

**AIR SAC MITE**  
**BANE OF THE GOULDIAN BREEDER**  
By “*Estrildidae*”

Air sac mite, *Sternostoma tracheacolum*, were once difficult to eradicate in Gouldians and other birds, but this is no longer the case.

Air sac mite are transmitted by close contact with an infected bird that is coughing or sneezing and releasing a tiny mist that contains air sac mite.

The symptoms are: sneezing, coughing, wheezing, squeaking, wet nostrils, and laboured open-beak breathing. Other symptoms include tail bobbing, weakness, weight loss and sneezing and clicking sounds while breathing. Those symptoms are often more noticeable after strenuous activity, such as flight.

Initially treatment was rough and ready: the infected bird was placed in a brown paper bag with a small amount of carbaryl, the bag was given a shake, the bird inhaled the carbaryl dust and the mite were theoretically eliminated. Unfortunately the bird being treated was often taken from the bag unconscious or dead. Then along came the Shell Pest Strip that was developed to destroy flies, *etc.* in a domestic situation. However, it was found to be very effective against air sac mite. The affected bird was isolated and kept with a pest strip for a few hours to a few days (depending on who you asked), and the inhaled fumes killed the mite. The pest strip was also very effective as a preventative if hung in the aviary shelter. But the “powers that be” decided the pest strip was a human health hazard and it was consigned to oblivion.

Various cattle drenches were then tried with varying success. But now proven avian specific treatments are available, and if treated early enough 100% elimination of the mite can be achieved. I have found the ASSA *Special Wormer*<sup>1</sup> extremely effective against air sac mite and all other body fluid feeding parasites, red mite, feather mite, scaly-face and leg mite, round worm, tape worm, *etc.* The *Special Wormer* can either be administered direct to the skin of the bird, or through the drinking water.

Response to the treatment will take a day or two and the birds will recover well. Remember to treat all birds at the same time - not just affected birds, as it takes sometime for an affected bird to show the full symptoms. Naturally, any new birds to be introduced to the aviary should be treated before release.

Gouldians are not the only species affected, air sac mite have also been found in Budgerigars, Double-barred Finches, Zebra Finches, Pictorella Manikins, Masked Grassfinches and Long-tailed Finches. Of these Pictorellas were found to be the most affected by the mite.



<sup>1</sup>Available from the Society's Services Officer Ed.