

# A BIRDKEEPER GOES SHOPPING

By Ian McArthur

'*Johnnies*' Pageant has been on TV and the amount of junk mail coming through my letter box is increasing as retailers try to entice me to spend, spend, spend in the lead up to Christmas. But it seems to me that bird-keepers have their hands in their pockets as they provide for the birds in their care. I was surprised, on examination, at the number of items that I regularly buy to keep my birds in good health.

Let's start with the basic dry seeds.

I keep canaries, budgies, finches and quail.

Being retired, I have the time to feed dry seed in separate containers. The seed containers are placed inside 20 litre drums cut in half so that any seed spilt as the birds feed can be winnowed and recycled. I believe this is a must in these times of high seed prices and also to help in the control of mice within the aviary.

I buy:-

- **canary seed** which is fed to all birds
- **hulled oats** mainly fed to canaries and budgies but Bengalese finches also seem to take some of this seed
- **linseed** fed to canaries, budgies and a little to finches
- **maw** again taken by canaries and some species of finches
- **white millet** the favourite seed of the budgies
- **Jap millet** another seed fed to all species
- **niger** given to canaries and a little to finches
- **rape** fed to canaries and finches
- **red panicum** fed to the finches.

The next item on my shopping list is **bacteria and fungus inhibitor**. While this can be used in drinking water, I do not use it in this way since I give fresh water and clean water dishes each day. I do, however, use it when soaking seed to feed to the birds. Before feeding the soaked seed, it is given a short soak in a weak solution of **bleach**, so this too features on my shopping list.

Because I keep finches, I need to have available live food. I feed mealworms and am able to keep up the supply by keeping my own mealworm culture. This means I need to have available **bran and pollard**

which I use to keep the culture in. I also like to use a few **bay leaves** in the mealworm container since this discourages some unwelcome ‘wogs’, but the product seems to have disappeared from the market in the last few months.

All the information that I have gathered says that birds need to be wormed regularly. Hence a good quality **bird wormer** is a must on the shopping list.

**Plain biscuits** (usually milk arrowroot), **breadcrumbs**, **Farex** and **cod liver oil/wheat germ oil mixture** are the ingredients for my egg biscuit mix. The original recipe called for glucose powder in place of Farex but while I used this at first, difficulty in getting hold of the powder has forced me to make the switch, which the recipe suggests. The mixture is fed to my canaries daily during the breeding season and twice a week in non-breeding times. When made up, I also feed a little to my finches.

[My Recipe for Egg Biscuit Mix – Boil two eggs for 15 to 20 minutes. Mash the eggs and add two teaspoons of cod liver/ wheat germ oil and mix in well. Add two teaspoons of Farex, two tablespoons each of breadcrumbs and crushed plain biscuits and mix in well. The eggshells are then zapped in the micro-wave and put aside for other uses.]

My aviary floor is fairly clean because, as I said before, I keep my seed containers in 20 litre drums cut in half. This means that little dropped seed is available for the quails on the floor of the aviary. I provide **chick starter crumbles** for these ground dwellers. Let me say at this stage that this is probably not ideal. A much better option would be quail crumbles but these are very expensive. The next best choice is turkey starter crumbles, but I have not been able to purchase these in small lots (5 kilograms) for some time. Hence I buy the more readily available and small packaged chick starter crumbles.

Aviaries can be subject to little ‘nasties’ which can harm the birds in a captive situation. I therefore use a **residual insect spray** from time to time in my aviaries. I pay particular attention to perches and corners where the ‘nasties’ may gather.

I also use a **vitamin and mineral supplement powder**. While the label recommends that it be used in drinking water, I use it on the soaked seed fed to my birds; daily during breeding season and twice per week at other times.

Because I keep red factor canaries, it is necessary to use **red factor food** with these birds. Again, the label recommends that it only be fed during certain times of the year, but I choose to use it all year round by adding it to their water. The only time it is not available to the birds is when I am away and the automatic watering system comes into play.

I even buy **shellgrit**. Now I know that I could probably go to a beach somewhere and get some but I figure that it is just as cheap to pick some up one of my trips to the seed merchant. I use this in two mixtures made available to my birds. I provide a dry calcium grit mix for all of my birds which consists of shellgrit, crushed cuttlefish, charcoal and crushed egg shells. I also make up some calcium grit blocks which uses all of the above ingredients with plaster of paris and water added to hold it all together. The blocks keep, in particular, the budgies happy although the canaries will also peck away at them on occasions.

Finally, the last thing I have on my shopping list is **tissues**. As I sit in front of TV at night, I tear the tissues into small strips and squares and place them in a wire basket in the aviary for use as nesting material. Canaries and finches seem quite willing to use these as a substitute for feathers.

Well, that's my shopping list, what's yours?