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# Questions and Answers

Edited and Researched  
by Richard Tkachuck, Ph.D.  
Perris, California

*Greetings to those of you who share the avicultural fever. Since last I wrote a number of letters have come and as a result, I shall attempt to give some suitable answers. Which comes to a point that needs to be made. You, the reader, should take the printed material below as advice; hopefully it is informed advice, and not as ultimate truth. Aviculture is not yet an exact science and is still largely anecdotal. It is the aim of the Watchbird staff to attempt to make bird breeding almost kid-proof but as yet there is more art than science in this most wonderful of activities. So, on to the questions.*  
—Editor.

**Question:** Will you please ask your readers if they have a recipe for mineral block? I have my own formula for feeding newborns and would be glad to exchange in return. Your help would be appreciated.

GS, Pennsylvania

**Answer:** I personally have no such recipe, but would welcome such from readers. If such are sent in, please tell why you roll your own when commercially available ones are available. Also, include how long you have used such and why you think it successful. And, GS, how about telling us YOUR secret?

**Question:** I am trying to find out if anyone outside of Japan has, raises or breeds Japanese Tumblers (Parus varius) or variegated tit. How are they bred in captivity or are we locked out by the restrictions of export?

**Answer:** An interesting question! One of my sources said that he has not seen these birds in the past 15 years. They once came from Japan and had a curious flight which resembled that of pigeons. I do not believe that they are banned by importation officials. If any of the

readers know of the existence of such a colony in the U.S., send us a note. Perhaps if there is enough interest someone could import a few.

**Question:** I have two cockatiels, which have recently had young. One of the chicks is 5 months old and does not have any tail feathers. He get one and it falls out in about 4 days. Other than this he is a very healthy bird.

Also, I would like to know what books are available on the subject of veterinary medicine for birds.

**Answer:** Any chance somebody is picking on the tailless critter? If not, you might have either a genetic problem for which you can do nothing or you might have a nutritional problem which could respond to treatment. With regards to the second case, have you tried supplementing the food with a vitamin and mineral mix sprinkled on the soft (fresh) food you give?

Time for the soap box again. A number of the cage birds that are kept are highly inbred. As a result, an increasing number of genetic problems seem to be popping up. I know what I am going to say is hard to take, but at least think about it. Would it not be best to eliminate these birds from the breeding population? That could mean either killing them (an unpleasant option to you as well as to me) or perhaps giving them to someone as a pet who will keep them as such and not attempt to breed them. (Certainly, not selling to some unsuspecting person.) I am concerned that if we continually permit the genetically infirm to be maintained, we will eventually reap a poor harvest. Personally, I believe it is poor management to allow birds into the public arena that one knows are inferior.

Some good books? Sheldon Dingle recommends these:

*Diseases of Cage and Aviary Birds.* Margaret L. Petrak, D.V.M., Editor. Lea and Febiger, Philadelphia, 1982. 2nd Ed. (Probably the best book.)

*Bird Diseases.* L. Arnall and I.F. Keymer. T.H.F. Publications, Inc., Neptune City, NJ, 1975.

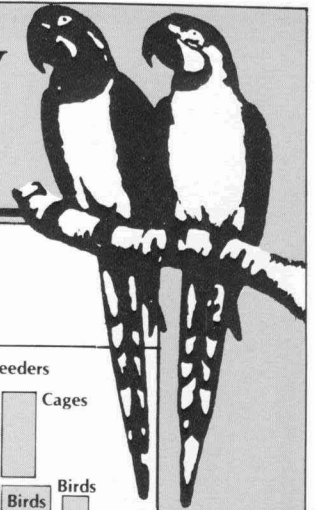
*Caring for Your Pet Bird.* R. Dean Axelson, D.V.M. Canaviax Publications Ltd., 41 The Links Road, Toronto, Ontario, MZPIT7 Canada, 1981.

OLD BUSINESS...

*A while ago someone questioned whether or not lovebirds could be kept out in the cold. I was a bit disappointed that no one from the midwest has written. Perhaps the record cold killed off*

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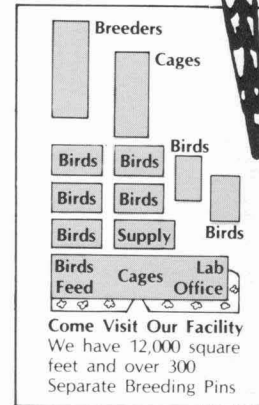
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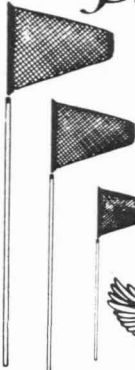
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everything and there was nothing to write about. We did receive mail from other regions, though, and answers from Oregon and Sweden follow.

— Editor

**Question:** Can lovebirds be kept out in the cold?

**Answer:** Here in Oregon we had a cold spell where the temperature was about 5°F during the day and below 0°F at night. I have an 11' x 11' x 8' high room of 3/4" plywood with two windows, cement floor and fiberglass roof with no heat or insulation. I keep black-masked lovebirds, cockatiels, Senegal parrots, and Indian ringnecks. In the daytime the 8" diameter 1-1/2" deep water dishes were changed three times a day. They were frozen solid. The birds all seemed to fare well with no indication of being sick or cold. This bird room adjoins our house with the living room window being one of the walls. The birds are under observation all day and did not appear to be affected by our recent cold spell.

S.L., Oregon

**Answer:** Regarding lovebirds and cold, I can tell about a friend here in Sweden who successfully bred Fischers lovebirds in an outdoor flight during the winter with temperatures sometimes dropping to 20°C below zero (-4°F). The breeding was carried through without any real problems except that one youngster froze to death. It had gotten out of the nest box early and could not find its way back before nightfall. After this incident, my friend always helped the youngsters back into their nest box before dark each evening. A small indoor flight, where their food was served, was available for the birds all of the time but they didn't use it except for feeding. The birds had a big nest box made of thick, solid boards and a lot of twigs were available. The thick wooden walls of the nest box and the nest of twigs in it probably had a very good insulation capacity.

Lars Lundgren, Gaole, Sweden

*Now these are letters I like. Lots of detail. It would seem that dry and draft-free locations with wooden perches will provide a good environment even in the cold. I was recently in India and saw ringnecked parakeets flying about in near freezing weather with no apparent distress. I'd still like to hear from you folks in Iowa, Nebraska and Illinois. That is, if you survived the miserable winter!*

**Question:** I have a pair of Stanley Rosellas. I would like to breed them in cages (2' x 2' x 4') if possible. I have had reasonable success with cockatiels in these cages.

**Answer:** Cockatiels do nicely in that size. I have a number set up like that also. But the rosellas, now that is different. Even though they are the smallest of the rosellas, they are by nature strong fliers and are not as sedentary as Amazons or macaws. They might breed occasionally, but should be housed for consistent success in a flight at least 4' wide and 8' long. Another individual contacted reacted quite strongly at the size of the cage you proposed and said that nothing less than 3' wide, 6' deep and 7-8' tall. Also, if you have more than one pair next to each other be sure the flights are double wired. Remember, when the young come and they are in a small cage, there might be five or six adult sized birds in a very small space. It has been the experience of one breeder that such crowding will result in the male killing the young. If these birds do not have adequate housing, their condition will gradually deteriorate in a small restrictive cage.

**Answer:** In your column in the Dec. '83 - Jan. '84 issue of the *Watchbird* you asked that people respond regarding the size of the flight that they breed rosellas in. I have bred Gold Mantle Rosellas in a flight that was 48" l x 30" h x 25" w. The 48" side was the front and was the only side to have wire. I used a nest box that was 12" x 12" x 24" h that was fastened on the front of the cage. The birds were fed a seed diet made by Abba Products of New Jersey that was supplemented with mixed vegetables, soaked corn, fresh greens, and vitamins. In one year they had 3 clutches of 4 babies each. I took the babies when the youngest was 2 weeks old and hand raised them. The hen laid new eggs after about 3 weeks.

My personal feeling, though, is that this would not be of suitable size as a permanent flight.

G. Steven Scott, New York

**Answer:** Thought I would write to give information on my experience in breeding rosellas. I had my first experience last year.

We are limited in space — in the house — so our bird room has several "large" cages made by my husband. Our birds went to nest in December, 1983 in pens 4' x 4' x 5' high. They laid 5 eggs — 3 of which were fertile. They

raised three babies.

This year they are nesting in a pen 4' x 4' x 8' high. As they have just started laying, I will not know the outcome for a couple of months. The rosellas are gold mantles. We also have and hope to collect more mealy rosellas. On another note, the birds (rosellas) outside are in areas 4 feet wide, 8 feet high, and 8 feet long. When birds are through raising their families, they are taken outside (weather permitting) and placed into larger flights for the rest of the year.

Mrs. Donna Hamry, Jacksonville, FL

*Well, that does it for this issue. And, as they say on the old radio programs, "Keep those letters and cards coming, folks!"* •

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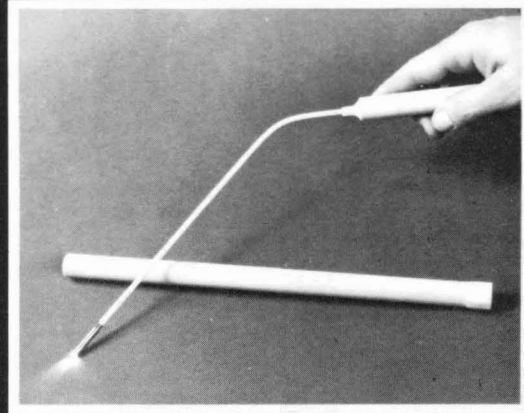
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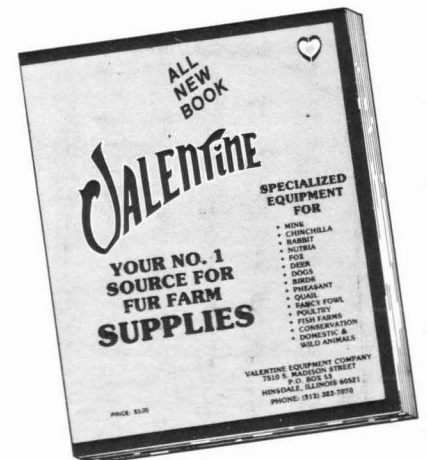
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