

"Basic Cockatiel Handfeeding"

by Lori Dahlstedt
Naalehu, Hawaii

Cockatiels seem to be one of the easiest of pet birds to breed. If you have a true pair, and have supplied them with a box and some privacy, then you know how wonderful it can be. Handfeeding the babies is a very rewarding experience.

Start out with a pair of Cockatiels, a nest box and some eggs. If all goes well, 18 to 21 days from the first egg laid you should find a little yellow fuzzy "alien" in your box. At this point the fun is just about to begin! Here is a list of things you should have:

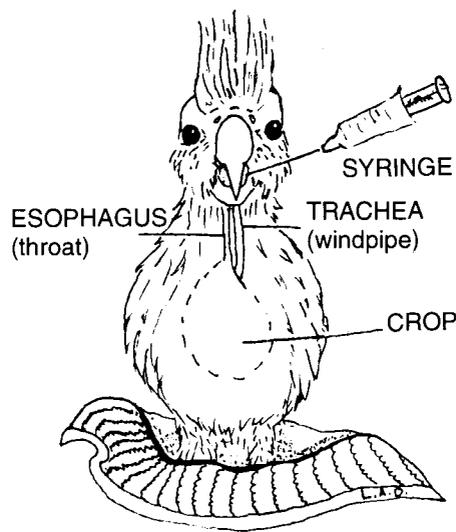
1. A good quality commercial baby bird formula (usually available at your local pet shop).
2. Syringes 3cc. and 10cc. (I find these easiest to use).
3. Box, basket, or a clear plastic tub (you will use this for the babies' new home).
4. Some soft small towels (with no loose threads that the babies will get tangled up in).
5. Paper towels.
6. Bleach or Nolvasan (used to sterilize the syringes).

You are now ready to handfeed babies.

Reliable parents should feed the babies with no problems for the first two to three weeks. I recommend this as the parents can give the babies a much better start in life than we can. Unless an emergency arises, I don't pull my babies until they are three weeks old. At this age they take to the syringe well.

The big day has finally arrived and your babies are now three weeks old. It doesn't matter how many times I pull babies, I still get excited. The first thing you do is get babies' bed all made up. Take the container you have chosen, line it with your soft towel, then a layer of paper towels. You should change the paper towel at every feeding (you must keep your babies clean). I think the best time of day to pull babies is after the morning feeding. All my birds get a

bean, fruit and veggie breakfast, so when I pull the babies they are full of all the good stuff that I fed the parents for breakfast. Now you're ready to GO GET THEM! As soon as you have them all settled in their new little nest, cover them with a towel. I use dish towels. This will



help them stay warm and snug if there are two or more chicks. If raising a single chick, an outside heat source such as brooder or hot water bottle may be helpful.

One thing that I do seems to really help. After I have the babies all snuggled in their new nest, I mix up a little formula. The consistency should be a little thinner than what you will be feeding later. This should be like watery apple sauce. For the proper temperature of the formula I rely on the wrist method, a little warm to me should not burn the baby. If it burns me, it will burn the baby, if it's cool to my wrist it will be too cold. Cold food does not digest well. The proper temperature is 100°F to 105°F. You want to give the babies a taste of the thinned formula. Sometimes this isn't easy, because the babies might be afraid of you. Just be patient and open their mouth and give a little squirt. The next

time you feed, the formula will taste familiar. Now cover them back up and place them in a safe draft free spot. Next, wash the syringe with soap and water, and rinse thoroughly. Mix your bleach, or nolvasan following the strength instructions on the bottle for sterilizing. I soak my syringes in between feedings. This helps keep bacteria/fungus in check. Make sure you rinse the syringe thoroughly before feeding. You're now on your way. You and the babies are off to a wonderful start.

Four hours have now past and if you're like me you have already peeked in on the babies several times. By now the little ones should be getting hungry. It's now time to give them their first real feeding. Mix up some formula a little thicker than you did the first time (more like stirred yogurt). First, place a clean towel on the table and make sure your formula is the right temperature. Next, place a baby on the towel in front of you and draw some formula into a clean syringe (keep an eye on the baby. They can move quite fast, usually backwards right off your table). Now place your left hand behind the baby's head, placing your thumb on the right side of the head and your forefinger on the left side holding him gently by the beak. Holding the syringe in your right hand, put the syringe in the baby's beak angling it from your right to left, the baby's left to right (see diagram). Give a little squirt of formula, the baby should chirp and bob his head up and down. Repeat this until you feel the baby has had enough. You do this by feeling the crop. It should look and feel full, but not tight. Now, if you're left handed (like one of my feeders), you do everything the same, but place the baby facing away from you, holding the syringe in your left hand. You want to make sure the formula goes down the right side of the throat (not the wind pipe). Once you have fed a few times you should get the hang of it, and it will become easier.

At three weeks of age, you should be feeding four times a day. Most people let their babies empty between feedings. I don't, because I don't feed at night. This way, the babies start the day with an empty crop. It is very important that you allow the crop to empty, at the very least, once a day. If you don't, you could run into sour crop problems. This is where the formula in the crop goes bad. Continually putting fresh food in on old food is only one of the many things that can cause this problem. If you find that a baby's crop has not emptied for two

feedings, GET IT TO A VET as soon as you can. Dirt, bacteria or feeding the babies food too cold or thin can also cause this problem. You should never feed left over formula. You may have to waste some until you figure out how much your babies need at each feeding. (Wasting a little formula is nothing compared to keeping babies healthy.)

Now, as the little ones grow, your feedings will decrease to three times a day at around five to six weeks old. At this time, you can start keeping them in a daytime playpen of plastic, glass or wire cage. Place them in a busy place in your house so they can watch you. Sometimes I place a towel over half of their playpen, this way they have a dark, private corner to sleep in. At first they may be a little frightened, but usually by the third day they will enjoy their playtime. This time is also a good time to start offering millet and some soft foods, such as diced apples, grated carrots, good quality wheat bread, cooked brown rice, cooked pasta, thawed out frozen peas, corn, broccoli, and whatever else you think would be good. I haven't ever had a baby Cockatiel that didn't like cheerios. (The fresh fruits and veggies should be removed after a few hours as they tend to sour and this can make the babies sick.)

At five weeks, I start adding to my for-

mula a dab of peanut butter, apple sauce, papaya, banana, various Gerber strained baby fruit and vegetables. Just small amounts of these are necessary.

At six weeks, it's time to clip the young ones' wings if you don't wish them to fly. The oldest might have already taken off the feeding table and flown across the room. Clipping is a way to avoid such accidents as flying out of an open door or into a closed window.

As the babies get close to seven weeks old, you can drop the morning feeding. This is the start of THE WEANING PROCESS! Every time they see you they'll probably start screaming for food. This for me is the hardest stage in raising Cockatiels. Instead of feeding formula first thing in the morning, I offer millet spray, diced fruit and veggies, Cockatiel seed and a bowl of water. Believe me, they'll think they are starving and do their best to convince you they are! Give them a little time, and they will start nibbling on the food. At this time you should pay close attention to the youngest ones, because they can be up to five days younger than the oldest. You don't want to push the youngest to wean too soon. If everything goes smoothly, by the time your youngest is seven weeks old all the babies should be eating on their own. You can tell this by feeling the crop for seed, it should

feel grainy.

If all your babies are over seven weeks old, and you're still feeding formula and thinking they will never wean, here is what you can try. First, make sure the babies in question are healthy, not too thin, do not sit fluffed up on the bottom of the cage, and have no messy vent feathers. If any of these signs are present you should have them vet checked. On the other hand, we often run into some "I don't want to let go of the syringe" babies. I feed these babies formula only once a day, this is right before I go to bed. This way I know they aren't going to sleep on an empty stomach. You can also place their cage in a room of your house where you will not be during the day. You might have noted that when you are in the same room with them, all they do is cry, and beg for you to feed them. If you are not around, they seem to go about their business and explore the food dish. It also helps to have an older, weaned Cockatiel in the same cage, because the younger birds will "copy-cat" the older bird.

Using patience, love and understanding, have faith that you won't go wrong in bringing up a baby. It's one of the most rewarding experience you can enjoy! Before you know it, you will have a house full of baby Cockatiels fighting for your attention. GOOD LUCK! ➤

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& Rick Jordan**

