

BEGINNERS BIT

GIVE YOUNG BIRDS A CHANCE

An Extract from
The Avicultural Writings of Eric Baxter

One of the essentials associated with aviculture is the care of young birds from the day they are hatched, through all the stages of development and eventual maturity to adult birds, and naturally for the remainder of their life.

To rear young it is essential that the parent birds are supplied with a diet that will encourage them to complete the task, and equally important that this will serve to produce healthy stock. In the case of finches it is necessary to supply live food for quite a number of species, whether this is in the form of white ants, gents, or mealworms. The quantity fed may determine the results, with perhaps a little caution in relation to mealworms.

Next in line, and very often substituting for live food, is a liberal supply of seeding grasses. These fed in a semi-ripe stage are very nutritious, and are always eagerly sought by all types and species of birds. In the case of finches this type of food can be instrumental in inducing some species to successfully rear their broods of young. Also, over a period it is possible that some birds can be weaned from live food and with the supply of seeding grasses will continue to produce young. This has become very evident with Emblemias. When these were first introduced to aviculture it was practically impossible to rear them without the supply of live food, but these days they are among the most prolific breeders in captivity, and without the supply of live food. This does not imply that they do not partake of it - if it is available they will most certainly take their share, but they can be bred without this type of food.

This applies to other species as well, and in the case of Australian species many will only partake of this type of food when they are rearing young, whereas in the case of seeding grasses they will flock on to them every time they are supplied. Foreign species are much keener and will take live food more readily, and in most instances are solely dependent on this type of food to rear their young (which unfortunately makes it a little difficult for some fanciers who are unable to get liberal supplies). However, there are instances where it has been reported that some species have successfully reared young without live food. This has been the case with Fires, Orange-breasted, Cordons and Cubans most frequently, and odd pairs of several other species. In most instances this has eventuated because of the liberal supply of suitable seeding grasses. This is very encouraging, and continued success along these lines could be instrumental in building up strains that are no longer reliant on live food. Providing the substitute for this is equally as nutritious then the progeny will not deteriorate. This method of breeding can be very encouraging to the beginner and of course advantageous to aviculture in general.

It is very essential to ensure that young birds continue to receive a diet that is beneficial to them until they are completely independent of the parents and are able to fend for themselves. It is equally important to allow them to remain with the parent birds for several weeks after they have become independent; this will ensure that they are entirely independent, and when transferred to a holding aviary will have a chance to mature and develop into good strong birds. There are some exceptions - occasionally breeding pairs will resent the presence of their young once they have become independent, in which case it will be necessary to transfer them to a holding cage as soon as it is observed that the parent birds are acting in an aggressive manner. Cuban Finches are in this category, and really can be very destructive and aggressive once their young have become independent, and failure to transfer them can result in losses. These are exceptions. Fortunately it is not the general behaviour of all species. Wherever possible young birds should be given



every opportunity to mature in the aviaries they are bred in, not transferred when the parent birds are still caring for them or have just finished caring for them - it is not good aviculture. Far too frequently birds are offered for sale when they should still be with the parent birds, or in holding aviaries where they can mature and develop into good breeding stock and eventually sorted out and paired up as unrelated birds.

Above : Plum-headed Finch nestlings