

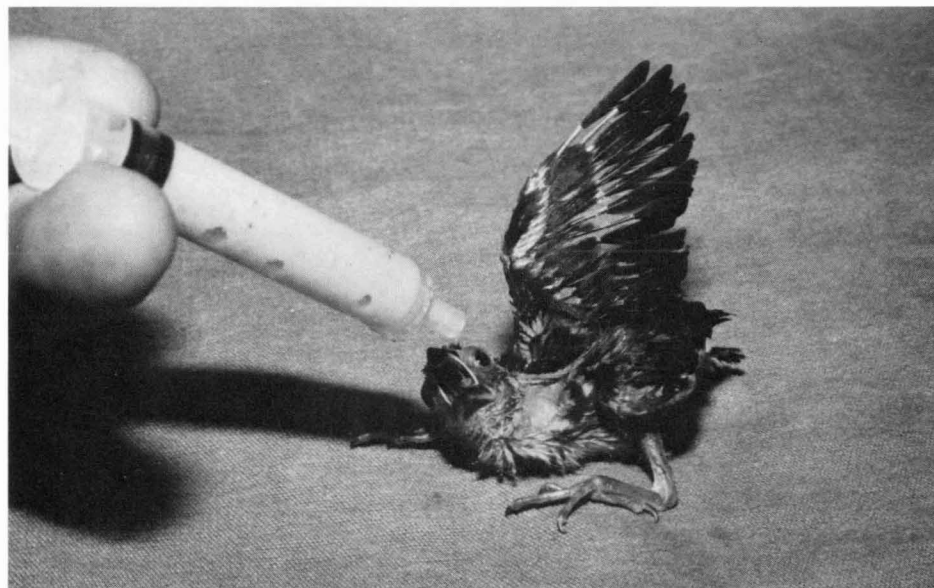
# Hand Rearing Mannikins

by Glenn Holland, South Africa

At the end of each year it is time to prepare the aviaries for the new season ahead. In August (the end of winter in South Africa) each year I catch up all the birds and put them in temporary holding facilities. All the plants are cut back, old nesting bushes are replaced with new dry thickets and nesting receptacles are thoroughly cleaned. All necessary repairs and painting are also done.

Once the birds have been removed, all nesting areas are thoroughly checked. Some eggs usually have to be sacrificed and newly hatched chicks are difficult to raise despite our valiant attempts at it. Chicks of a few days and older are removed for hand raising. This season I removed two Silverbills, seven Pied and two Black and White Mannikins. The Black and White Mannikin chicks were estimated at five days old and the others a little older, already showing quills on their wings. The chicks were separated into groups of two to three birds of similar size and each group placed in a tef grass lined container. The containers were then placed in a brooder with a temperature of 30-34° C. (86-93° F.). The smaller chicks were placed closer to the source of warmth (a 60 watt light bulb below the brooder floor) than the older chicks and, as they developed, I progressively moved them further away from the warmth. At this young stage they were fed every two hours between 6:00 A.M. and 8:00 P.M.

Feeding was done with a 2.5 ml syringe. The food consisted of a heaped tablespoon of finely ground commercial Canary food which was moistened with warm water until a runny consistency was achieved. A teaspoon tip of peanut butter and a few drops of sunflower oil were then mixed into the warm food. Twice a week a little boiled egg yolk and a multi vitamin were added as well. Canary food was used as the base of the formula. It is an almost complete diet with sufficient protein for the chicks as well. The oils were added to



*Black and White Mannikin—note the one wing lifted to ward off possible competitors.*



*Pied Mannikin being fed.*

provide extra fat which is lacking in such a dry formula. A further advantage of a little oil was found in that it lubricates the syringe alleviating the problem of a blocked stopper. The food was fed warm and a new batch mixed twice per day. Each bird was given one short gentle squirt into the back of the gape and feeding rotated amongst the group, thus giving each

bird a chance to swallow the food properly.

Chicks begin to beg for food soon after they are removed from the nest and the cries from the first bird soon stimulate all the others to begin soliciting for food. Small chicks beg with the head pointing upward but once well feathered, their posture changes to a head down position with the neck

Photos by Glenn Holland

twisted so that the beak faces upward. All the African mannikins make a similar "chit, chit, chit" call when soliciting for food. Once this head down posture is adopted, another habit of lifting one wing vertically into the air also begins. The wing lifted is usually the one on the opposite side from which the food is being offered. This is done to exclude siblings and ensures that the individual covering the others is fed first. This habit makes it essential to separate the chicks. Feeding a group larger than four birds is made difficult as they all lift one wing and clamber over one another.

Once the chicks are ready to fledge, they begin to jump out of the containers. They can now be placed together and after about five days they begin to peck at the food. At this stage they can be offered dry and sprouted seed with a little moistened soft food and a bowl of water. By 12 days they are eating well enough to slowly reduce feeds to three per day then to two. They are then placed in a cage that has a source of warmth, and a nest receptacle is also made available with all the birds usually sleeping on this at night. Often one or two birds will sleep on top of the rest of the group. Green grass seed heads are scattered on the floor and the birds enjoy not only the seeds but, in typically mannikin fashion, they "chew" on the stalks and feed on the sap as well. The floor of the cage is covered with tef grass the seeds of which they also feed on.

Once the chicks are feeding well, they lose interest in the syringe and can then be weaned over a period of a few days. As a word of warning, it takes longer than the two weeks many books will tell you it takes to wean mannikins. It is also advisable not to be in too much of a hurry to remove the extra warmth and don't keep them too warm, both of which will result in soft chicks which will never adapt successfully to aviary life.

Once the chicks have fledged and are placed in a cage, they are placed outdoors in dappled sunlight for most of the day. They spend much of their time feeding on the green grass under the cage floor. Three weeks after fledging they are placed, together with their nest, in an outdoor aviary. Seed is initially scattered on the aviary floor to ensure the birds do not struggle to find food. Soft food is supplied in the bowl with which they are familiar. ➔

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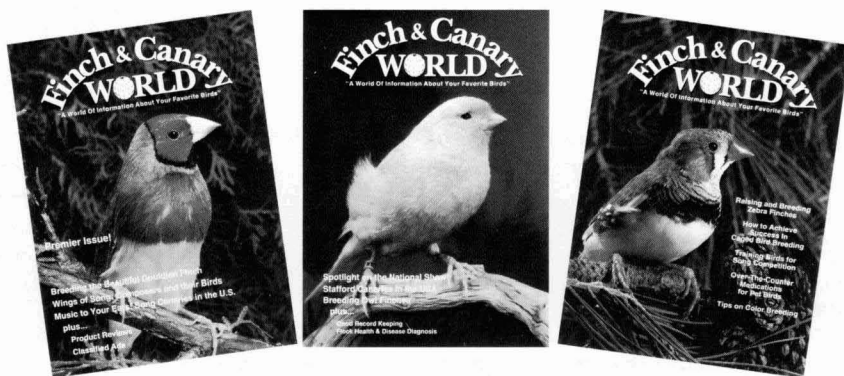
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