

# Canary Pox

By Tony Bucci  
San Pedro, California

A week ago a frantic canary breeder here in California called me and, virtually crying, begged me to tell him what to do about his dying canaries. After he described to me the symptoms it was obvious his canaries were dying from canary pox disease. Unfortunately, not I nor anyone else could give him any advice that would do him much good.



Photos by Tony Bucci

*A European gold finch with pox.*



*A canary with pox.*

*The lesion on the foot of this canary is caused by pox.*

Yesterday I received a phone call from a friend in New Jersey who lost 400 canaries and 50 Venezuelan siskins. All of them died within two months with the dreadful disease called canary pox.

Today another canary breeder here in my own town called me for advice and again the same problem, canary pox.

About three years ago, a large commercial breeding facility here in Cali-

fornia was established to mass produce canaries for the pet industry. A thousand stock canaries were set up in individual breeding cages. They all died within four weeks from pox.

Years ago, I was hit with canary pox and practically lost all of my canaries. I live in fear that this can happen again. All it takes is a mosquito to sneak into my bird room during the time I am entering the room, or a mite that has bit-

ten an outside bird with pox, then crawled into my bird room to feed on one of my canaries, and I would lose my canaries again.

Every canary breeder here in the U.S.A. is sitting on a keg of dynamite. Not all the breeders realize this, especially those who were lucky enough not to experience the ravages of this dreadful disease.

For breeders who have experienced

the agony of seeing their beautiful canaries, often show winners developed over years of hard work, die in two weeks there is no need to explain. But I will explain for those who have had no experience.

The reason why not many people know that the canary pox problem exists is because the breeder whose canaries get pox is protective of what has happened. A natural defense mechanism to avoid criticism is to keep one's mouth shut. Bear the brunt and try again is the thing to do. But, not all breeders try again. Perhaps this is the reason why so many canary breeders give up the hobby.

What is this dreadful disease called canary pox? It is also referred to as Kikuth's disease, or "*diphtheria*". The agent that causes the disease is a filterable virus. There are three clinical forms to be distinguished: acute, subacute or pulmonary, and chronic.

**Acute form:** Acute form is characterized by death without any observable, clinical symptom. The canary stops eating, fluffs up into a ball with its head under its wing and dies.

**Subacute or Pulmonary form:** In this form, respiratory symptoms are evident. We can observe faster rhythm of respiration with the beak open. This will last three to four days. Mortality is very high and very few birds will survive the subacute form of pox.

**The Chronic form:** This form is characterized by irritation of the eyelids, which is evidenced by frequent scratching of the eyes and beaks and rubbing of the head on perches. The lesions may appear within three to four days on the eyelids and around the mouth, on top of the head, and neck. The lesions are inflammatory with tendency to scab formation. The lesions on top of the head and neck develop into large tumor-like bumps. Tumors may also appear on legs and toes which may result in loss of a toe or the whole leg. This chronic form of pox will give a fifty percent chance of recovery.

Other birds in the *fringilidae* family may come down with pox also. When I had the problem, my European gold finch was infected and eventually died. Also, a Venezuelan siskin and a brimstone canary suffered the same fate.

My other finches, Gouldians, shaft tails, parrot finches, and diamond sparrows, all housed in the same bird room, never suffered ill effects from canary pox.

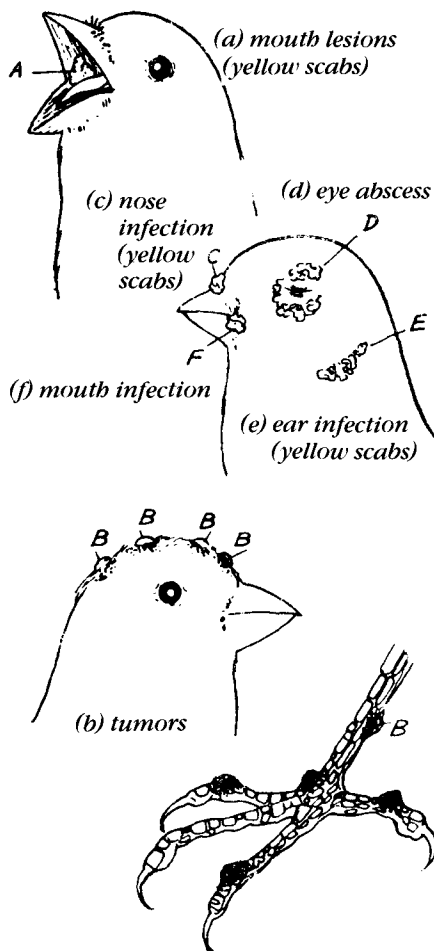
Laboratory diagnosis is lengthy and

expensive. In the state of California the Department of Food and Agriculture's Veterinary Laboratory Services offer their services for a very modest price. I am positive other states offer similar services also.

What to do if mentioned symptoms are evident in your bird room. Immediately remove suspect birds to another room. Apply Mercurochrome on lesions. Wash your hands after handling the sick bird. Wash daily all perches, drinkers and food dishes with soap and hot water. Then rinse them in a solution of 10% Clorox and 90% water. Divide birds in smaller groups in separate cages. If a bird becomes sick, remove the bird immediately to another room, and place the remaining birds from that cage in another clean and disinfected cage. Spray the bird-room daily for mites, preferably using a fogger. Antibiotics may be given to prevent bacterial infection.

If you follow the above regimen, you may save more than half of your birds, providing the birds have the chronic form of pox. The acute, subacute or pulmonary form of pox will kill them all.

Treat infected birds as mentioned above. Do not sell your birds or visit other breeders. Keep other breeders



from visiting your place. Do not exhibit your birds.

### Control

The best control is to *vaccinate* your canaries. Unfortunately, canary pox vaccine is not available in this country. We can go to the moon, we can explore mars, but we don't have canary pox vaccine.

Every country in Europe has it. Most canary breeders in Europe vaccinate their canaries and enjoy the blessing of the results; that is, no dead canaries from pox. Vaccination is done by the breeders themselves. It is as easy as dipping the needle in vaccine and poking the needle through the wing web. Usually this is done right after the molt.

Don't get any ideas; it is illegal to bring vaccines from Europe. The U.S.D.A. dictates that policy. To the contrary, the importers are permitted to bring from Europe and Japan thousands of canaries every year. These canaries are never tested for pox. Obviously, the U.S.D.A. does not care if we bring canary pox into this country. The poultry industry is well protected from pox; they have a vaccine for chickens, and believe me, every chick is vaccinated as soon as it reaches ten days of age.

If quarantine operators are permitted to bring in canaries, possibly infected with pox, why is it that we can't bring in a pox vaccine to protect our canaries?

Why don't our veterinary doctors do something about developing a vaccine for canary pox as others have done in Europe and Japan?

Is there a capable veterinary doctor in this country who is willing to help us enjoy the hobby of breeding healthy canaries? Please, come forward. I will personally see that you get all the canaries necessary to accomplish the task. Also, all of the canary breeders who had the bad experience with pox, please write to me and explain briefly your bad experience. (It will be kept confidential.) Perhaps if we supply enough statistical evidence somebody will listen!

Write to: Tony Bucci, 1605 West 20th Street, San Pedro, CA 90732, (213) 833-7349.

In the meantime keep your canaries indoors. Don't forget to install screened windows to keep mosquitos out, and use pyrethrum base spray (preferably applied with a fogger) to control mites and other insects.

References: *Diseases of Cage and Aviary Birds*, Margaret Petrak; *Bird Diseases*, Arnold Keymer; *Diseases of Birds*, Robert Stroud. ●