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Questions and Answers

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

With the summer comes the breeding season. Hopefully, yours has been a successful one. A number of questions have come in this month. A few will be answered below.

First a reader response to a previous letter: In reference to your last column which included a question on where to find Japanese tumblers, I too have been looking for them with no positive results. [The letter then goes on to list other species he is looking for.] JY Delaware.

Reply: This letter and others has raised a continuing problem. Where does one find the rare and the strange? There is the feeling that somewhere out there someone has just what you want. The problem is that there is no real way presently for people to get that type of information. The AFA attempts to maintain a census for education purposes, but the rules are very tight as to who has what birds. (And this is as it should be.) Our dear editor has told me that there is a movement afoot to put people together who have lonesome birds for which they have not been able to find a mate. The Education and Media Committee has plans to provide this service in cooperation with the Watchbird but those plans have to be approved by the Board before they can go into effect.

QUESTION: I have a lovebird that lays four to six eggs, sits fine until approximately a week to four days before the eggs hatch and then starts to peel the egg shell thus killing the young. I have had to foster the eggs each time. [An adequate diet with mineral block and cuttlebone are listed. The other hens in the flock do not have this problem.]

ANSWER: For an answer to this one I called Lee Horton, who has probably raised more species and mutations of lovebirds than any other aviculturist. He said that he has never had, in the multiple thousands of clutches, any similar experience. It appears that you have a hen with a plain nasty habit. Such erratic behaviors are not all that com-

mon. I know of a conure hen which loves to lay and then to smash. I have heard of other hens that lay like chickens, and have no interest in incubation. Fortunately, these aberrations are rare. Sorry I can't help more.

I should like to give a plug to The African Lovebird Society. These folk publish a journal ten times a year at the price of \$15. Devoted exclusively to lovebirds, it covers maintenance, breeding, housing, etc. It's well worth the expense. Address: P.O. Box 142, San Marcos, California 92069.

QUESTION: [This question represents a couple requests so will paraphrase the problem. RT] I have a lovebird that at first had good feather presentation. Over a period of time it started to look scruffy and later patches of skin could be seen. I have taken it to the veterinarian who said it was a genetic defect and that there was nothing that could be done.

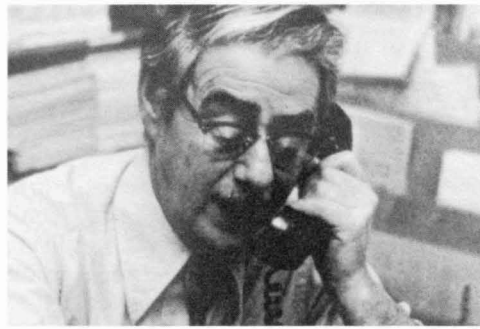
ANSWER: The problem raised by these questions seems especially common amongst lovebird mutations of the lighter shades. At first, an area appears which looks like the bird was in a fight and had some of the underfeathers bent out of shape. The sites commonly appear at the bend of the wing or on the chest and belly. Instead of going away like a normal injury, more and more appear until the bird looks like it has been through a blender. Two courses follow. If the bird is in the outside, it will probably die because of loss of heat so that some cool morning, it will be dead on the floor. The other option is the bird kept as a pet in the house where the temperature extremes are not so great. In this case the bird will gradually become nude. Ultimately, death will come.

The causes are puzzling and cannot be traced to one factor. All cases require testing in a veterinary lab and at some expense. A common possible cause is a bacterial infection in the quill of the feather. To determine if this is the case,

it is necessary to remove a newly emerging primary feather and squash it on a slide, stain it with a Gram stain to determine the presence of bacteria. Alternately, one can also culture this tissue to see if any bacteria are present. Should this be the case, one can then perform a sensitivity test to search for an appropriate antibiotic to treat the bird. Once found, the appropriate injections can be given. And even after all this it might not work.

Similar examination could also reveal a fungal infection. Feather mites might also be a problem. Also thyroid deficiency, which can be determined by a blood analysis, can be a cause. Even after all these have been excluded, some lovebirds still have the problem. These have been blamed on viruses for which no cure is known.

In one colony of which I am aware, this problem showed up. Numerous birds were sent to the state lab and with no results. Finally the owner simply culled all birds that showed the symptoms and ultimately developed a colony which did not have the problem. It seems that he was able to get a strain that was more resistant to whatever the problem was. ●



IN MEMORY OF DAVID W. GOODMAN

David W. Goodman, 61, died June 18 of an apparent heart attack in Miami, Florida while serving on a Mediterranean fruit fly task force.

Mr. Goodman was a public affairs specialist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (A.P.H.I.S.) and represented the U.S.D.A. at many A.F.A. functions. Mr. Goodman was a very sympathetic and understanding man who did much to bridge the gap between aviculture and government. The current mutually beneficial liaison between U.S.D.A. and the bird industry is due in great part to Mr. Goodman and a few others like him.

The A.F.A. lost a good friend and will miss him very much. Mr. Goodman had been scheduled to speak at the A.F.A. Convention on "100 Years of Protecting American Animal Health."

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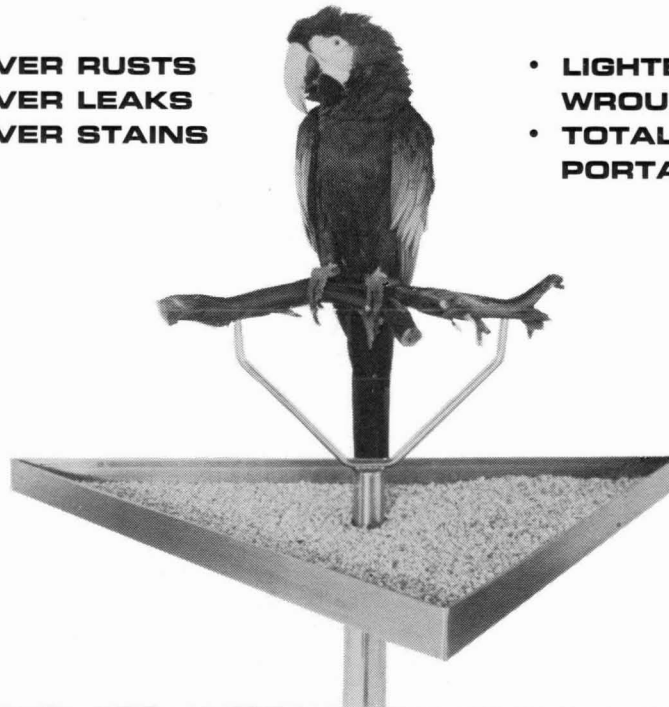


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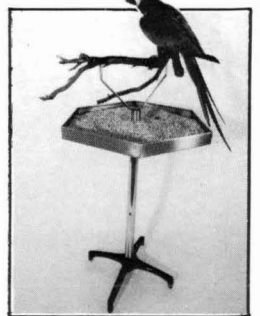
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