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**Florida State Fair
Exotic Bird Show
February 10, 1991**

In conjunction with the
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For more information, contact:
Bobby Nipper, Superintendent
(904) 372-0299
or

Agribusiness Department of the
Florida State Fair
1-800-345-3247

**Bird Clubs of Virginia
7th Annual Convention & Bird Mart
April 12 - 14, 1991**

Sheraton Inn on the oceanfront
Virginia Beach, Virginia

For information contact:
Charlie Zoby (804) 480-3039
or

Dick Ivy (804) 898-5090
P.O. Box 2005
Yorktown, VA 23692

**Tennessee Valley Caged Bird Club
Annual Exotic Bird Fair
April 13 & 14, 1991**

Knoxville Convention Center
World's Fair Park
Knoxville, Tennessee

For more information contact:
Gary Reid, Fair Chairman
P.O. Box 51425

Knoxville, TN 37950-1425
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**Middle Tennessee Cage Bird Club
is hosting its annual
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For fair information contact:
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Success with Cage Breeding Cockatiels

by Sunny Clarkson
Phoenix, Arizona

Cage breeding? Why would anyone cage breed cockatiels when they breed so readily in a colony? The reason for cage breeding varies from breeder to breeder but once the decision is made, there are many factors to consider for a successful breeding season, factors such as cage and nest box design, pairing breeders, diet, and chick growth.

When Mark and I started breeding cockatiels in 1980, it quickly became clear that outdoor flight breeding was not going to be successful because of the predators we had in the neighborhood. Breeding pairs would just get settled on a clutch of eggs only to be frightened off at night by a cat. After several unsuccessful nestings, we made the decision to cage breed in a spare bedroom. Having never experienced the pleasure of breeding cockatiels, success became a best guess effort for us. In the next few paragraphs I would like to share with you what did become successful in cage size, pairing, lighting and diet.

Cockatiels are powerful fliers and frequently exercise their 14-inch wing span by hanging onto a perch and beating their wings. Because of this fact, plus the availability of 18 and 24 inch (widths), half-by-one-inch welded wire, we decided to build our breeding cages 24 inches deep, 30 inches across the front and 18 inches high. The sides are constructed from one continuous piece of 18" width welded wire folded to make a 24" by 30" rectangle. Two pieces of 24" wire cut 30 inches long serve as the top and bottom. All three wire pieces are assembled with 'J' clips. An eight inch high, ten inch wide opening is cut four inches from the bottom and four and a half inches

from the side on the front face for a doorway. Two 3/32" diameter slide wires are brazed to each side of the doorway to facilitate an up-and-down sliding door. The wires are brazed at the bottom of the doorway and the top of the cage. Wire tabs are left on the eight inch by ten inch door when it is cut from the welded wire. These tabs are then wrapped around the slide wires. We have found that a sliding door is easier to handle in comparison to a latched door when one's hands are full. Offsetting the door allows for mounting the nest box on the front of the cage next to the door.

Nest boxes are made from 3/8" plywood with inside dimensions of nine inches across the front, ten inches deep and ten and a half inches high. We provide the breeders with a three inch wide entry shelf set three inches up from the floor to keep birds from dropping onto their eggs or young chicks when entering the nest. This shelf also serves as a place for the male to sit but still guard the nest on cold nights. As with most nest boxes, a three inch long wooden dowel is placed just below the 2-1/2" to 3" entrance hole. The nest box is hung on the cage with hooks. Once the nest box is located, a corresponding square hole is cut in the wire cage to facilitate the entrance hole.

To take full advantage of the nine foot by ten foot bedroom, we double stack the wire cages using a 1 x 1 inch angle iron frame. The two cages are bolted to the 60 inch long legs at the top and 34 inches down the leg. Since we prefer a wire bottom cage, a plywood debris catch shelf is placed three inches below each cage. We use a 1 x 1 inch angle iron for the catch shelf frame. The whole cage/frame

assembly is bolted together with 1/4 inch by 1-1/4 inch long bolts. Modified fender washers are needed at the cage attachment points. Once the cages are assembled as a unit and standing, the nest boxes are mounted.

A few details need to be taken care of before the introduction of the breeders to their new cage. First, the catch shelves are piled high with 15 sheets of paper of the "Wall Street Journal" for the purpose of easy cleaning. Individual sheets are removed as they become soiled. This is done once a week before the chicks hatch, and every three or four days thereafter.

Our concerns with bands on the young chicks catching on the wire bottom cages turned out to be unfounded.

Two Eucalyptus perches are secured about half way up the side of each cage. These perches need to be firmly fastened so the male can keep his balance while mounting the female. Since we breed indoors, two full spectrum 40 watt Vita-lite bulbs are set on timers to give the breeders 14 hours of artificial sunlight. Just before adding the breeders, fresh seed and water is placed in each cage.

Selecting breeders starts for us almost as soon as the last breeding season ends. We are always evaluating the offspring of a particular pair to decide whether to place that pair back together, change mates or cull the breeders. The standard we evaluate to is a full bodied, 15 inch long cockatiel with a weight between 110 to 130 grams for males and 130 to 160 grams for females. We generally line breed our birds with an occasional out crossing to enhance our standard. To help in selecting our breeders, a breeding card is kept on each pair. This card contains such information as: date of set-up for breeding, lineage, number of and the date eggs are laid, fertility and the weight at time of set-up and resting.

From our breeding cards, we have noticed two important trends about our breeders. First, a breeder which is not in breeding condition will be ten to 15 percent above or below its average set-up weight. We have found that a breeder which is too light or heavy in weight will not breed. The second important trend is that our females will start laying eggs eight to 12 days after set-up if they are in peak condition. Pairs which do not have eggs by day 12 are usually returned to their

flight cages. If a particular pair is working the nest box heavily, we will allow them to foster eggs and chicks in hopes it will stimulate them toward future breeding. First-time breeders are left together for the entire breeding season whether eggs are laid or not. Knowing when and how to bring our cockatiels into breeding condition has gone a long way toward a successful breeding season.

Two weeks before breeding season starts, usually the first week in February, we start conditioning our breeders by offering them nestling food. The nestling food consists of pressure cooked pigeon feed, canned corn and chopped fruit and vegetables. This nestling food is offered daily along with fresh greens from our garden.

An advantage to living in the Southwest is that our breeders can be housed outdoors during the off-season. Bringing the breeders from outdoors to indoors seems to stimulate them towards breeding. The males are brought in one by one, weighed and placed in a breeding cage. We give the males about two hours to investigate the cage, nest box and establish dominance over their territory before introduction of the hens. Copulation has been observed within five minutes of introducing the hen. Pairs are carefully watched for a few days for compatibility.

Each morning and evening, nest boxes are checked routinely for new eggs and the general health of both chicks and breeders. New eggs are marked with the cage number and the order layed with a permanent color marker. We mark the eggs so we can mix and match eggs according to genetics and hatch dates. Some of our hens will lay up to eight eggs. To improve the last chick's chances of survival, we switch eggs around so a group of five or six will hatch within three or four days of each other. Once a routine is set, our breeders become very trusting toward us and will allow us to do our job without becoming flighty.

The nestling food described earlier, along with fresh greens, is offered twice a day once the chicks have started hatching. A dish of sunflower seed and our seed mix is always available to the breeders. The seed mix consists of 50% Proso millet, 40% canary seed and 10% oat groats. If we need to handfeed a chick or an entire clutch, we prefer to use Roudybush handfeeding formula since it was

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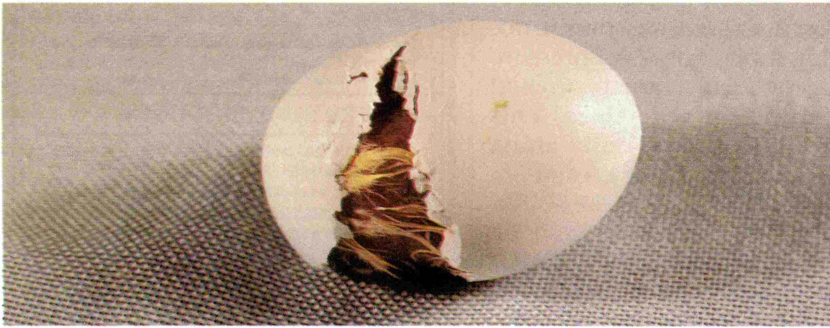
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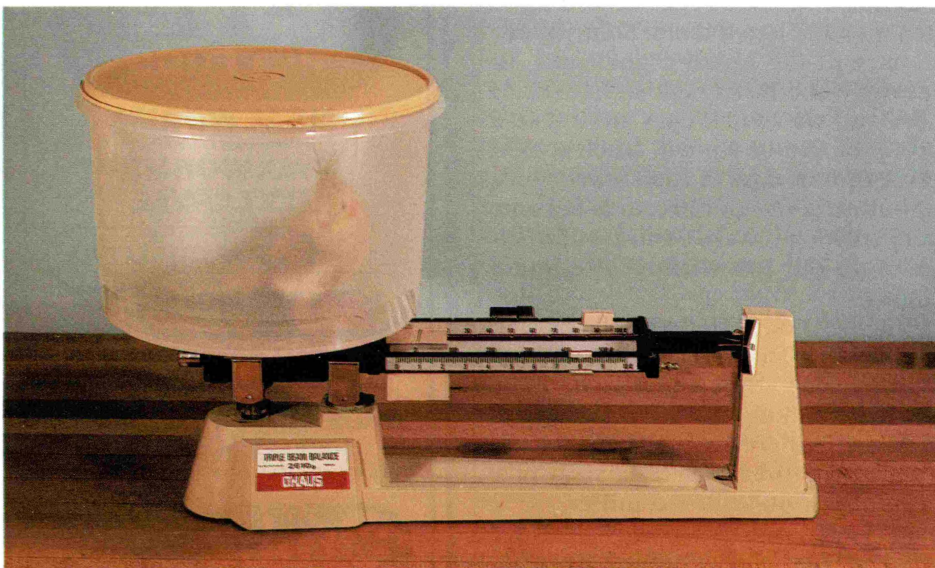
Cockatiel egg showing the rotating pipping circle which enables the young chick to hatch successfully.



After most of the pipping is done, the young cockatiel chick strains to separate the two halves of its shell.



The newly hatched cockatiel chick emerges from its shell. It is still quite wet and distinctly shows its yellow down feathers.



Weighing of birds is an important aspect, whether it is done during hand feeding, for judging weight and size for one's show birds, or as a tool for first observing signs of illness in your pet or breeder bird.



This photo shows a sample of the tiered cockatiel cage breeding set-up successfully done by Mark and Sunny Clarkson of Phoenix, Arizona.

scientifically developed to meet the needs of a growing cockatiel.

In the spring of 1983, Mark and I developed a parent-fed growth curve for cockatiel chicks. Some interesting facts emerged from this study. For example, cockatiel chicks reached their maximum growth at 20 to 23 days of age. After this peak in weight, they begin to lose weight until the time of fledging, which is about five weeks of age. The fledged chick will start gaining weight again once it starts eating on its own. This growth curve is also used when chicks are being handfed. Chicks are weighed before the morning feedings and compared with the curve. As long as the chick's weight falls within the average weight range for its age, things are considered to be good.

We have found weighing our birds to be the most valuable tool in telling us how our birds are doing. Taking the time to get to know our birds by breeding only five or six pairs at a time in our home has added pleasure, not work, to the job of raising cockatiels. It is my hope that the information in this article will help in adding pleasure to your breeding program. ●