

Questions and Answers

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







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This month's mail has brought a stack of questions which are much appreciated. Thank you for the kind words, at least in some of them. But with the increased number comes a bit of a problem — I can't answer them all because of lack of space. So if you do not see your letter after an issue or two it probably will not show up. A number are very similar to ones answered in previous issues. As a consolation, if the problem is different from what has been printed previously, I will attempt to answer them personally.

A request that keeps appearing in the letters is one which demands a precise protocol to deal with a specific problem. Quite frankly, there are few situations in aviculture that can be handled only one way. What I will give is what I or others *think* is a good solution. Be advised that there may be as good or better ones somewhere else. Aviculture should be enjoyable and not filled with a continual fear that one is not doing something exactly right. Remember, no way is exactly right. —Q&A Editor

Question: *What formula would you recommend for feeding young bookbills?*
—DT, California

Answer: The idea of hand-feeding to those who have never done it calls up the idea that the formula required is one so complex and complete that one must have a Ph.D. in nutrition before you can feel confident that the little ones are getting an adequate meal. This is absolutely not the case. One needs to look in the seed dish of the parents and one will realize that the young do nicely, thank you, on what the parents eat. Thus, if the breeder can mimic what the parents eat there is a good shot that the hand fed birds will also do fine. No need to worry. The following is a formula that is a rough approximate of what I and several others I know use.

- 1 cup sunflower meal
- 1 cup ground monkey chow
- 1 cup high protein baby cereal
- 1 cup any other type of grain meal or

seed meal (peanut, pecan, corn, etc.)

Note: If you can't find some of the above, substitute with what you can find. It is just not that critical. If you have at least two different ingredients, you are quite sure to be safe. I would make one caution—it would probably not be safe to use raw soybean meal. It has a trypsin inhibitor in it and could stop enzymatic digestion. But then again, soybean meal is not all that common.

Now you have to make sure that this is in a fine grind. This is the greatest pain in the whole procedure. However you do it, finally sift each ingredient through a fine sieve. I feed with a stomach tube and if I do not sift, then the thing will plug. If you don't feed with a stomach tube but a syringe or a teaspoon, the necessity of sifting is less.

To the above mix I add about 1/2 cup of a mix containing equal portions of a calcium compound (D-CA-fos) and Vionate. Mixed all together it is put into the freezer. When needed for feeding I take one measure of the mix, one measure of baby food applesauce and one measure of baby food peas. Mixed together with enough water to make it soupy so that it passes through the syringe without much difficulty. This comes by practice and experience — sorry.

The next step is to heat it to about bird body temperature. This is important. If the babies, especially the small ones, get a shot full of cold food, this will lower the body temperature of the bird, slowing down digestion and possibly causing distress. But what is the right temperature? Roughly, warm enough to be felt warmer than your skin but cooler than what would cause discomfort on the inside of your wrist. Again a precise temperature is not required.

How much to feed and how often depends on the size and age of the bird. Generally the younger the more often. A general rule is to feed after the crop has been empty for only a short time. As

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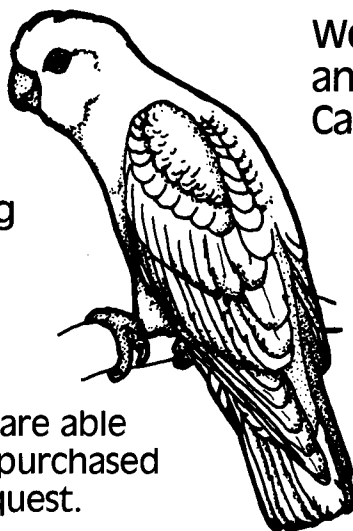
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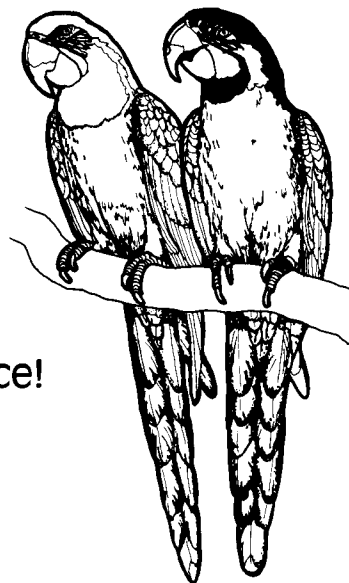


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the bird gets older and can take more, three to four times a day may be all that is necessary.

A suggestion. (And please forgive me for using the word experiment — it seems to have upset someone before.) If you plan to raise cockatoos or other valuable birds, practice on cockatiels or lovebirds so that when a truly favored bird needs help, it will not be the first time you have tried hand feeding.

Question: *Why do some individuals within a single species of conure have a white periophthalmic ring and some almost a black one? The color of their legs also varies from flesh-pink to dark grey. What would happen if contrasting colored birds were mated?*

—LS, Sweden

Answer: The origin of variable features within living systems is due to different mutations in the genetic material. Why these mutations are maintained in a particular species is due to chance, natural selection and the will of the gods. Ultimately, if a character does have selective value its expression in a population will increase. There is some indication that novel structures or colors in birds sometimes increases reproductive success. As to the type of inheritance that the various color forms have, this, to my knowledge, is yet unknown. Conures presently are just now being widely bred and very little is known about the genetic of the various color forms.

Question: *Some of my cockatiels have orange spots of flecks around their neck and head near the cheek patch (the orange spot on the neck of the bird). My vet thinks it is a dietary insufficiency or imbalance. [The writer then lists what he feeds the young and it is the most adequate diet I have seen.] What is the problem?*

—JC, California

Answer: What is one person's problem is another's pleasure. This spotting is a normal color pattern that occurs on some birds. They are on mine and I have had thoughts of trying to get the color to spread by selective breeding. If you want to get rid of your birds cheap, give me a call. Imagine a totally orange bird — Wonderful! But if you don't like it, then cull those without the spots and in a couple of generations you should have largely eliminated the problem. But why not see if you can get an orange bird?

Question: Should I give grit to my moustache parakeets? [The writer then

describes a good seed mixture he is using.]

—WB, Texas

Answer: To grit or not to grit? Most bird keepers who do not have earth floors to their flights put some bird grit in a bowl and let the bird pick and choose. There was thought a few years ago that the withholding of grit from parakeets (budgies) resulted in better health. But I have not heard if this is substantiated. Keet lovers write and tell me what you know about this. In any course, one can be sure that any seed or insect eating bird is going to get some grit in its food while living in the wild so in all probability it will not hurt to have some available.

Question: *It is true that Sheldon Dingle looks like Orson Wells?*

—RS, Texas; VQ, New York;
and nine other people

Answer: Only from the neck down. •



In Memory of Mrs. J. L. Spenkelink

We regret to report that Mrs. J.L. Spenkelink-van Schaik of Soesterberg, Netherlands died 12 October 1983. She was an important and well-known aviculturist for many years having first kept birds in Indonesia then in Holland. Mrs. Spenkelink-van Schaik specialized in rare and uncommon parrots and was a strong believer in captive breeding as one means of conservation. She was an enlightening speaker at the 1982 convention in Washington, D.C. and was scheduled to speak at the upcoming convention in Florida. We shall all miss her.

Before her death Mrs. Spenkelink-van Schaik submitted to the A.F.A. *Watchbird* several articles and photos regarding some of the parrots she was working with. Even though we may miss her in person we are fortunate enough to still have her guidance by way of the written word. See article on page 28. •

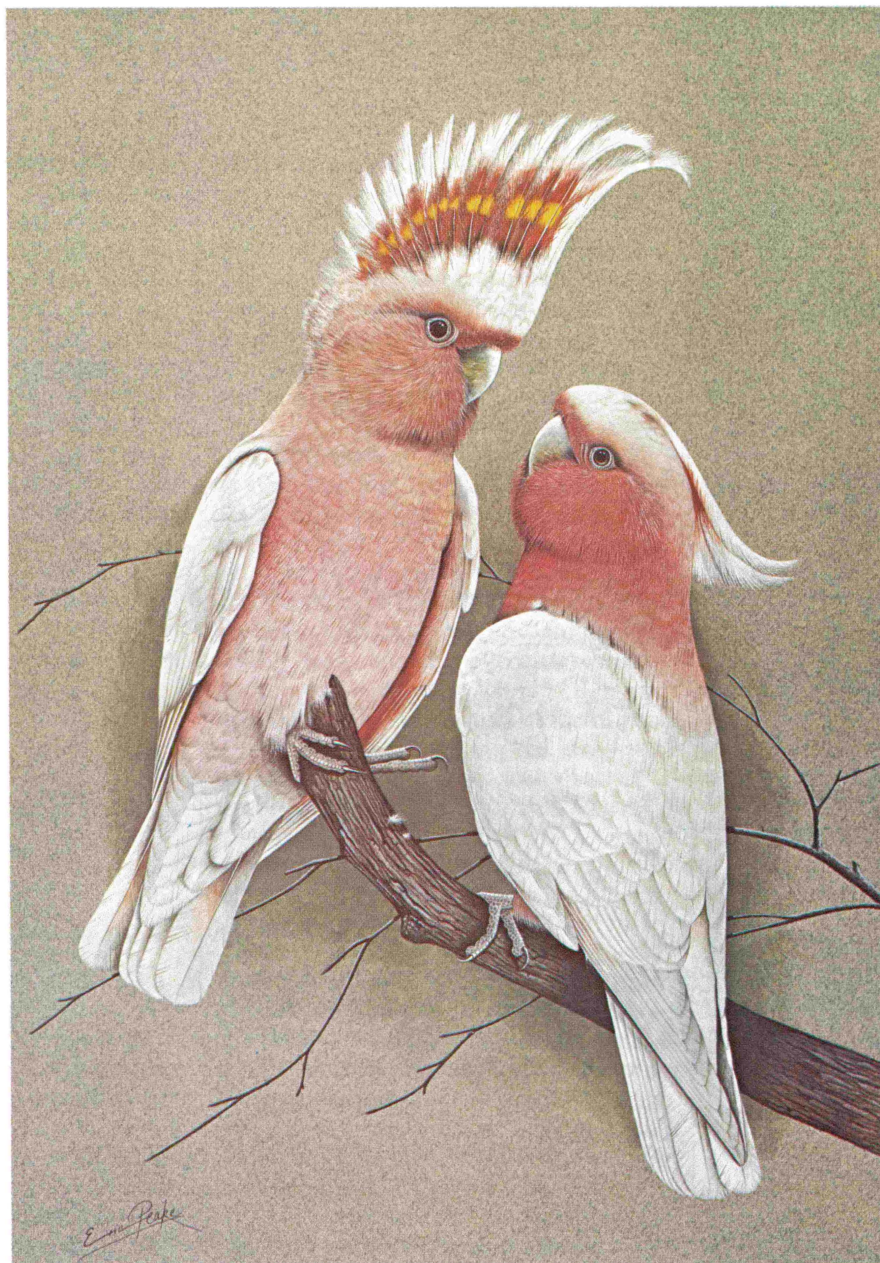
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