CARE OF THE BIRDS IN THE BREEDING CAGE

(Courtesy Budgie News March/April 1963)

**T**he breeding season is the most interesting time of the year for budgerigar people. It is the practical application (at least by the birds anyway) of forethought and planning, prior to putting the birds into the breeding cage, and the hopes of those ideas and plans crystallizing into something after the season has finished and the shows are under way. Although the most interesting, it is also one of the most important seasons of the yearly cycle.

**T**here is, of course, pre-natal care and after care, especially of the young in the form of training for the show bench. However, what we wish to discuss here is the care during the breeding season. Most of us have our own ideas on care and these ideas only change when we learn something better, either by reading or from practical experience. It is hoped here that we can assist someone, at least, during the breeding season.

**F**irstly, the birds must be kept warm. We must remember that our aviary birds breed earlier than the wild ones and also that the wild birds have a warmer, drier climate than that experienced in the southern parts of Victoria. We must also see that the birds are kept free from draughts, but have plenty of air. The nest box is an enclosure within a bird room, but the hollow log in which the wild birds breed is, in its natural state, a draught free compartment that not even the rain penetrates, although it is subject to all the elements.

**S**ome of us always use sawdust in the nest box right from the very start. It seems that the hen likes to prepare the place for her young and delights to scratch and throw the stuff all over the place. She will always get rid of it all before she lays, but if she were not doing this she would be tearing the nest box to pieces with her beak and still shuffle around to get the pieces out of the nest box. A good tip is to place a piece of bark about the size of a match box in the nest as soon as you pair up the birds. This will keep her mind off the actual nest. It is also a good idea to sprinkle some insecticide powder under the wooden plate in which the concave is shaped. This helps to control vermin.

**A**fter all the young are hatched, some breeders advocate the use of sawdust in the nest until the second batch of eggs are laid. This helps to keep the nest box clean as the dirt and so forth can be cleaned out every day with the sawdust making it easier to clean. In their natural environment the birds can keep themselves clean without any human help whatsoever.

**B**ecause our cultivated birds are unable to roam the wild open, it is up to us to see that they get as many as possible vitamins and minerals that they would receive in their former state. To overcome these deficiencies, each of us do it in different ways to the best of our knowledge and thoughts.

**I**t is most important to see that they get a regular supply of green food, seeding grasses are the best and there are plenty around during the breeding season. It is known that some breeders grow green food particularly for their budgerigars and thus have an all-round-the-year supply available. Silver beet, lucerne and even salt bush, which is a natural plant to the wild birds, are grown, to mention a few.

**A** large number of us supply extra little titbits to the birds in the breeding cage. Of course, shell grit is never forgotten, but little extras like a piece of charcoal for its potash content, a lump of ordinary salt, or better still, iodized salt sprinkled over the seed once or twice a week, a lump of mortar or cuttlefish for the lime. One extra food that is brought before the notice of us all is cod liver oil, mixed with the seed once or twice a week. This has the same effect on the birds as it has with humans, and helps to build up the system against winter chills etc. One must not forget the ordinary seed which forms the bulk of the diet at all times. A mixture of seeds such as panic, plain canary, jap.millet and others should be fed by the breeder according to his knowledge of what the birds like. Some birds like one seed in preference to another and it will be noticed that birds liking for different seeds will change throughout the year. Canary oats should not be forgotten but should not be fed as regularly as other seeds.