

Floor Litter and Bird House Dust

by Cortus T. Koehler, Ph.D.
North Highlands, California

The principle sources of dust in bird houses are birds, poor ventilation, floor litter and nest material. Not only is the evidence of dust in the pigeon loft, poultry house, birdroom, or aviary complex unsightly and unpleasant, there is a great deal of concern regarding the occurrence of respiratory disorders among bird breeders as a result of dust generated from bird keeping activities.

The problem is less severe in open facilities such as flypens, etc., therefore, the focus shall be on the more enclosed facilities with some sort of solid roof and a floor of wood or cement. Some breeders prefer to keep the wood or cement floors bare. The normal practice is to scrape the wood floors and hose down the cement floors on a regular basis. Droppings become lodged in the cracks of wood floors; and, cement floors act as a solar mass and retain the heat or cold depending upon the climate. Furthermore, cement floors tend to stay damp during wet weather.

The usual approach to addressing the above problems has been to use some form of litter over cement and wood floors. Traditionally sawdust, wood-shavings, ground corn cobs, or sand have been used as a litter in bird enclosures. All of these materials easily break down — thus creating dust; and, retain moisture — thus encouraging the occurrence of mold and bacteria. All but the sand tends to move up against the side walls of the enclosure leaving the floor bare when birds fly around or down to the floor.

For the past year I have been using a ground-up walnut shell for litter on top of cement floors in a pigeon loft, poultry house, and cage bird facilities and have reduced the amount of dust by 80% and moisture retention by at least 50%. This ground walnut shell material has the appearance of small granules and comes in three sizes. The largest size is just under 1/8 of an inch in size and

there are medium and fine granular sizes available.

The hardness of the granules and the material's ability to repel moisture encourages evaporation and a dehydrating affect in the sub-strata of the litter thus discouraging bacteria and mold growth. The weight of the granules keep the litter from moving around and collecting against the walls of the bird house leaving bare floors. In addition, the hardness of the walnut shell impedes the deterioration of the granules thus reducing the amount of dust in the bird house. Another aspect of this material which helps to reduce the generation of dust particles in the bird house is the tendency for droppings to hold together and dry up as one piece.

At weekly or bi-weekly intervals, depending on the size and number of birds in a particular pen, the litter is raked to the center of the floor and sifted through an 1/8 inch gauge wire mesh sifter then again spread over the floor to a depth of two inches. For more than a year the material has proven to be reusable, the amount of dust in the facilities has been significantly reduced, and the moisture content of the floor litter is minimal. Because of the above mentioned qualities I have also found these walnut shell granules to be useful as floor litter in nursery pens for young birds, litter in shipping crates, and as replacement for traditional nesting materials in nest boxes. The ground walnut shell granules are being manufactured and distributed by a few mills in California. I have obtained my supply from Avian Pacific Products, 8320 Eschinger Road, Elk Grove, California 95624; and have found the cost of the granules in 50 pound bags to be cheaper than other materials sold for floor litter in this area of Northern California. I understand the product is now available throughout California. Those breeders who have had a continuing struggle with dust in the bird house should look into the possible use of this material. ●

Aluminum Leg Bands

PROMPT SERVICE • HIGH QUALITY

ORDER 1987 BANDS

Coded Parakeet Closed Bands.
Regular Initial Type Bands, not coded,
in choice of colors, open or closed.
Plastic Family Identification Bands
for keets or canary, choice of colors.
Leg Band Cutters. Bird Claw Scissors.

SEND SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED
ENVELOPE FOR COMPLETE PRICE LIST.

RED BIRD PRODUCTS, INC.

2786 Fruitridge Road
P.O. Box 20004 (Dept. A.F.A.)
Sacramento, CA. 95820

Bird Pet and Supplies Retailers —

did you know that one
of the most prestigious
bird publications,
The Watchbird
is available for
resale in your store?

Call or write for information:
American Federation of Aviculture
P.O. Box 1568
Redondo Beach, CA 90278
(213) 372-2988

The Avicultural Society of America, Inc.,

Welcomes new members.



We publish a monthly bulletin on all aspects of aviculture. Anyone interested in becoming a member please contact: Helen Hanson, (213) 542-3633, A.S.A., Inc., P.O. Box 2796, Redondo Beach, CA 90278. Yearly dues \$15.00. Overseas members, please add \$5.00 to cover postage.