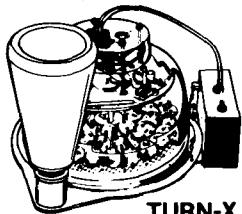
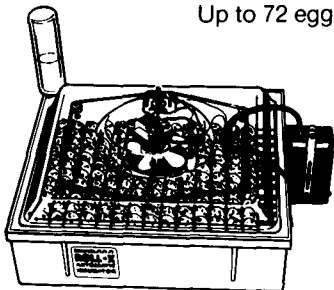


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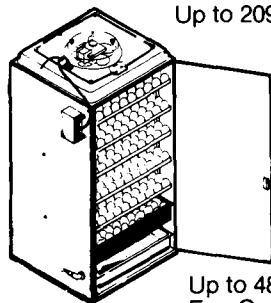
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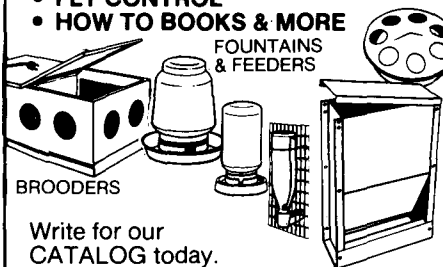
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Avian Summer Safety

by Dorothy Murphy
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Birds love the heat! The luxurious image of the great blue and gold macaw opening its wings in the summer sun may be all the pet bird owner will be left with — an image — without certain summer precautions.

The following tips will protect your pet bird and even help to lengthen its life.

Although birds are not victims of heatstroke as often as cats or dogs, leaving a bird in a parked car (such as after a purchase or grooming) will leave your avian pal seriously overheated. Note: Pet purchases or grooming appointments should be planned as a single stop, returning the bird to its home area as soon as possible.

Symptoms of an over-heated bird may first be noticeable by the bird opening its wings wide in an obvious attempt to cool off, as well as panting, tongue showing.

While tempting to place a caged bird out on a porch or patio during summer months, it is wise to first consider the risks. Stinging insects such as mosquitos, wasps and bees may prove fatal if your bird is allergic or is a small species. The caged bird has no way to escape the flying insect in its cage.

A covering of fine netting, such as used on baby carriages and playpens, may be constructed. Even after a covering is placed over the cage, the bird must be checked every few hours to watch the angle of the sun, so that the bird is never in direct sunlight.

Despite the fact the psittacines (parrots, conures, and other hookbills) in the wild dwell in high temperatures, the forests of their natural habitat provide much coverage in the form of heavy trees and foliage, and daily downpours of warm rain.

Offering the bird bath during warmer months should be done early in the day to allow for ample drying time before nightfall. Supply a large enough container to place on the bottom of the cage, or purchase a ready-made bird bath to connect to the cage opening.

Regular bathing promotes healthier birds and smoother plumage. Don't fill the bath with too much water, half

an inch is fine for parakeets. Tepid water is the safest and most appealing choice. A stubborn bird may be encouraged to bathe by the addition of a small crisp piece of lettuce into the bath water, or a sprig of parsley.

Summer Celebrations

Summer is a fine time for celebration — which often leads to firecrackers! Decrease the amount of stress your bird is exposed to by considering cage placement. In advance of holidays or summer parties, discover a place in your home where the bird will be the least disturbed, such as a back bedroom or well-ventilated bathroom.

Stress is the leading cause of disease among birds. Many diseases birds experience are difficult to treat by the average person, and veterinary care can be costly. Prevention is the best remedy. Stress reduction will help your bird to fight off illness and live a longer life.

Stress leads to intestinal upset, including but not limited to diarrhea. Other symptoms are over-eating of gravel or mineral cubes and flighty, nervous birds that jump or bite when approached.

It is good practice to continue to cover your bird's cage at night, even in warmer months, with a lightweight fabric. A cover is a valuable aid for quieting a noisy bird, but more importantly, promotes a sense of security and a good night's rest for a healthier pet.

If it's practical to take your pet on a summer vacation, try to give your bird enough time to grow accustomed to its new surroundings. Early in the day is the best choice, but not always possible. Simply by placing the caged bird in a quiet place upon arrival with enough light to see its safe surrounding, your bird will come around in no time, and probably enjoy its vacation as much as you. Note: Considering the small amount of water necessary for daily bird consumption, it would be wise to take along a jug of water to slowly accustom a bird to a new water supply, especially across state lines.

Summer poses a special problem for the storage of bird seed. During heated

months, it is beneficial to buy seed in smaller quantities and to store it covered in the refrigerator. This will avoid mildew and insect webbing in seed, which will upset a bird's digestive tract. If you are unsure of the freshness of your bird seed, taste it. Fresh seed smells and tastes sweet.

Your bird will love the taste of freshly rinsed greens to help combat the heat. These are necessary at least three times per week and should include dark, leafy vegetables which provide plenty of plant protein, water and cellulose. Iceberg lettuce is not recommended because of its minute nutritional content.

All vegetables should be rinsed in fresh running water to remove toxic sprays used by growers.

Dorothy Schults, breeder of exotic and domestic birds and co-author of the book, *Breeding Cockatiels* (TFH Pub. 1980) states, "Raw broccoli and spinach are favorites at our bird farm in Lan-horne. For the larger species, we supply the birds with freshly cut chunks of apple and orange."

Hot weather leads to a more rapid multiplication of microbes (germs). Be sure to provide fresh water daily, even if you use a weekend-feeder.

Smaller birds, such as parakeets, enjoy gravel sprinkled on the bottom of their cage. Since birds have no teeth, the gravel grinds the food in the gizzard, aiding digestion.

Says Dr. Marvin Rothman, a veterinarian in Collingwood NJ, "Sickly birds do tend to overeat gravel in their cages, therefore, if you suspect that your bird may be ill, remove the gravel for a few days. Over-indulgence in gravel can lead to an impacted crop in small birds which can cause even further complications."

Fans used in summer pose a special threat to your bird's welfare. Veterinarians report an upswing of avian first aid during warmer months.

Ceiling fans appear harmless, but are especially dangerous to tamed exotics left to sit out on perches. Even birds with clipped wings have been known to fly to new heights in a frightened state. Should a caged bird fly from its cage or a tamed exotic leave its perch, go for the fan switch first!

Like any other living things, birds need respect. Whether a normal green parakeet or a rare hyacinth macaw, all are of the same flesh and feather. Your extra summer attention will bring you the reward of many additional years of love and companionship from your avian pal. ●

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