THE USE OF THE CROP NEEDLE

Some birds require to be given a variety of medicines by mouth and this is not as straight forward as it sounds. Medicines can be added to the drinking water and while this is satisfactory for some diseases and some medicines it does not always work. The problems with water medication are firstly that the amount of medicine the birds take is very variable as their water intake can range between 1/2 and 5ml per day and even more in the breeding season; secondly some medicines have a bitter flavour so that the birds will not drink medicated water, thirdly - some medicines will not dissolve in water.

The mixing of medicines with seed is a waste of time as it will be discarded with the husks. Putting drugs into the bird's mouth is also difficult. The alternative is to dose the bird directly into the crop, something which some fanciers do with no difficulty, while others are very reluctant even to think of doing it.

It is quick and easy to do, can be done repeatedly without the birds becoming more resistant to it and ensures exactly measured doses of medicine. Crop needles come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The preferred variety is the stainless steel needle. This is about 3 inches long;( 75mm )the business end is smooth and rounded, with a small hole a short distance from the tip through which the nedicine is passed. the other end has a mount for a syringe. To dose a bird the needle should be lubricated with water or liquid paraffin and the tip placed firmly on one side of the beak towards the back, close to where the upper and lower beaks join. In nearly every case this makes the bird open its beak, if it does not, moving the tip of the needle down and then up will open the mouth.

Once the mouth is opened the tip of the."needle" should be passed backwards along the roof of the mouth towards the throat for a short distance and then down the neck towards the bird's body. Slightly twisting the needle as it goes down often helps. Under no circumstances should any force be applied as it is being put in, it will slip down very easily. One way to avoid applying any force is to hold the bird vertically with the beak up, and once the needle is in the mouth let go of it so that the needle can slip down into the crop under its own weight and that of the syringe. When the needle is in the crop the average budgerigar will have taken 1 3/4 to 2 inches ( 40 - 50mm)of it. Once the needle is in the crop the medicine in the syringe can be given. the whole procedure takes only 2 or 3 seconds.  
Fanciers are concerned on two points, one is that they will damage the internal organs of the bird.  
Provided no force is applied and you don't try to drill the tube down the neck no harm will be done. The other point of concern is that they will put the needle and the medicine down the bird's windpipe. This is almost impossible to do, for two reasons. First, the tube is bigger than the wind- pipe; second, when the tip of the needle is in the mouth the bird will close the epiglottis at the top of the windpipe so that there will be no hole for the needle to go down unless it is forced. All fanciers should have a crop needle in the first aid box and also be able to use it so that when needed it can be used with no difficulty. I am sure that being able to do it will save the life of some birds and make the treatment of disease easier and less stressful.