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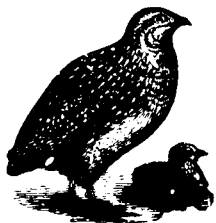
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CONTROL OF IMPORTANT PARASITIC DISEASES OF BIRDS

In six separate cases today, I found air sac mites in some Lady Gouldian Finches, gizzard worms in a Shaftail Finch, gizzard worms again in a Cordon Bleu, and roundworms, coccidiosis, malaria, and trichomoniasis in three separate flocks of pigeons. This may serve to dramatize the fact that parasitic diseases must be controlled in your flock if you wish to have healthy birds and good performance. For the purpose of this discussion, I would like to list some of the more important parasitic diseases according to the following convenient format.

- I. Protozoa, the lowest division of the animal kingdom, consisting of one celled animals.
 - A. Having flagella, by which to move.
 1. Trichomoniasis, seen in many species including pigeons, finches, etc.
 2. Hexamitiasis, seen in some game birds and budgies.
 3. Histomoniasis, seen in turkeys and other game birds.
 4. Giardiasis, rare but seen in budgies and a few other birds.
 - B. Sporozoa, having no locomotor organs in the adult stage and reproducing by sporulation.
 1. Coccidiosis, found in most species.
 2. Malaria.
 - a. True malaria due to *Plasmodium sp.*, in many domestic and wild birds.
 - b. Pigeon malaria, due to *Hemoproteus sp.*, in pigeons, doves, and quail.
- II. Helminths, intestinal worms or other wormlike parasites.
 - A. Flukes, trematodes, usually flat and leaf shaped with suckers.
 - B. Tapeworms, cestodes, flattened, tapelike, and composed of separate segments.
 - C. Roundworms, nematodes, usually relatively long and thin, such as the

ascarid.

III. Arthropods, articulated animals such as ticks and lice.

- A. Ticks and mites, arachnids, flattened bodies with four pairs of legs.
- B. Mosquitoes, flies, and lice, insects, having three pairs of legs.

HOW TO AVOID PROBLEMS

- I. Start with clean, healthy birds.
 - A. Try to buy only from clean flocks.
 - B. Always isolate the new bird for at least one month.
 - C. Have the bird examined for parasites by an experienced veterinarian.
- II. Start with a clean, adequate environment.
 - A. Provide adequate nutrition.
 - B. Minimize stresses.
 - C. Many parasites are transmitted through the droppings. Minimize the opportunity for contamination of feed and water.
 - D. Certain parasites require insects for their spread. Eliminate those insects if at all possible.

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

- I. Identify the cause as soon as possible.
 - A. Find a veterinarian who is willing to help you before trouble strikes.
 - B. A well trained layman can identify certain parasites with confidence.
- II. Treat the disease with the most effective drugs which are available.
- III. Sanitize or modify the environment to minimize the chance of recurrence.
- IV. Certain diseases are best controlled by periodic, preventive treatment.

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE MOST COMMON PARASITIC DISEASES

- I. Protozoa

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A. Trichomoniasis is spread from bird to bird during feeding or through contaminated feed or water. It causes heavy losses among pigeons and finches and less frequently among budgies and other birds. It is most dangerous to the young and may cause gasping or diarrhea before death. Microscopic examination of material from the digestive tract is necessary for diagnosis. It may be controlled by the use of one level teaspoonful of Emtryl per gallon of drinking water for a period of five or six days. Strawberry Finches don't seem to tolerate Emtryl for more than four days in a row. The drug Flagyl may be substituted for Emtryl at a dosage of 250 mg. per gallon for five days. It is said to be only about half as hazardous. Certain treated individuals may remain as carriers. Some flocks may require preventive treatment just before each breeding season.

B. Coccidiosis is found in many species of birds and may cause heavy losses or remain unnoticed according to the species involved. It is spread through the droppings. A microscopic examination of the droppings will usually reveal the presence of the eggs or oocysts of the organism. In some cases of acute losses, the oocysts may not appear in the droppings and examinations of scrapings from the intestine of a dead bird may be needed. Of the readily available drugs, Vetasulid offers some advantages over the other sulfas. It may be given at the rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonful per gallon of water for a period of five days. Other sulfa drugs are usually safe and effective when given according to the directions for chickens.

continued on next page

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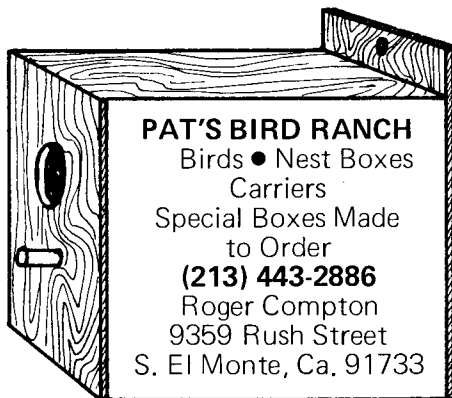
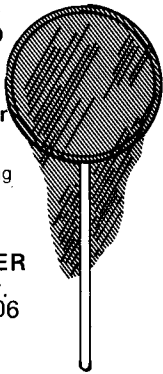
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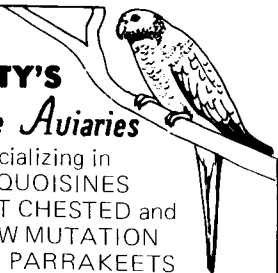
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C. Malarias. True malaria, due to an infection of the red blood cells by *Plasmodium sp.*, seems to be uncommon, but it has caused some losses in canaries. It is spread by mosquitoes and may be treated by the use of Atabrine at the rate of one tablet, 1½ grains, per three quarts of water for a period of seven days. The mosquitoes must be controlled to prevent reinfection. A type of malaria which is common among pigeons and doves is caused by an infection of the red blood cells by a *Hemoproteus* organism. It is spread by the pigeon fly and rarely causes death, only poor performance. It may be treated with Atabrine as described for true malaria. Control of the pigeon fly may be facilitated by the judicious use of Shell Pestrips.

II. Helminths

A. Flukes are tiny, flat, leaf-shaped organisms which are occasionally seen during post mortem examinations. They require a fresh water snail as an intermediate host to perpetuate themselves. They may cause unthriftiness or rarely death. There is no practical treatment available.

B. Tapeworms infect the digestive tract and may vary in their effects from negligible to severe. They all require an intermediate host, such as beetles, snails, or molluscs. There is no practical treatment which is totally effective.

C. Roundworms are among the most common and dangerous of the parasites. There are many different kinds, but several deserve special mention.

1. Capillaria infect the crop or intestine and are especially common among game birds. They are spread through the droppings and may be diagnosed by microscopic examination of the droppings. Tramisol is reported to be effective if given at the rate of 15 mg. per pound body weight either orally or by subcutaneous injection. It may be necessary to raise game birds on wire to avoid the problem.

2. Dyspharynx and Tetrameres, stomach worms, are common parasites of pigeons and rarely of psittacines. They bury themselves in the wall of the proventriculus, or true stomach, and may cause unthriftiness or death.

They spread from bird to bird through the droppings. No proven treatment is known, but Tramisol should be tried.

3. Gizzard worms may cause heavy mortality among finches. They burrow underneath the hard inside lining of the gizzard and cause unthriftiness and death. On post mortem examination, the worms may be seen if the thickened lining of the gizzard is peeled away and examined with the aid of a good magnifying glass or dissecting microscope. Another clue to the presence of this parasite is the detection of whole, undigested seeds in the intestine which resemble beads on a string. They may often be seen through the abdominal wall of the live bird or in the droppings. Little is known of its life cycle, but it probably requires beetles or maybe even ants as an intermediate host to complete its cycle.

4. Roundworms may cause heavy losses among many species of birds. They inhabit the digestive tract and the mature worms lay eggs which may be seen on microscopic examination of the droppings. A young bird may be killed by a heavy infestation of immature worms before the worms are old enough to lay eggs. In this case, a diagnosis may only be made by examination of a dead bird. Piperazine is still an effective treatment in psittacines and is said to be dangerous. Tramisol appears to be much better for controlling roundworms in the other species. It may be used at a dosage of ¼ rounded teaspoonful per gallon of drinking water for a period of five days in many species. A dosage of only ¼ rounded teaspoonful per five gallons of drinking water for a period of two days seems to be effective in pigeons and doves. In the case of birds which consume only a limited amount of water, such as some psittacines, it may be preferable to use ½ rounded teaspoonful per gallon for five days. This dosage has been tried by a number of breeders without any problems to date. The safety, effectiveness, and dosage schedule of Tramisol remains to be

established with certainty. Its use should be approached with caution in new species until it is known to be safe. Tramisol, like so many of the other drugs, has not been approved for use in the exotic species of birds and the risk is entirely on the owner.

III. Arthropods

- A. Ticks and mites may often intrude into a flock and cause serious problems before they are noticed. Most budgie fanciers recognize the presence of the scaly leg mite which causes the scales on the feet and legs to thicken and become rough, as well as causing the bill and cere to become distorted. They are readily controlled by soaking the affected areas with commercially available mixtures of several drugs.
- B. Skin and feather mites may be detected by a very close examination in a strong light, perhaps with the help of a magnifying glass. Some are very harmful and others are not. Some can be controlled with drugs and others cannot. Unless you know which kind of mite is involved, you should seek a positive identification with the help of your veterinarian.
- C. Airsac mites often cause heavy losses among Lady Gouldian finches, canaries, and some other finches. Their presence may be suspected when these species show respiratory distress either after exercise or even at rest. If a bird is caught and held close to the ear, a clicking or gurgling sound may be heard. The mites may be seen at time of post mortem with the help of a good magnifying glass or dissecting microscope. Treatment is difficult to apply properly and is best learned from an experienced veterinarian or breeder. There are several basic approaches to treatment. One of the oldest, which is still quite useful, involves the use of a 4% to 5% Malathion powder which is used to produce a dusty atmosphere which the bird is forced to inhale. It may be administered in a paper bag or in an elaborate chamber. The critical factor is to give the bird just a little less exposure than would kill it. This requires a lot of judgement and experience. The treatment should be repeated at weekly intervals for three to six weeks.
- A relatively newer system involves the use of seed which has been treated with Sevin. When properly

continued on page 38

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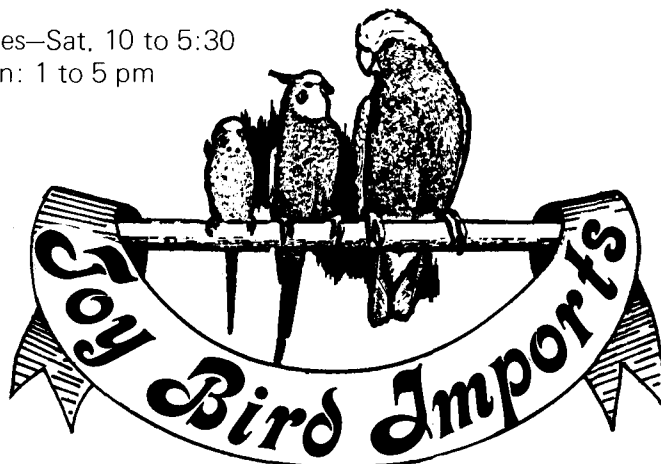
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THE PERILS OF BUYING IMPORTED BIRDS *contd from page 16*

been thoroughly cleaned and properly disinfected. No visitors should be allowed.

(Some clubs may want to consider such a quarantine facility as a club operated project.)

If the above best method is impossible, then quarantining the birds for at least a month on an isolated part of an aviary premise is in order as next best. Here, again, a separate attendant, who has no contact with other birds, separate equipment, and "off-limits" to everyone else are required. This separate attendant can be a member of the family who will take care of the quarantined birds during the isolation period, shower each time after taking care of them, and who will stay completely away from the aviary proper during this time.

If the aviculturist must take care of the quarantined birds himself, either on the separate premises or on an isolated part of his aviary premises, he should do this last after taking care of all of the needs of his aviary. This is much less satisfactory than any of the two previous procedures and he must be meticulous in seeing that no possible contagium is carried from the quarantine facility to the aviary proper.

Nothing must be taken from the quarantine facility. Disposable head wear, coveralls (long sleeves preferred), and rubber boots (high enough to tuck coverall legs in) should be used when servicing the quarantine facility. After service, boots should be cleaned and disinfected, inside and out, with an approved disinfectant on leaving and left there for next day's use. Remove coveralls only in clean plastic bags for laundry before reuse. Wash hands, fingernails and arms in disinfectant, take a shower and wash hair, and dress in clean clothes before returning to the aviary proper.

The least satisfactory form of isolation would be in quarters (a separate room) not apart from the aviary proper. If this is the only way possible, strictly following the instructions in the paragraph above may possibly help to avoid spread of contagious disease if such disease should exist in the newly purchased birds.

To buy new birds from any source and put them directly into the aviary is asking for trouble and sooner or later trouble will occur.

The purchasing of new birds, especially imported birds, will always be accompanied with risk.

THE VET'S CORNER Parasitic Diseases *contd from page 29*

applied, this system may be easier, but it may not be 100% effective. The dosage of the drug is critical and a slight overdose will kill. For this reason, I won't publish the dosage in this sort of general article. If you still want to try it, I will tell you how to proceed personally. It should also be repeated several times.

Some experienced breeders swear by the use of hargate spray. I have only word of mouth confirmation of its effectiveness, but it is worthy of consideration.

IV. Mosquitoes, flies, lice and fleas are insects which may carry several kinds of diseases, including parasitic, bacterial, and viral, in addition to causing damage by themselves. If it is at all possible to exclude these insects from the environment, many problems may be avoided, such as malaria and canary pox.

Unfortunately, there is no single procedure or drug which will solve all of your problems. Each parasite has its own peculiar habits and susceptibilities and must be approached with full knowledge of its weaknesses. Your own veterinarian can often be very helpful to you in achieving and maintaining a parasite free flock. You will also find many fine books and magazine articles on the subject which will help you.

READING LIST

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