

General Management of your birds



This fact sheet gives guidance on the general management of your birds.

The routines associated with managing a birdroom must never be overlooked even when dealing with the relatively hardy species. Well organised birdrooms tend to be those where the birds are fit and healthy. Successful exhibitors invariably bench birds which are clean and in good physical condition.

Routine daily tasks include the replenishment of all seed pots, removing any old seed husks before adding fresh seed. Water should also be replaced daily, even when using tubular drinkers which hold more than a days supply of water. Additionally it is important to set aside time every day just to look at each individual bird. Often when rushed for time it is possible to top up the seed and water pots without actually looking at the birds. Daily inspection allows early signs of trouble to be spotted and the sooner remedial action is taken the easier will be the cure. Any birds looking off colour should be caught up and examined more closely. If the cause of birds appearing to be unwell is not obvious, they should be housed separately from other birds until they return to full health. Certain individual birds will dislike each others company and when they are kept in the same cage this will lead to one or both looking off colour.

Weekly chores include cleaning out cages, providing baths for your birds and replenishing grit pots. Cages should have old floor coverings completely removed and replaced with fresh material. Sand or sawdust are the most usual coverings, although paper may be used in some cases. Sawdust tends to be the most absorbent, keeping cages drier and birds cleaner, however it is important only to use clean, coarse, softwood sawdust. Many fanciers have had birds die because sawdust contaminated with creosote and other toxic chemicals, has been used. Sand is probably the most beneficial floor covering for the general health of the birds as natural sand contains many chemical elements which are of benefit. Again this must be clean, and if possible natural river sand is to be preferred. With the high level of pollution in many rivers some thought should be given as to where it is safe to collect sand. Although sand can be of physical benefit to birds it may be messy if baths are being used very frequently, and it can also cause the ends of tail feathers to become frayed. Paper keeps the cages themselves fairly clean but birds kept on plain paper tend to pick up dirt more quickly than those where sawdust or sand is used. Some bird keepers recommend cat or loft litter as floor coverings for cages and these may prove useful in some cases.

Weekly cleaning may seem to be a bit of a chore, but less frequent cleaning is less than ideal. Perhaps during the breeding season it may be wise to restrict cage cleaning to avoid disturbing parent birds unduly. Giving your birds access to baths once a week is a bare minimum, more frequent bathing will help to promote better feather condition. During the breeding season when birds are sitting eggs or incubating small chicks it may be wise not to supply baths.

Bathing can lead to the feathers of damp birds sticking to the eggs or chicks and they can be accidentally dragged from the nest. Although grit pots will often seem to contain ample grit, fresh grit should be added on a weekly basis to ensure a supply of the right minerals is available.

Less frequent routine tasks include cleaning flights and aviaries. Indoor flights need cleaning about once a fortnight and outdoor aviaries about once every four to six weeks, depending on their size and floor covering. All receptacles used for seed, water and grit must also be kept clean and will require washing out fairly regularly. Seed pots should be emptied and their contents sieved at least once a fortnight. Perches also require attention; any which do not fit properly should be discarded and replaced. Whether to use dowelling or natural perching is a matter of personal preference. Some people use either round or square dowel perches of about $\frac{3}{8}$ " diameter and these are roughened slightly to provide some variation in thickness. In addition to scraping perches clean they also need washing thoroughly about once every six months. Do this by soaking perches in water containing a biological detergent for about twelve hours. The perches are then wiped clean and soaked in clean water for another twelve hours, before being wiped again and allowed to dry thoroughly. Dirty perches, in addition to encouraging foot sores, can also be responsible for eye infections. Loose perches which fall down continually make birds nervous and flighty. Birds should be treated with an anti mite spray, exactly to the recommendations of the manufacturer, at least twice a year.

Annual jobs include cleaning nest boxes after they have been used, before they are stored away for the following season. After cleaning it is a wise precaution to spray them with a mild solution of disinfectant. Cages and indoor flights usually require repainting at least once every twelve months, either gloss or emulsion paint can be used, providing the paint is free from any toxic elements. Exterior woodwork should be treated with wood preservative, remembering not to allow birds to come into contact with the preservative until it is thoroughly dry. Birdroom roofs should be inspected annually to ensure the roofing felt is not damaged allowing damp to seep into fabric of the birdroom. Any other running repairs should be attended to promptly. Damage which permits draughts or vermin to enter a birdroom will be detrimental to the birds unless repaired quickly and properly. Once mice are established in a birdroom they can be very difficult to eradicate. It is a wise precaution to make sure birdroom doors are tightly closed at both the top and bottom. If the door warps slightly not only will this create draughts within the birdroom but also allow mice entry to the birdroom. Mice can squeeze through apparently impossibly small gaps, especially when warm surroundings and an ample food supply will be their reward.

While it may seem optional as to whether we employ good general management or adequate general management techniques it is worth bearing in mind that those breeders and exhibitors who consistently produce good quality birds almost certainly employ good general management. For the exhibitor failure to meet these standards often results in birds losing at least two or three places on the show bench, while breeders who neglect detail tend to be those who have lots of clear eggs or high levels of dead in shell.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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