

Questions and Answers

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Perhaps the prologue to this month's column should be called "**Death of a Patty**". Recently, I found a mature female Patagonian conure dead on the floor of its cage. I had had it for several years and last year it had laid (as my wife likes to call the first egg) its practice egg. It was fertile but the pair was inept. Thus it was that I was looking forward to this season with high expectations that some young ones would be found in the box. When I removed the bird from the cage, it felt fat and sturdy. I took it to my veterinarian for a post mortem. The report came back that it had an internal hemorrhage — it bled to death.

It seems that conures have a problem getting enough vitamin K. Vitamin K is important in the process of clotting. While the clotting process is too complex to describe in this column, it is enough to say that it is a multi-step process and one that requires between 10 and 15 different compounds all interacting in proper steps in order for the clot to form. Hemophilia in humans is a genetically caused absence of a particular protein, which, because of its absence, does not allow the clotting process to finish.

Vitamin K is not found in food as is the case with most other vitamins, but rather is formed by bacteria in the intestinal tract. For some reason, conures in captivity don't seem to get enough. Thus, when an injury occurs or a spontaneous break in a blood vessel takes place, the resulting bleeding will not stop. Several rodent poisons take advantage of the fact the small blood vessels in a body often break. Poisons like Bar-Bait have clotting antagonists, and as a result the rodent bleeds to death internally.

Where do conures in their natural habitat get their vitamin K? Two possible ways come to mind. Perhaps something in their diet in the natural state provides supplementary vitamin.

While this is possible, I prefer the next explanation. When we place birds on diets that are different from those in the wild, the bacterial flora in the intestine changes. It is well known that certain people react differently to certain foods and as a result different groups of bacteria grow to significant levels. Thus, while the aviculturist can provide an adequate diet to maintain growth and reproduction, the captive diet may not stimulate the proper bacteria in the gut of the bird to produce enough vitamin K.

Supplements with additional vitamin K seem necessary for these birds. Until it is determined exactly what the needs are, this is perhaps the safest course.

I started this column by saying that the "Patty" died a couple weeks ago. In a real sense its fate was sealed about two years ago. At that time I had a Finsch's conure. One morning I found it dead. During the night it got its toe nail caught in the cage. While struggling to free itself, it pulled the nail out and bled to death. Then last summer a nanday conure developed a very puffy left breast in a matter of 24 hours. When touched, it felt like a soft cushion. In the case of the Finsch's conure, I did nothing but remove the bird. In the case of the nanday, I added some antibiotic to the water for a few days. What I should have done was to call the veterinarian on the Finsch's conure and ask why it bled to death. In the case of the nanday (and I realize this by hindsight now), it appears that a spontaneous rupture of a vessel took place. Only, in the case of the nanday, it recovered, whereas the "Patty" did not.

Moral of the story — when anything dies, get a professional opinion as to why, and maybe you can preclude that problem in other birds in the colony.

Question: Some of my birds have been diagnosed as having fungal infections. I

keep a clean flight and am wondering what are sources of this problem.

M.S. California.

Answer: We can be thankful that most fungal infections are not very difficult to treat. See your veterinarian and ask for some antifungal drug that you can sprinkle on the food or put in the water. Mayco-20 is a favorite of mine.

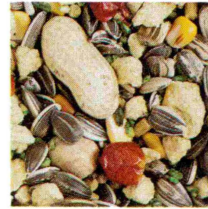
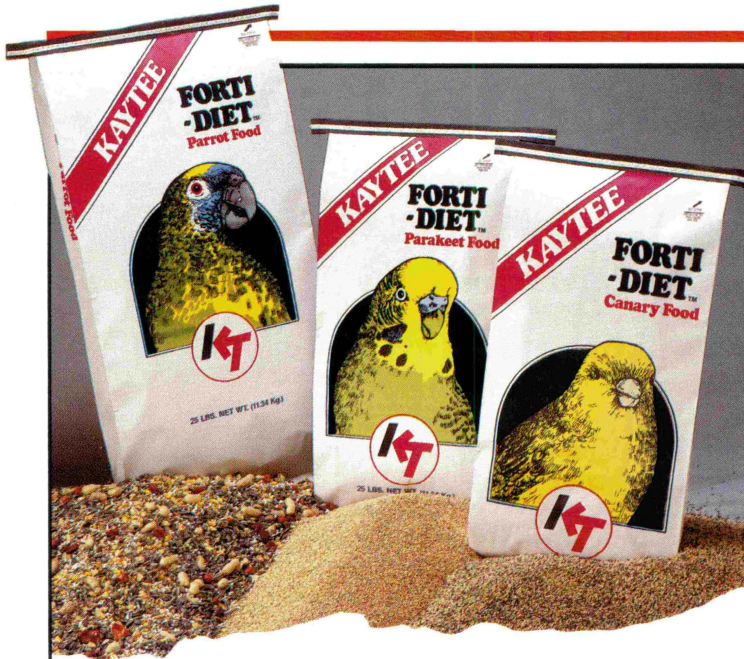
An important question needs to be asked about each cage or flight: Where might fungal infections come from? First, look in the feed box. Is the bottom layer damp or moist? Are seeds germinating on the flight floor in damp areas? Making sure there are no damp areas will do much to solve the problem. Fungi require moist environments in order to grow. Next, are you giving softened or sprouted grains? I, for example, give my birds soaked rolled corn and soaked racing pigeon mix every day. The night before these are fed I place them in water to soak overnight. Such mixes, even when dry, are a good source of fungi. When such grains were analyzed for the presence of fungi it was found that many lots have a high percentage of fungi present. Why this occurs is rather simple. First, the air contains numerous spores. These are found on harvested grain. Secondly, as the corn or other seeds are drying, these fungal elements have a time to grow before the moisture is all gone. Then they wait until the seeds are rehydrated and start to grow again. The birds eat these seeds and become infected.

Is there a way to prevent this? Fortunately yes, and it is also easy. Get from your veterinarian or druggist some calcium propionate. I pay about \$5 a pound. Disperse 1/3 teaspoon in a gallon of water and then put your seeds in to soak. The fungi just don't do well in the presence of this compound. Is calcium propionate a chemical to be feared? Not at all. Calcium is a part of everyone's diet, and propionate is another name for propionic acid — something your body makes when it digests odd-chain fatty acids.

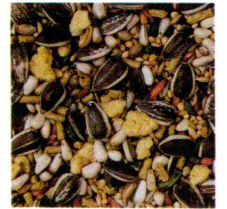
One final note. One should not continuously feed an antifungal agent in the diet. (Note: I do not consider the calcium propionate soak a part of the diet.) What I am saying here is that compounds like Myco-20 should be used to treat problems and not as a prophylactic. One should keep these special agents for use when a problem arises. Otherwise continual use will enhance the possibility that resistant strains will develop.

Till next time. Hope to hear from others of you. ●

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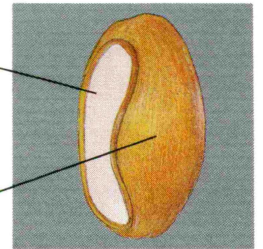


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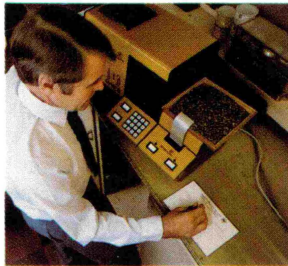
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