Megabacteria

Introduction by Johan Lucas

What I am writing here is totally based on our experience over decades of breeding budgies.

For all of us, maintaining the health of our budgies is of paramount importance. Nothing is more disheartening than one of our feathered friends suddenly sitting in a huddle all puffed up and “slowly” wasting away.

For many years breeders in South Africa have experienced those birds “going light”. They appear to be continuously eating but slowly waste away with a sharp breast bone.

Megabac can be kept in check by good hygiene and treatment but it could happen that a major outbreak occurs. It is clear that it is never irradiated and is always present but at manageable levels don’t pose such a threat.

Many articles dating back to the late 1990’s are available and are still very relevant today. Megabacteria had an impact on most fanciers over the years, however not many are keen to admit to that. We need to be aware of the symptoms and the measures we can take to curb its spread.

Some of us used Megabac-S imported from Australia at huge cost. In consultation with Onderstepoort we used F10SC as a preventative measure. Although F10 SC is better known as cleaning/disinfectant it seems to be very effective as a “medicine” in the drinking water. Baytril we have also used but also rather expensive.

Bringing in new birds from other breeders do come with risk and to keep them isolated for some time and put them through a treatment program would also be advantageous.

F10SC in the drinking water is an inexpensive program that we use and it seems to have the desired results. We use treated water for 14 days at a time – i.e. 5ml to 5 litres of water bi-annually.

Many breeders use apple-cider vinegar in the water (5ml to 1 litre of water two to three times per week) and provide birds with lemons to eat to increase the acidity in the crops of the birds. It is believed that higher acidity decreases the comfort zone of the megabacteria.

A further good practise is to spray the feet of visitors to your aviaries with an F10SC solution as a preventative measure.

We know that the main source of contamination is droppings of birds. I have taken two steps to try and reduce the risk of this form of contamination:

(1) Our entire aviary roof is covered to avoid contamination from outside or wild birds sitting on the roof. In sunny South Africa we can have roofs with only wire for parts of our aviaries.

(2) The other solution that we implemented was to keep the birds away from most of their droppings. We fitted a wire floor or suspended floor under the perches. Budgies love eating on the floor (ground) so we have not taken that opportunity away from them completely. Under the Larkwood Aviaries membership profile you would be able to see photos of the design that we used. Many fanciers have implemented mobile flights which serve the same purpose or totally suspended aviaries.

Air transmission and other contact in the aviary are also possibilities.

We have experienced the most trouble with birds going thin when we move them from breeding cages to stock cages and thereafter to the flights. It is as if the changes spark them getting sick. i.e. an increase in stress.

In order to combat this, we initially treated the birds that finished breeding with Doxibiotic and a probiotic whilst in the stock cages and regaining their strength (two to three weeks). When we skipped this program the birds do not perform as well as they should and with some fatal results. Now we use the F10SC program exclusively with excellent results and only the rare challenge (5ml to 5 litres of water). For sick birds we have increase the dosage to 5ml to 1 litre of water for 4 to 7 days.

Again I reiterate that it is something we have been using with great success. You must however always consult appropriately qualified persons when treating your birds.

You are further invited to read the articles on the AWEBSA webpage and also do your own research in order to understand Megabacteria and its impact on our hobby clearly.