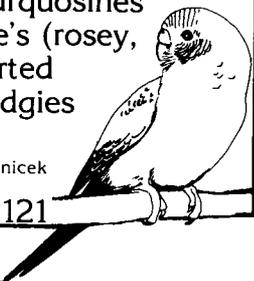


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Yoda

A Case of Calcium Deficiency

by Sherry Rind
Redmond, Washington

For several weeks Yoda, a young Timneh African grey parrot, has been subject to the anxious attention of three human beings as they try to rectify his calcium deficiency and worry about whether he will live to be a healthy, mobile adult. His story began in the spring of 1984 when I decided that my grey, named Audio Feedback because of the noises he made, wanted a mate more than he wanted my company. An ad in the local bird club newsletter resulted in his meeting Sollie, owned by Sue Ellis and Mark Snodgrass, and it was a case of compatibility at first sight. Perhaps we should have known in those first few months that our luck was going too well.

Audio moved to Sollie's house in mid-May. The two birds spent a day gazing at each other through the bars of separate cages before Sue let them out to meet. They clambered to the tops of their cages. A confirmed people-fearer, Audio leaped away from Sue and landed on Sollie's cage. Soon the birds were sitting on the same perch, preening each other; and a few days later Sue and Mark moved the birds to a large cage in the basement.

Propped several feet off the ground, the cage measured 3'x4'x6' and was made of 1/2"x1" wire. In a far upper corner was the nest box, sized 1'x1'x3'. The plywood box was attached outside the cage and nailed to a log facade inside the cage. Apparently the birds liked this natural-looking front, for they began to investigate the box immediately.

A combination of daylight and Gro-lux light gave the birds fourteen hours of light every day. They ate a parrot mix supplemented with oats, alfalfa, and safflower, along with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Audio was finicky about his vegetables, but Sollie, a tame pet, ate almost everything given to her. The birds also received wheat germ oil and Super Preen on alter-

nating days.

Each time Sue or Mark walked down the stairs, they would hear the birds making a rush for the nest box, with Audio usually diving in first. By July 13, two months after the birds had been put together, Sue and Mark realized that for several days only one bird had been diving into the box. Sollie was remaining inside full-time.

On July 20 they found two eggs in the nest box and a few days later, two more. Every day they provided a pie pan of water in which the birds bathed to keep the eggs moist. The human excitement quickly rose but fell when nothing happened. Finally giving up hope at the end of August, Mark removed the eggs and found them all infertile. We all hoped for better luck next year but were surprised when we discovered we did not have to wait that long. On October 14, Sue and Mark found Sollie sitting on two eggs. She laid a third on October 16.

Deciding to be more scientific this time, Sue and Mark candled the eggs on October 27. They decided one was infertile because it was light in weight and showed nothing when they candled it. Of the two others, one showed a dark spot and the other showed something that looked like a vein. They put all three eggs back in the nest.

On November 13 Sue and Mark left for work feeling depressed and discouraged. Any eggs should have hatched by now, they thought, but there were absolutely no signs of action. When Sue returned home at 2:30, she checked the box again. Growling, Sollie lunged at her while Audio cowered and screamed in his corner. Sue could see nothing but thought that underneath the noise she had heard a faint "peep." She closed the lid on the box and pressed her ear to the outside. There it was again, not loud, but unmistakably the sound of a baby bird.

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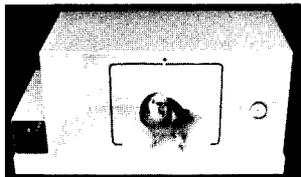


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Sollie tolerated Mark better than Sue, so Mark took on the job of checking the nest box and baby bird. He removed the infertile egg and, a few days later, took out the other egg which had not hatched. Breaking it open, he found an embryo that had died two or three weeks into development—cause unknown. The first few days, he felt the baby's miniscule crop frequently to make sure the parents were feeding it properly. Using a wooden ruler to fend Sollie off, he scooped out the baby in a soup ladle. Bending over the box, ladle and ruler in hand, muttering while a cacophony of growls arose, he looked as if he were stirring a witches' broth full of huge, malevolent beasts. What emerged in the ladle, however, was a fluffy pink-and-white squeaking creature no larger than a chicken egg. Very soon the white changed to grey.

Sue and Mark added trout chow and game bird starter to the greys' diet. An interesting change occurred in Audio's eating habits. Previously, he had not eaten many vegetables and refused to touch cucumbers, which Sollie loved. Now that he was feeding her, he ate everything in sight. Particularly cucumbers!

The baby's eyes opened by December 2, beginning with brief periods of his looking around, then shutting his eyes as if he did not like what he saw. On December 10, Sue and Mark pulled him from the nest. Already he was growling like an adult and had no hesitation in making his displeasure felt. They installed him in an aquarium and made a discovery that defied what vets and breeders had told them.

With the temperature of his new home set in the 80's, the bird panted with discomfort. Gradual lowering of the temperature showed him to be most comfortable when the thermometer measured 74 to 76 degrees.

Whenever his crop emptied, they fed him. His formula consisted of: 1/2 c. Wheat Hearts, 1 egg yolk, pinch of

salt, 1 tsp. powdered oyster shell, 1 tsp. oil, 1/8 tsp. powdered kelp, 2 c. water. After cooking it, they added a baby food jar of green vegetables, 1/2 jar of apple sauce, 1/2 jar of banana, and 1/2 c. ground sunflower seeds.

Two days later Sue was sure the baby had a problem with his right leg. Since first removing him from the nest, she had noticed the leg dragged and the foot kept turning in, instead of facing out straight. At first she thought the bird was merely fat and uncoordinated but after watching closely for two days, she called the vet.

The vet first made a routine examination, finding the soft skull and loose mandibles that indicated a calcium deficiency. He took a blood test and made x-rays which revealed the bird's thin, underdeveloped bones. The dragging leg was either broken or bent; the vet taped it close to the bird's side and said it might heal into anything from a perfectly straight, normal leg to a permanently crippled limb. We would not know for another six to eight weeks—providing that the bird survived.

The vet prescribed 1/2 cc of liquid calcium (Neocalglucon) twice daily. The bird, whom Mark now named Yoda, hated the calcium. Mark and Sue fed it to him separately from his regular formula so that he would not associate the bad taste with his regular feedings. He was already a difficult eater, not eager like most baby birds. Sometimes Yoda would eat only a little and decide he was full, sometimes he would eat a healthy amount only to throw half of it up, and sometimes he kept it all down.

Mark and Sue talked to a number of breeders about the calcium problem. As is usual when the subject is birds, everyone had something different to say. Some breeders remove greys from the nest within the first seven days of hatching and begin right away to feed calcium supplements, with vitamin D and phosphorus added to help the bird assimilate the calcium. Often, but not

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always, this regimen averts the deficiency. One vet's theory is that parent greys, whether Congo or Timneh, seem unable to transmit enough calcium to their young. He says that a hen will rob her system of calcium, if necessary, to form the egg; but even when she is fed extra calcium after the chicks hatch, her body does not transmit it to them.

What is missing from the parents' diet or environment? Is removing the chick before seven days of age the only way to get a healthy bird? Is more known about this problem in other parts of the country or is it everywhere a case of speculation and hit-or-miss

cures? If you have helpful ideas or answers, write to Sherry Rind, 6509 210th Ave. N.E., Redmond, WA 98053.

Will Yoda survive? And in what state of health and agility? Every day he becomes more responsive to human beings. He struggles to free his foot from the bandages, he tries to walk and falls over, he learns to balance with the aid of his wings. And we three human beings grow attached to him, all the more so for the extra care and worry he is given. People who breed birds make mistakes and learn, encounter unexpected problems and learn, make good discoveries and learn. They try to share the knowledge in the hope that it will

Yoda at three and a half weeks showing the right leg splayed out.



Yoda looks quite debonair wearing his new bandage after surgery at eight weeks of age.



Yoda is growing out of his ladle at three and a half weeks.

help someone else. The problem is that whatever precautions we take, whatever we start out knowing, it never seems to be enough.

Because the bandaging did not adequately straighten out Yoda's leg, an operation was necessary to make the leg functional. The vet straightened the leg somewhat and put in a pin; he could not work on the foot where surgery could possibly result in more damage than repair. With the bandage now off, Yoda is learning to perch. The leg and foot will not be beautiful but the bird will be able to get around.

By June, Yoda was weaned and on his own. His leg will always be a little gimpy but he is eating well and his health appears normal. He is, like most hand-fed parrots, very friendly and affectionate. He is trying to form words and we all feel that Yoda will be an excellent pet for many years to come. He is well worth the expense and trouble spent on him. ●

Photo by John Welliver, Redmond, Washington



Yoda with the bandage removed after his operation. A steel pin keeps his leg straight so that a short tendon can grow out.

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MUTATION SPECIALIST — Now breeding - **SCARLET CHESTED PARAKEETS** - blue, cinnamon - **TURQUOSINE PARAKEETS** - yellow, red fronted, pied (Opaline), "red fronted yellow", "red fronted pied" - **BOURKE'S PARAKEETS** - rose, yellow, cinnamon, "yellow rosey". **PEACH FACED LOVEBIRDS** - orange faced, white faced blue, lutino. **COCKATIELS** - white faced, pied white faced, "true albino", fallow, fallow pied, fallow pearl, silver, silver fallow, cinnamon pearl peds - **ALSO** available November or December, imported "SPANGLE MUTATION" English budgies. Arnold Chaney, Escondido, CA. Call (619) 743-5519.

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