



ASK THE EXPERTS

If you need avicultural help and are unable to attend a General, or Branch, Meeting, you can ask a question through the magazine. Either mail your query to "ASK THE EXPERTS", P.O. Box 485, North Adelaide, 5006, or, preferably, e-mail it to amalurus@adam.net.au.

Please ensure that as much relevant background information as possible is included with your query. Every endeavour will be made to supply an answer in the next edition of the magazine.

ONLY INITIALS WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY USERS OF THIS SERVICE

While every endeavour will be made to supply relevant information, any advice tendered should be treated as being of a general nature only, and not as personal professional advice.

THE EXPERTS ANSWER

Q. *My breeding pair of Ringnecks have just had a clutch of 3 eggs, got to stage of babies starting to crack through then all 3 died inside egg. I used sawdust last season and the same thing happened so the people at my local pet supply told me the gentleman in the next door shop to them bred Ringnecks and used natural hay, so I used it this year. Can you advise me on what may have gone wrong, or am I doing something incorrectly? I need help.*

A. Your problem is almost certainly the nesting mediums you have used. When breeding birds their nesting requirements must be catered for in a manner as near to nature as possible. In the wild Ringnecks breed in hollow branches. The natural hollowing process results in decayed wood being accumulated in the hollow, and it is on this substrate the eggs are laid.

The hollow limbs in the wild are subjected to the vagrancies of the weather and are soaked during rain and dry out somewhat in heat. However, much moisture is retained and this results in a reasonably high humidity being present in the hollow.

Eggs have an inner membrane between the shell and the liquid contents. Humidity in the nest is necessary for this membrane to remain soft and supple. If the membrane dries out it becomes too tough for the young to cut their way through. If this is the case the young either die before they can "pip" the shell, or are so exhausted trying to get out of the egg they die before completely out, or shortly thereafter.

Sawdust is usually from kiln-dried timber, and therefore draws moisture from the egg and toughens the inner membrane. Dry hay will do the same.

Unfortunately, many so-called "experts" advise all sorts of weird and wonderful nesting mediums without ever working out that the birds we keep have been conditioned over thousands of generations to adapt to the conditions Mother Nature provides. The closer we can replicate nature, the better results we will obtain.

An ideal nesting medium for parrots consists of well-rotted wood dirt, sifted to remove any sharp pieces, then mixed with hydrated coconut peat in a 50-50 proportion. Coconut peat can be obtained in brick form from garden centres. However, it is important to check that it is a plain brick and not one that incorporates fertiliser. The damp wood dirt/peat mixture should be placed in the box or log to a depth of approximately 12 to 15cm and then tamped down well with a flat-ended piece of wood.

This mixture will retain some moisture and therefore produce the humidity required to allow the young to easily cut their way out of the egg. In extremely hot, dry weather the eggs may need a very, very light misting spray of luke warm water to maintain the required moisture. Never saturate the eggs.