

Those Loveable Lovebirds...

Problems in the Nest Box

by Judie Casey
Visalia, California

When you have obtained a pair of lovebirds and want to set them up to breed, there are a few things that can happen in the nest to be aware of.

Lovebirds build their own nest from materials you supply. Their favorite is palm leaves. The birds will shred the

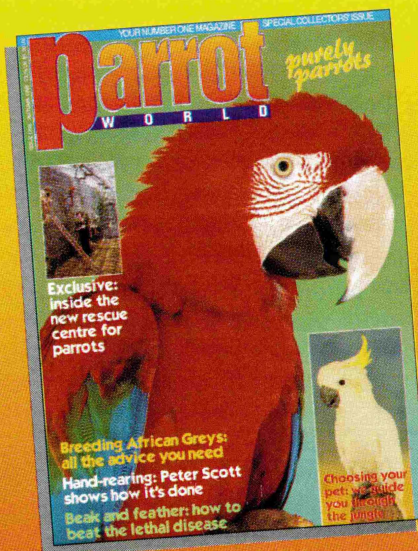


Lovebirds build their own nests from materials you supply. Their favorite is stripped palm leaves. Peachfaced lovebirds have many color mutations and it is a wonderful surprise to see several colors within one clutch.



Photo by George D. Dodge / Dale R. Thompson

leaves into thin pieces. Females tuck the pieces into their rump feathers and under their wings. This is carried to the nest box where she will build her nest. Some nests are quite elaborate



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with a deep tunnel and an entrance that is covered on top. They will continue to build the nest as long as the material is available, sometimes even if eggs have been laid or babies hatched.

If palm leaves are not available, there are some other things you can try. Some birds will use fresh corn husks, Bird of Paradise leaves or some types of bamboo. Make sure anything you give your birds is free of insecticides and is not poisonous.

When the female starts to lay her eggs, it is helpful to keep track of dates the eggs are laid to estimate dates of hatch. I use index cards stapled to the nest box, but a calendar is easy when you don't have a large number of birds.

The hen will lay an egg every other day. Eggs will hatch 19 to 21 days from the date of incubation. Sometimes the hen doesn't start incubating until two or three eggs have been laid. Make a note of the date she starts sitting all the time.

Babies will hatch one every other day if the hen started sitting with the first egg. If she didn't, two or three babies can hatch at the same time. If the hen has laid five or six eggs and they all hatch, the last may be very small compared to the first hatched. Check them from time to time to see if they are being fed and don't wind up on the bottom of the pile of babies.

If you have other lovebirds with babies, you can switch them so sizes are more even. Try not to overburden any pair with too many babies. Most of the stress in breeding is in raising the babies. If you don't have other babies to switch with, when you check the babies put the smallest ones on top of the larger ones. If they still don't get fed, wait for the parents to feed, then remove the larger ones. When the parents feed again, they will only have the smaller ones to feed. After they have been fed, the larger babies can be put back. Always keep babies removed from the nest nice and warm.

Keep your nest boxes as clean and dry as you can without disturbing the parents too much. It is helpful to keep some of the nesting material that falls

to the bottom of the cage. This can be laid under the babies for fresh bedding without disturbing the nest itself.

Lice and mites can be another problem in the nest. To discourage them, we put Sevin powder in our boxes before the birds start building their nests. We also use Eucalyptus leaves in the boxes. Boxes should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each clutch, then fresh powder and/or leaves put in them. If you find babies or parents with lice or mites, there are sprays that can help. Spray babies and parents, keeping spray away from eyes and mouth. Spray can be used in the nest but don't get the bedding wet. Powder is better as long as babies are in the nest.

Some birds will nest in warmer weather. When babies start to get pin feathers, sometimes parents will pick them. This only seems to happen in the heat, but there is a chance that parents could do this anytime. Not all parents do this, and sometimes parents who have never picked babies will do so in extreme heat. It seems there is no definite reason why. There are, however, many opinions. If this happens, we use a bitter spray on the babies. Most times parents don't like the bitter taste and will stop. You may need to apply the spray several times. Normally, the babies' feathers will grow back with no permanent damage.

When babies leave the nest, parents will continue to feed them for about two weeks until they are eating on their own. I don't remove babies until they have been out three weeks. By this time they are sure to be eating on their own. If you have more than one nest of babies ready to leave their parents, most times they can be housed in a cage together. Young birds will normally get along together.

No matter what we do or try, there is always a chance of losing babies in the nest, and most often if has nothing to do with anything we have done. Don't let any of these things discourage you. Some things must be left to nature, especially when we have done all we can. We are rewarded when we have a cage of fat, healthy babies. It's a wonderful sight. ●