

# DEWORMING

— compiled by Vera Dennison —

Most breeders like to use this time of the year for deworming their birds. The birds should not be moulting any more and they should not be breeding. Most of us whose birds are in suspended cages, do not have a regular deworming schedule, as the risk of infestation of birds that are kept off the floor, is greatly reduced. Like antibiotics, deworming medication is poisonous to birds if given in the wrong quantities, and it can cause a disruption of feather growth. It is dangerous if fed to baby birds by parent birds that have been dosed. If however, you have birds that have access to a concrete or dirt floor, the chances of some of your birds becoming infected are very much greater. Even then it may not be necessary to deworm all your birds every year or twice a year, unless you have sporadic confirmed cases of worm infestation in your collection. To check your birds for intestinal worm infestations, place plastic sheets under the perches on which they sleep. Take the fresh droppings to your nearest vet who can check for worms. It need not be a specialist avian vet.

## PREPARATION

Before you start your deworming it may be a good idea to look at your aviary design. The right design can help a great deal in preventing your birds from becoming infected with internal parasites or worms.

One of the most important factors to consider is that your aviary floors must be clean and dry. There may be areas on the floor that are always moist – worm eggs can survive for a long time in wet conditions.

Check for insects – they are carriers or intermediate hosts that pass worm eggs on to our birds. Insects may hide in cracks of floors or in wooden posts and panels. Use a safe insecticide to kill insects and keep them out.

Do not allow perches and wire to get very dirty with droppings. Do not allow droppings to accumulate anywhere in the aviary. Bored, inquisitive

birds will pick them up and carry them around, thereby standing a chance of ingesting worm eggs.

Place food and water bowls out of reach of perches, preferably on the same level as the perches.

In short: clean, dry aviaries are your best ally in the fight against worms!

## SYMPTOMS OF WORM INFESTATION

How do you know if your birds have worms?

1. Keeping the above paragraphs in mind, decide what the chances are your birds could have worms. Simply giving the right medication is not the best way of controlling worms; prevention is still the best for your birds.
2. Now take a close look at your birds. Do they display any of the following symptoms:

Diarrhoea, weight loss, depression, lack of appetite, vomiting, anaemia, weakness, tapeworm segments in the droppings, mucous in droppings, even sudden death.

3. Have the birds' droppings checked so that the vet can advise you on the correct medication to use for the species of worms present in the gut.

## GIVING DEWORMING MEDICATION

Medication comes in tablet form, drops and powders. Most of us who have large collections of birds, would be tempted to add the dewormer to the drinking water and feed it to the whole flock all at once. This is however, not very effective because many birds either do not drink enough water to take in enough medication, or they do not like the taste of the medicated water. One of the best ways is to add the medication to the food (softfoods, not seeds). The more nicely flavoured, attractive and well-liked the food, the better the chances of masking the taste of some of the

drugs, and the better the consumption by the bird. The dosage would normally be a certain amount of medication per kilogram of food.

Consult your vet or supplier of avian medication for a suitable general dewormer if you decide to treat your whole flock. Be very meticulous about measuring the correct dosage for the various types and weights of birds. If you have one bird only, do not deworm unless you have had a reason to have him/her checked for worms and the result was positive. You would then be given a specific medication that can be given directly into the crop.

**Reference:** Dr Michael J. Cannon, A guide to basic health and disease in birds, Australian Birdkeeper, 1996. Own experience ■