

Breeding those Budgies – Fred Wright

The breeding season is always one of the most exciting times of the year so I would expect fanciers to be up for the challenge – be they exhibition breeders, colour breeders or just breed budgies for fun. Many of the routine jobs should already be completed but let's look at what should have been done and what needs to be done before we make that all important start.

Sell any birds you are not going to use

It might not seem obvious but you need to sell or dispose of birds that are not going to be used for breeding. Keep any of those “special” birds that might be old and have done well for you but never keep a flight of birds that are not going to take you forward. They eat your seed, they need to be kept clean and demand your time. Move them on even if you have to sell them to a dealer if you are unable to sell them privately to other breeders.

The breeding season is all about looking to the future with new birds and you will need room and space for the birds you are about to breed. Keep spare birds if some of the frontline breeding team fail but don't keep flights of birds you will never use!

The bird room – cages, nest boxes and flights

It should be a priority to start the breeding season off with a clean and well disinfected bird room. I never like to run one season into another so it's easy for me to say – star of clean, but if you do breed all the year round, you have to keep the bird room, the cages and flights clean.

Certainly in Europe it's becoming more and more common for flights to be constructed of aluminum frames. Many cages and nest boxes are made of plastic and it is easier to wash these down than it is for those conventional timber constructed cages, flights and nest boxes. Cages need to be a minimum of 600mm long and 800mm or larger would be better if space permits.

I use both cabinet-type cages with outside boxes and all-wire cages with inside boxes. I prefer the cabinet cages but the addition of racks of all-wire cages gives me the opportunity to bring in a few extra cages to the bird room during the breeding season and take them out again once breeding is finished. What I have noticed is that it takes longer for the pairs in the all-wire cages to go to nest but the fertility in them is always better, probably because it takes longer for the hens to go to nest and mating takes place more frequently.

Nest boxes could be the subject of a whole book! It never matters what design is used, box within a box, hole at the top, hole at the side, or even a cardboard box with an entrance hole of some kind. It does seem to matter what type of box the hen was bred in, and she usually prefers that same or similar design for her own breeding. If a hen does not go to nest in a box, move her onto a different design of box and she is usually in it within a short while.

If the birds are fit and ready to breed it will not matter about design or if they are inside or outside boxes. What does matter about nest boxes is that if you are breeding on the colony system; remember all of the boxes need to be at the same height or the hens will fight for the highest box. Its distressing seeing hens fight and can easily be avoided.

I like to use a concave which is nothing more than a concave shape removed from a block at the base of the nest box. Budgies don't make a nest and it assists the hen to keep her eggs together. Some fanciers don't use a concave and just a sawdust base is provided in the box.

There are some vital sizes that nest boxes should conform to. It's best to build a box around a 200mm x 120mm concave. The box needs to be about 150mm high and the entrance hole should be 50mm diameter.

Spray, paint and disinfect

Timber cages and nest boxes need to be sprayed with some form of mite repellent before the breeding season. Clean them first and boxes are probably best soaked for an hour and dried. Cages can be painted and this not only makes them look better,

the paint fills those cracks and crevasses where mites can breed and hide. Plastic cages should be washed thoroughly and sprayed. When it comes to mites, prevention is better than to cure the problem when it turns up.

We need to use a disinfectant when we wash. It kills bacteria and any fungal spores that might be lurking around. Use a disinfectant to do a job and not just as something to smell pleasant.

Buying what's needed for the next few months

It's something that frequently gets overlooked but if we live in an isolated area where it's difficult to get regular supplies delivered or collected, it is worth buying in bulk before the breeding season. This will include seed mix and any of those special seeds we use during the breeding season. Many fanciers hate using a new or different batch of seed during a breeding season and if you are one of these people buy before you start breeding – and store it.

It's never a good idea to change your brand of egg food during a breeding season. A different brand and the hens will notice and they may well be reluctant to make the change. Stick to the same brand during the year and if you believe supplies will fail during the months of breeding, stock up before you start.

Preparing the birds for breeding

Our birds do run in cycles and generally they will moult and as they come through the moult and grow their new feathers they begin to naturally come into breeding condition. Each fancier will have his or her way to bring the birds into breeding condition but for me regular spraying of the birds seems to advance that breeding condition and the addition of some tonic or condition seeds brings them on.

For me it's the extended daylight hours that advance condition but the key factor for me is the addition of a good and trusted soluble vitamin supplement added to the drinking water. Experience will tell you about the concentration needed but remember to cut it back as the fertile eggs appear in the nest boxes or the birds will become so fit they destroy the eggs and start to lay again or they are likely to attack the chicks so they can get going again too early.

Selecting pairs and putting them together

Pair selection is another huge subject – exhibition birds need to be paired on qualities and on pedigree while colour birds are paired up on visual and genetic factors.

Experience tells me that it does not matter if the hens are placed in the cages first, the cocks are in first or they are placed into the breeding cage at the same time. When I put my birds together I like to see a reaction and response between the birds. They will either mate instantly or become slightly aggressive towards each other. So long as they don't fight – it's a response we need. If they just ignore each other I always wonder if one or even both of the birds are fit – and I think again about the pairing.