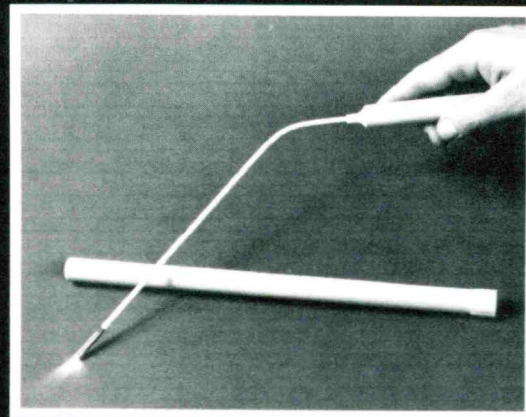


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