

year.

While some pheasants are polygamous, none of the firebacks are and they should be housed in separate pair quarters if you are to avoid the heartbreak of sudden death syndrome. If the aviary is large enough, a pair of firebacks can be used with other compatible birds, such as doves and certain selected non-aggressive species, but I think it is best to keep them separated from other birds. They will reproduce better if there are no other distractions in their pen. And never, never introduce a new bird into any pen of pheasants, no matter what the species, unless you are there to intervene to save the newcomer and, hopefully, you will be wearing your suit of armor before you intercede to correct your lack of caution. Amiable, happy birds, normally as content and laid back as Californians in a hot-tub, can instantly become as aggressive as a school of piranhas coming upon a swimming pig in the Amazon, when a strange bird is introduced into their domicile. Far better to keep them in separate quarters, or to introduce all the prospective tenants to new quarters at one time; otherwise you are just asking for high mortality and personal stress, and the birds are adversely affected as well.

As a general rule, pheasants should be raised in as large a facility as your pocketbook and real estate will allow. Since most of us don't live on a section of land obtained under the Homestead Act, and are not the scions of robber barons, we have to make do with what is available. My pair of Siamese firebacks do very well in a pen that is four feet wide by sixteen feet deep and eight feet high. For years they resided in an adjacent pen that was exactly twice as large, but these

are times that require sacrifices of us all, and the move did not seem to embitter them in any way.

Still, as a general rule, the larger the pen the better the chances for reproduction. And, skittish birds seem to adjust better to heavily planted aviaries where they feel more secure, so there are good arguments that can be made in favor of lots of landscaping and hiding places in an aviary. The counter argument in favor of spartan, bare bones accommodations is that you can see the birds better and observe both their needs and behavior without the distraction of foliage and hiding places. Vigilance is a necessary ingredient of aviculture, whether you choose to maintain your aviaries in the "naturalized," or "clear view" mode, or a combination of both.

Being birds of the tropics, all firebacks will require some modicum of protection from the extremes of weather and climate. Aviculture is an interest that has spread throughout the world and, thus, if you live in the tundra or the taiga you will have to take a few more precautions in housing your firebacks than you would if you lived in a more balmy climate. Firebacks don't like having their toes frozen off, nor do I. A judicious application of forethought, and occasional supplemental shelter and heat will do wonders. All in all, they are birds that can be raised without great difficulty and are adaptable to a wide range of situations. They are remarkably hardy if provided with the basics for living.

In conclusion, I would recommend highly the Siamese fireback as a good starting bird for the aviculturist interested in this most interesting group of pheasants.

Next issue — the Bornean and Malayan crested fireback pheasants. ●

Veterinary Viewpoints

edited by Amy Worell, D.M.V.
Woodland Hills, California

Editor's Note: The AFA is very pleased to present a new series of columns called Veterinary Viewpoints, edited by Amy Worell, D.V.M. Dr. Worell was graduated from Auburn University with a D.V.M. degree, with honors. She has practiced in southern California for the last six years where she sees a large number of avian patients. She has a special interest in pediatrics and nutrition and, as an aviculturist, is currently working with nine species of cockatoos, African gray parrots, scarlet macaws, and pious parrots. Dr. Worell is active in a number of professional associations and is a frequent lecturer on avian medicine.

A unique thing about Veterinary Viewpoints is that a number of veterinarians are consulted and a broad spectrum of viewpoints are presented. You won't get just one veterinarian's opinion. No single vet can know all about everything so Dr. Worell will solicit answers from various vets. This way we hope to get the best answers from the best people on any given subject.

If there is anything you'd like to know about avian medicine, nutrition, even husbandry or anything else, please send your questions to Veterinary Viewpoints, P.O. Box 1568, Redondo Beach, Ca 90278.

Question: I recently purchased a blue fronted Amazon from a pet store. I thought its eyes looked funny so I took it to a veterinarian. He said it had avian pox. We have been treating its eyes for three weeks now and it looks much better. Is this contagious to my other birds and why did the bird look okay when I bought it?

A. Sillman, Florida

Answer: Avian pox, a disease of birds caused by seventeen different pox viruses, is a transmissible disease. The virus can be spread in a variety of ways. Mosquitoes and other biting insects transfer the virus from victim to victim. The virus can be carried on fomites; hands, gloves, feeding and

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food preparation items and the like. Last, it can be transferred by birds fighting and physically transferring the disease.

Insect control, good sanitation, and isolation should be an adequate course of action to prevent the spread of pox. As is the case with many infectious diseases, there is often a period free of symptoms or signs of illness before the condition is evident. This is the *incubation period* and a bird incubating a disease at the time of purchase would not have any obvious signs of that disease. The incubation period for pox is one to two weeks.

*James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, California*

Answer: Psittacine pox is the most common problem we see in blue fronted Amazons. As you mentioned, the course is prolonged and the disease can be very debilitating or fatal. It also has a relatively long incubation period, up to two weeks, which is why the bird could look normal when you purchased it and then developed the eye lesions. Upon recovery, the birds will be immune to pox and blue fronts don't appear to become carriers after recovery. When the lesions have healed and all scabs are gone, he will not be contagious to your other birds.

Please be sure the cage is cleaned well and any wooden perches, toys, or other porous materials are destroyed as they cannot be adequately disinfected and present a hazard to other birds. Soak the cage in a good virucidal disinfectant or diluted Clorox for at least ten minutes to kill the virus on hard surfaces.

Amazons, lovebirds, Australian parakeets, South American parakeets, miniature macaws, pionus, lorries, caiques and a few others are susceptible to infection. Cockatiels, cockatoos and African parrots are resistant.

*Susan Clubb, DVM
Miami, Florida*

Question: My pet cockatiel, Jimmie Dean, has been drinking a lot of water and consequently urinating more than usual. I was shocked to learn that my young bird has sugar diabetes! What is the cause of this and what can be done to help my bird? Also, is the outcome always fatal?

A. Green, California

Answer: Diabetes in birds was first described by Altman and Kirmeyer. The two species most commonly affected with this disease are budgies

and cockatiels.

Birds have high blood glucose levels with normal ranges between 200 and 550 mg/100 ml. Signs of diabetes include excessive drinking, frequent watery droppings, increased eating often associated with weight loss and lethargy. The exact cause of diabetes in birds has not yet been documented but results from a decreased secretion of insulin and/or glucagon.

Some birds showing a transient rise in blood glucose levels should not be treated since these birds are not diabetic. True diabetics, however, can be treated effectively with daily injections of insulin. These injections are not difficult to administer and, in most cases, must be administered throughout the bird's life.

It is necessary to test the urine and blood glucose levels from time to time to be sure the insulin levels are within the normal range. If properly maintained, many of these birds can live a normal, functional life span.

*Robert B. Altman, DVM
Franklin Square, New York*

Answer: Sugar diabetes (diabetes mellitus) is an endocrine (hormone) deficiency condition. The hormone involved is insulin which is produced by special cells in the pancreas. This hormone is necessary for the utilization of sugar (glucose) by the body. When there is a lack of insulin, the level of glucose in the blood is elevated and glucose spills out through the urinary tract. Congenital lack of development of these special cells in the pancreas or any change to the pancreas can result in low levels of insulin and diabetes mellitus. As in the case with mammals, injection of insulin is the treatment of choice. Birds are generally injected twice a day. Occasionally, there is spontaneous recovery from this disease. Birds often die, though, from secondary liver involvement. Consult with your veterinarian for further information and help.

*James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, California*

Answer: Diabetes can also affect other species of birds, including one species of toucan, the toco. The incidence amongst these birds, as with the commonly kept cockatiel and budgerigar, appears to be quite low.

Treatment of affected individuals can be attempted with twice daily injections of insulin, even though the insulin levels in the bird may be normal. Potentially, the cause of the

elevated blood glucose may be due to a deficiency of another hormone which is also produced by the pancreas, glucagon.

The levels of either hormone in the body may be abnormally low due to changes in the pancreas, such as the presence of tumors or abnormal changes (hyperplasia) in the cells. These changes lead to the lack of necessary hormonal production with the result being an elevated blood glucose and a diabetic bird.

In this author's experience, affected tocos eventually succumb to the disease, many times within six months after recognition of the condition.

Some research is being done regarding diabetes in birds, and individuals with affected birds may choose to explore the possibility of additional diagnostic tests for their birds.

Amy Worell, DVM

Woodland Hills, California ●

If there is anything you'd like to know about avian medicine, nutrition, even husbandry or anything else, please send your questions to:

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