Home Care for Sick and Injured Birds

By Dr Pat Macwhirter

If you are looking after a sick or a convalesent budgie it is important to recognize that there are marked differences between body temperature and metabolism of birds compared with ourselves, cats or dogs. Budgies have a normal body temperature above 41deg.C, normal heart rates of more than 300 beats/minute and they breathe 80-100 times/minute. For most mammals these values would be much lower. Sick birds are also more inclined to be adversely affected by stress.

These factors should be considered when trying to provide optimal conditions to help a sick bird recover.

**Provide warmth**

To prevent the bird from using up vital energy to keep warm a cage temperature of around 28-30'C is required. Still air heat is best, a hot air blower/ fan is not very satisfactory due to air movement. These temperature can be obtained by using:

(i) a cardboard box and a covered light globe (100w)

(ii) a covered cage on a heating pad.

(iii) an infrared heat lamp.

A thermometer should be used to ensure the correct temperature. After the bird improves, the temperature may be reduced gradually over 6-7 days to allow the bird to adjust.There should be no draught.

**Avoid stress**

Keep the dog, cat and young children away. Subdued light will induce the bird to rest and remain quiet, therefore cover the cage and disturb as little as possible. Noise should be kept to a mininium. A dimly lit quiet cage is recommended.

**Food and Grit**

A wide variety of top quality food should be available at all times. Include seed, greens, cuttlefish and treats such as thistle and seeding grasses.

*Grit should be removed from the bird's cage*as sick birds sometimes develop a depraved appetite and engorge themselves on grit, resulting in impaction of the gizzard and proventriculus. Grit, unlike minerals, does not dissolve in the intestinal tract. Birds have been known to over eat grit in the excitement of returning home from the veterinary clinic. Wait at least a week after picking a bird up from a veterinary clinic before offering grit and then offer it in a separate dish. Remove the grit if the bird is observed to be eating excessive amounts.

**Avoid exercise**

Playing and free flying should be avoided until the bird has fully recovered. Bathing should also be avoided. Keep the bird isolated. Keep the sick bird separated from any other birds. Use separate feeding and watering containers.

**Monitor stool**

Keep a written record of the number of droppings and their consistency.

**Medications**

Administer medications carefully and in accordance with instructions

Follow the directions given with any medication carefully. It is easy and dangerous to overdose birds. If the bird has medication for its water, this water should be the only water available and should always be checked daily to see if it is being drunk Remember birds will often camouflage signs of illness in the initial stages of a disease and their condition can deteriorate rapidly once they begin to show obvious symptoms. If there is any doubt about your bird's progress contact your avian veterinarian. Administering appropriate treatment early in the course of disease is often critical to the bird's recovery.