

## TWELVE MONTHS WITH MY CANARIES

By Ian M<sup>c</sup>Arthur

I have kept canaries for many years now and there is no doubt that these are among my most favourite of birds. To hear a chorus of their whistling, in my view, is among the more pleasurable sounds of bird-keeping.

Most of the information around about canaries seems to be written by, and for, those who show these birds and requires that you keep your pairs in cabinets to enhance their characteristics for showing. However, I have no interest in showing and over time have been successful, in my terms, in colony breeding canaries.

Most years I keep between ten and twelve pairs of yellow and the same number of red factor canaries in separate aviaries. Each aviary measures 3m by 1.5m by 2m high. In a slightly smaller aviary I keep up to four pairs of white canaries.

The following information describes how I look after these birds during the year:

So let's start at the beginning of June when the birds will have been through an 'austerity period' of six to eight weeks. (An austerity period is one in which the birds are not given any supplementary feeding, just a plain diet of seed and water). At the beginning of June I begin to provide my birds with their supplementary food, twice per week.

My canary supplementary food has three components:-

1. The first component is a hard boiled egg which is mashed and mixed with my own version of an 'egg/biscuit' mix. This consists of 6 parts breadcrumbs, 3 parts each of ground rice, oat bran and brown sugar and two parts each of crushed linseed (bought as LSA mix from the supermarket) and maw seed.
2. The second component is soaked seed over which is sprinkled Paswell Finch Food.
3. The third component is a mix of six to eight different fruits and vegetables. The most common ones I use are apples, oranges, broccoli, Lebanese cucumber, celery (these are finely chopped) carrot, sweet potato (these are grated), frozen peas (covered with water, micro-waved for two to three minutes then mashed), and frozen sweetcorn kernels (thawed by soaking in boiling water for five to 10 minutes). Not all are used each day; I just use what I have available and what is on special at the supermarkets at the time. I also have a saltbush growing in my yard and from time to time I strip a few leaves off the bush, chop them up and add them to the mix.

The three components of the supplementary mix are mixed together before being fed to the birds. Where I have ten to twelve pairs of birds in an aviary, I feed three heaped tablespoons of the mix in the morning and again in the afternoon. The other aviary gets about one heaped table spoon of the mix at the same time.

The number of days on which the supplementary mix is fed is increased every week or two until the beginning of August by which time the birds are receiving this on a daily basis. This daily feed continues through until about the end of January. Then the feeding is gradually scaled back until part way through April/May when the birds are placed on their austerity diet.



Photo: I. M<sup>c</sup>Arthur

Here in Whyalla, I introduce the open nest pans I use together with the nesting material in late July or early August. Each nest pan has a circular piece of felt glued into it (in place of nest liners) using Aquadhere. After use the nest pans are soaked in water and the soiled felt removed and discarded and the pan cleaned. Canaries are very messy and wasteful with their nesting material, so

adequate supplies need to be made available to prevent the birds from squabbling amongst themselves. For nesting material I use jute string cut into pieces about 150mm long and cheap, white tissues torn into small pieces. I find the birds use these quite readily. The nest pans are attached to a piece of 2 x 1 timber which is fixed to the aviary wall. I also fix a divider between each nest pan for privacy.

Depending on the season, I allow the birds to have two or three nests before I remove eggs or take away the nest pans. The nest pans need to be left in the aviary until all young have left the nest to prevent birds without access to nest sites interfering with those still having young in the nest. I find that the young birds in the nest do not like a series of hot days, which we do get from time to time here in Whyalla. Two years ago we had a run of hot days and the birds had virtually finished breeding by the middle of November. Last year was much milder and I began pulling eggs in the first or second week of December after the birds had had two or three nests.

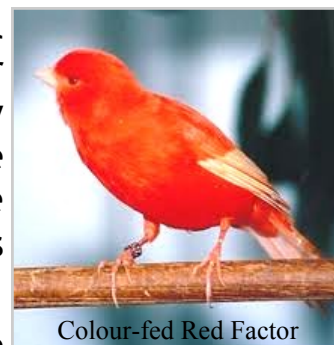
Once the breeding is finished the supplementary feeding is continued, as described above, during January through to March as the birds will be moulting; and supplementary feeding is necessary to help the birds through this stressful time. When the moult begins the males cease whistling. The supplementary feeding is gradually wound back until sometime during April

when the austerity period begins.

During the austerity period the birds are simply fed dry seed and provided with water. I do not feed birds mixed seed, The seeds which I feed are plain canary, rape seed and small amounts of maw, niger, hulled oats and linseed. These are fed all year round. The seeds are placed in separate containers for three reasons:

1. When I fed mixed seeds I found that canaries will flick and kick the seed around to find their favourite seed. In separate containers this does not happen. I replenish and clean out seed containers every ten to fourteen days. The birds eat their favourite seed until it is all gone and are then forced to eat the others.
2. The amount of each type of seed fed can be controlled.
3. I'm retired so time is not a factor, and it does take more time to feed seed in separate containers.

I follow the watering regime suggested by Russell Kingston all year round. One day per week, apple cider vinegar is added to the water and on another day vitamin/mineral powder is added. On the other five days normal water is provided for the yellow and white canaries while the red factor birds get water which has factor red concentrate added.



Depending on the prevailing weather conditions, the management techniques, described above, enable me to produce strong healthy birds in good numbers most years.