

# Canary Culture

by Tony Bucci  
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## Readers' Response to Canary Pox

*Editor's Note:* In my article on canary pox (Dec./Jan. '85 Watchbird) I described the devastating effects of the disease and asked for other breeders' responses. The following three excerpts reflect the response I've received suggesting that canary pox is a problem in most or all parts of the country. My thanks to the breeders who wrote. Their letters give added data that may be of help to canary breeders until such time as we can get a pox vaccine for canaries.

Tony Bucci

### It Will Never Happen To My Birds!

The mosquitoes and their diseases are a part of canary breeding that no one should ignore. I feel the reason for the hush response of people is, as Tony Bucci stated in his canary pox article, "fear of a bad name" but I would also like to add another reason that is customarily thought and one that happened to me, "it will never happen to my birds."

In the past five years, I have raised 50 to 75 hens yearly and housed them outside from August to February. Last year I moved to Auburn, California and had heard about the acute and subacute forms of pox carried by mosquitoes, but had yet to be so unfortunate.

While moving 450 canaries into an outdoor aviary, I had not put up mosquito screening. In two weeks, I started losing two to three birds daily. After several autopsies at the California Department of Food and Agriculture, I was told that the birds had malaria instead of pox, another deadly disease carried by California mosquitoes.

The symptoms of malaria are similar to the acute form of pox and just as lethal: instead of puffing up, the birds appear to daydream 24 to 36 hours before death. Malaria attacks the red cells and is not contagious.

A total of 50 birds were lost during two weeks of exposure to mosquitoes. Although screening has been up since the first part of September, I have had a couple dozen canaries die from the chronic form of pox.

In my 15 years of breeding canaries,

the treatment of the occasional bird hit with the malaria disease is hopeless as none have survived, but the ones with the chronic form of pox can survive with heat and antibiotics, however, these are mostly cocks, as my hens rarely pull through.

I feel fortunate that after dealing with hundreds of birds each year, I have had as few losses to pox and malaria that I've had. But the threats are out there just waiting for an opening, so I do my best. To lose a bird "developed through years of hard work" is a tough loss to swallow no matter how often; the threat prevails.

California

### Tackle The Problem Yourself

I am writing in regards to Tony Bucci's article on canary pox. I must agree with his statement about the tendency to lay low and tackle the problem yourself. Nobody wants to talk about high losses in livestock. As a dedicated aviculturist, I hope this information may help someone.

Five years ago, I started with 300 newly purchased birds and lost 100 in the first two months due to canary pox. More losses occurred for two more months. Fortunately, an interested veterinarian forwarded several articles to me.

As noted in the Coulston-Manwell paper, a 1-3% mercurochrome in 70% alcohol to which a trace of acetone was added was successful in treating canary pox. I applied the 1% mercurochrome, alcohol, acetone solution (prepared by a pharmacist) generously to all their lesions. The success rate of birds treated in the early stages was 90%, and 50% to 70% in the later stages. By the next season, I still had 180 birds (60% of the flock) and raised 200 chicks from them. I realized this is low production, but after experiencing the nightmare of canary pox, I was happy.

In July, the pox surfaced again. It appeared in 70% to 100% of the 200 babies and a few of the adults. These birds primarily displayed lesions around the eyes. I placed the birds in (1' x 14" x 1') cages with three to a cage

and treated them twice a day in addition to having the buildings and flights steam cleaned and fumigated.

Several successful breeding seasons followed without any reoccurrence of the pox. This was four and five years ago and I still have a few of the original birds.

British Columbia, Canada

### Importance of Quarantine

While at a meeting of the Texas Canary Club, I was handed an article. I had no idea of the subject matter, yet with one look at the pictures, I knew what the article was about. The sight of the pictures caused me to take a deep breath while horrible memories raced through my mind. After reading the article I decided to share my experience concerning canary pox.

I bought several pairs of canaries from a breeder and had only my love of animals to guide me in my new hobby. No one bothered to tell me about *quarantine*.

Pox was introduced to my canaries, by my lack of experience and by a woman with a pair of glogsters that needed a home. I had no idea this small pair of birds would soon turn my new hobby into a nightmare that I will never forget.

The young hen had a small sore on her toe. I asked the woman what was wrong with the hen's toe. The owner replied that it was a "cut." Being very new at this hobby, I simply doctored the "cut" and placed the birds in my flight.

Two weeks later, more of these sores began to show up on more of the birds. I called my veterinarian and rushed to his office with two birds. The doctor said not to worry about "this virus that rarely gives trouble or kills." Indeed, I didn't have to worry long. Soon all my birds were dead. (Needless to say, I have a new vet!)

Several weeks later, I repainted my birdroom, sterilized equipment and restocked my aviary, but this time I was a lot wiser on the subject of canaries. I bought birds from only the best breeders. The birds were quarantined for sixty days in addition to other precautions.

Pox was a difficult disease for me to witness and I wondered in the beginning if I would ever have the nerve to restock an aviary again knowing that one mosquito could kill everything. Pox could still get started in my birdroom, but it won't be because I didn't learn to quarantine birds. Texas ●