

# A Few Notes on Hardiness in Winter

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I had heard that diamond doves, button quail, cockatiels and most other hook bills could not stand our winters without supplementary heat. Three years ago I had an infertile male diamond dove, seven excess male button quail and two cockatiels who were lousy parents. These birds all remained outside during the winter. We had some low temperatures that year but I do not remember exactly how low it went. The birds were in an uninsulated shed 8' x 12' that was solid wood except for 18' on the south that was covered with one thickness of clear plastic. All of these birds came through in excellent condition and none were lost. Since then most of my stock of these three types have been kept outside during the winter. Only two birds have been lost due to the temperature. One cockatiel got its feet wet and froze to the wire partition when the temperature was around -20 degrees. This winter one young diamond dove froze all of its toes though the other 32 and 16 in the same pen did not freeze a toe. It must have roosted on the metal rod that locks the doors.

This year I had three pair of black headed caiques and three pair of yellow thighed caiques. An article in ACBM Apr. 82, p. 11 had mentioned that a pair had survived an English winter without heat and I have seen pictures of them in the snow in Holland. I felt that since the information I had been given on the winter hardiness of the first three species mentioned was so erroneous and the caiques did not seem like tender birds then they certainly should be able to stand what the cockatiels had taken.

About the first of November I finished one flight on the south side of an uninsulated barn. The outside was a hanging cage 3' x 4' x 5' and the inside also a hanging cage of 2' x 4' x 5'. There was a three inch hole near the top so they could go in and out at will. There were four nest boxes that they could roost in, three perches in each cage and branches from the perches to the bottom so they could get to the feed and water without climbing the wire.

At that time I put two pair outside that I wanted to breed as a unit. The weather ranged from 55 to 20 degrees for several weeks and the birds acted very happy. In December we got some

temperatures around zero and one bird was out most of the day, two came and went often but one stayed inside much more than it was out. Only one nest box was used and I did not want to scare the birds out by checking but assumed that all four were roosting in it. Around the end of December we got a storm and the temperature went to -27 degrees. When I got to the barn in the morning one bird was on the bare wire at the bottom of the cage and looked dead. Another was sitting next to it. The other two birds were on the top perch. When I picked the bird up it tried to bite but was too weak and cold. The other bird went up the wire but had difficulty. I put the one under my coat and took it to the house.

At first I thought of giving it extra heat but decided that a change of at least 80 degrees was enough. The feet were stiff and looked frozen and I expected the bird to die but put it in a cage with feed and water and went after the others. Getting back with the other three I was amazed to see the first bird standing up and drinking. A little later it ate some seeds, held an apple in its foot and ate it then climbed up on the perch. For the first week I watched them rather often and was surprised to see them using both feet to climb and eat. Unfortunately, I quit watching closely and it was some time before I realized that three birds were standing on the same foot all the time. Birds often stand on one foot so it did not seem unusual. When I caught these three I saw that they would be losing some toes on the foot they were not using.

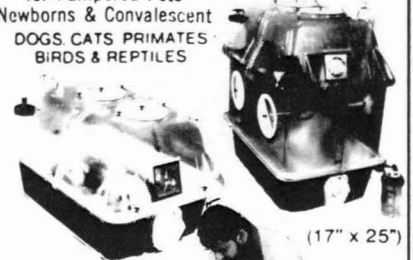
At first I could not figure out why the cockatiels stood the weather and not one was lost while the caiques were unable to take it. Then it hit me that I had always seen the caiques climbing on the wire instead of staying on the wood or flying. The cockies land on wire at times but fly up and down most of the time and perch on wood. I think the caiques could stand the low temperatures if in a building with little wire and where they had to fly up and down instead of climb. I am not going to try to find that out, however.

Since I have to handle these birds alone and they are not tame I found that a soup can with a slit in the end for air works very well for holding the bird to trim nails or work with the feet. ●

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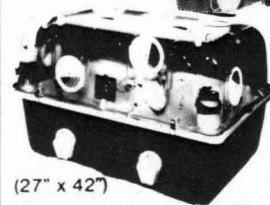
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