

Mice in the Aviary

by Joanne Abramson
Raintree Macaws
Fort Bragg, California



Pests such as mice and rats can present significant problems for the aviculturist. Not only do they consume considerable quantities of food, but their habit of urinating and defecating in the aviary has contributed to the spread of disease organisms such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and other bacteria. Controlling mice in your aviary should be part of your regular maintenance routine. Mice eat almost anything. Seed, pellets and fruit and vegetable mixes fed to birds are a natural magnet to attract all kinds of rodents. Cement floors and small wire is helpful, but not always practical or effective in controlling mice.

For those of you who have problems with killing any animal, let me share a few facts. The two most common rodents are house mice and brown rats. There are about 300 species of mice worldwide. The word *mouse* comes from a Sanskrit word meaning *thief*. The common house mouse that we know today came to America in ships from Europe as early as the 1500s. At maturity, it weighs 1/2 to 1 ounce (14 to 28 grams), about the weight of a Greenwing Macaw at hatching. They have good hearing but poor eye sight. Like all rodents, they have strong, sharp, front chisel-like teeth which they use to tear open seed bags, gnaw holes in wood and collect far more food than they will ever eat. Mice are constantly harvesting and storing food. They live anywhere they can find food and shelter. They prefer dark, warm and quiet homes; unused nest boxes are just perfect. They build their nests out of a variety of materials including grass,

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leaves and feathers.

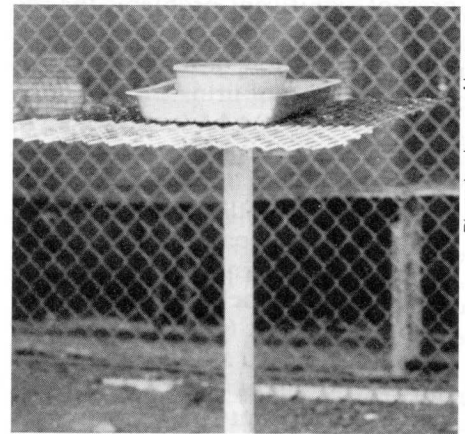
The average female house mouse mates for the first time when she is 40 to 45 days old. Their gestation period is 18 to 21 days. They have four to seven young in a litter. Initially, the young are fur-less and completely helpless. At fourteen days, their eyes open and by three weeks old they leave their parents' nest to start their own families. Once they establish their own nest they spend most of their time in an area 200 feet in diameter. They do not like water, but can swim if they have to. (I question their ability since I frequently find them floating in water basins.) Wild mice can live as long as a year if they find a safe nesting spot, but more commonly die in two to three months. In that time 14 babies can be produced. Sheltered from the cold winter weather, they will breed all year around. Most mice are nocturnal, though if disturbed they will come out during the day.

Natural predators of mice include coyote, fox, snakes, birds of prey including owls and hawks, cats, dogs, even rats and other mice. People are their number one enemy. The most common way to determine if mice are present is by seeing their droppings. Footprints, spilled seed and physically seeing them are other ways. If you see one, you can bet there are many times that amount.

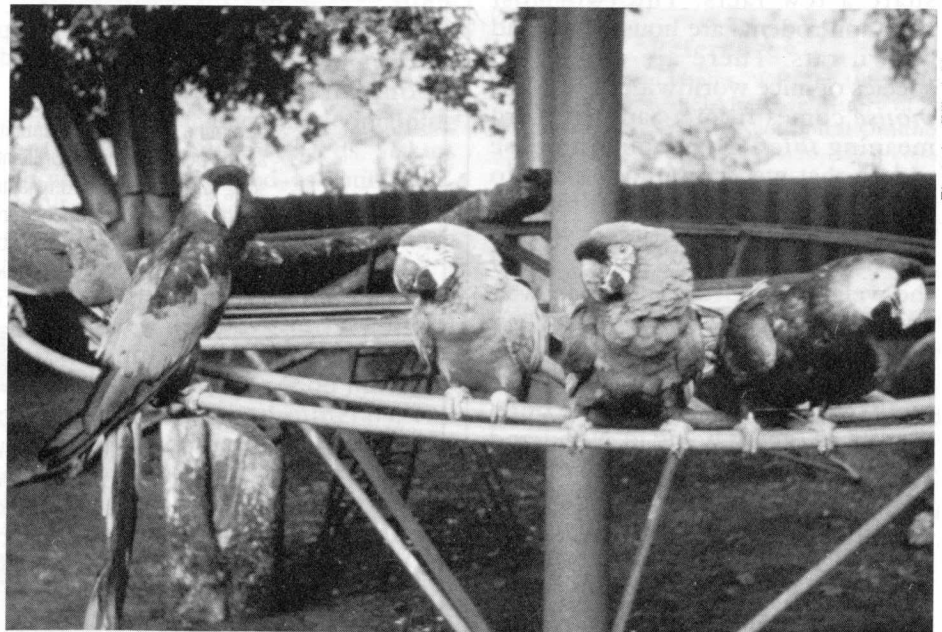
Reducing access to food is helpful in controlling the population. Pam and Larry Hanson have devised a feeding tray for their macaws by using an upright metal pipe on which an

expandable metal platform is attached to allow spilled seed to fall through. A metal feeding tray holds the food three feet off the ground. This limits the access of food to rodents. Parrots are not the cleanest of eaters. They tend to fly back to their perch and frequently drop bits of food about the aviary. Raised aviaries with metal post framework are also helpful.

There are two ways to deal with your mouse problem. The first is poison. Most available poisons contain arsenic and other chemicals that are too dangerous to use around your birds. In the last few years, anti-coagulants have been popular for use around livestock. Anticoagulants work by interfering with vitamin K utilization. They are known as chronic poisons. They must be eaten several times before causing death. If birds are accidentally poisoned, the



The Hansons' expandable metal platform holds feeding tray three feet off the ground and keeps mice out of food.



Another style of suspended feeder tray and perching ring keeps food free from rodent contamination for these young macaws.

Photo by Joanne Abramson

Photo by Gill duVenage

toxic effects can be reversed with multiple doses of vitamin K (Harrison and Harrison). I am not fond of the poison method. I worry about what else will eat the poisoned mice. At our own breeding site, a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks and ravens hunt the mice and gophers. I am not trying to kill the before-mentioned natural predators, nor my own birds. Ultra-sonic pest control devices which emit a high pitched sound not audible to human ears have had mixed reviews for effectiveness. Some breeders have reported breeding interruptions presumably from the devices. And sometimes they are simply ineffective.

So far the only way I have found to successfully control mice is with mechanical catching devices. After years of trial and error, the best I've found is the Ketch-All mouse trap. We place one in the shelter of each aviary as well as the feed room. They can catch up to 15 mice at one setting and, I must admit, I have caught that many when we initially set them up. These traps are about 10" long by 8" wide by 6" high. The optional drowning attachment helps by drowning the mice after they are caught, which makes your life much simpler. The drowning device is a slinky-like tube attached to a jar. The mice get into the trap, their curiosity makes them investigate the tube and as they reach the end they fall into the water. To minimize bacteria, we put a small amount of Novasan in the water jars. Like all mechanical traps, they require regular cleaning and occasional servicing. We disinfect the traps and jars in a bleach solution to reduce bacterial build up. Having double jars helps cleaning. Macaws, who are also extremely curious, seem uninterested in these traps. Only a bird the size of a cockatiel could even attempt to get into these traps and that problem could be solved by putting a wire cage over the trap so that the mice could get in, but the bird could not. Because of their nocturnal habits, you will be amazed at how many mice exist around your aviaries. Fall is an excellent time to get on top of the mouse problem so next spring the population will be at controllable levels. Mice will frequently commandeer a nest box. They also may be so disruptive during their night time foraging that a lack of breeding occurs. Once you see how much your seed or pellet costs decrease, you will be happy you took measures to eradicate the mice. ●

Photo by Pam and Larry Hanson



Macaw cage is 14' long, 5' high, 5' long and raised 2-1/2 feet off the ground by its metal post framework. Roof covers back half of cage. 30 gallon plastic drum nestbox has a rear inspection door.

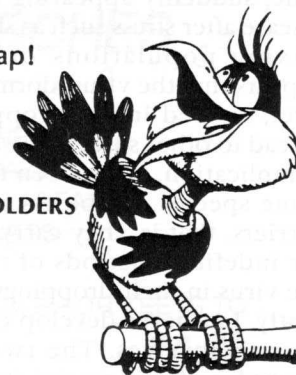
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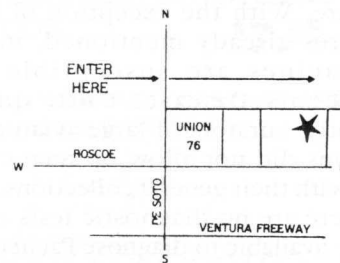


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