

# **WATER AIN'T ALWAYS JUST WATER**

**By Ian McArthur**

Read just about any book or magazine article on breeding birds and you'll find a quite detailed description of what to feed the species to gain best breeding results. This is because it is generally recognized that what the birds eat in the wild needs to be replicated in the aviary to get the birds up to breeding condition and keep them there for the duration of the breeding season if they are to raise healthy youngsters.

Almost as an afterthought, nearly every piece of advice ends with a comment that your birds will need fresh, clean water daily. Over the last few years, I have read in more than one article that it is beneficial to the birds to place a clove of garlic in the water. Remove the clove and replace it with another when it becomes soft, usually between 10 and 14 days, depending on the weather.

If you want your birds to take in a particular medication or additive, then many breeders would put this in to their bird's water, because we can guarantee that the birds will partake at some time. This cannot be guaranteed with adding substances to the bird's food since birds have individual tastes and in my experience, what birds in one aviary will attack with gusto, the same species in another aviary will hardly touch. It all depends on what they are used to eating.

**Russell Kingston's Watering Regime** – At last year's UBSSA Seminar Russell Kingston, well known finch breeder from Queensland, outlined how he treats the water given to his birds. To begin with when he worms his birds he removes the water from the aviary about 3.00 in the afternoon then places the treated water back in the cage at about 10.00 the next morning, finally removing around 1.00pm. This process is repeated three times, two weeks apart every three months. Once each week he adds apple cider vinegar to the water at the rate of 10ml per litre. When asked about this he said that this 'stirred the worms up'. On another day each week he adds a vitamin supplement to the water according to the directions which come with the product. He was also an advocate of adding a clove of garlic to the water.

With this background knowledge, I was interested to read in the latest edition of '**Just Finches and Softbills**' magazine, two answers given by Dr Danny Brown, a veterinarian, to questions asked by readers.

The first asked about the effectiveness of adding Apple Cider Vinegar to the drinking water of birds. Dr Danny stated that adding the vinegar will make the water acidic which will discourage fungal organisms in the gut of the birds who drink the water. However, he did sound a note of caution. To be effective, the water should have a pH of 5.5-6. To get this accurately you need to get hold of pH testing kit from an aquarium shop and test the water since water qualities vary from place to place. In addition, an organic non-pasteurised Apple Cider Vinegar will give better results.

Dr Danny was less enthusiastic about placing a clove of garlic in the water, and I quote '.... The short answer is no value whatsoever and some detriment if they are left for greater than 24 hours.' ..... since they then begin to rot. On the other hand freshly squeezed garlic juice added to the water is beneficial as an anti bacterium. Make sure to remove this treated water after 24 hours. Alternatively, ½ - 1ml of garlic oil poured over a kilogram of dry seed will have a similar effect.

The complete answers to the questions on additives in water may be found in the **Just Finches and Softbills** magazine – Issue 7, which I received some time in December 2005.

*Reference: Answers given by Dr Danny Brown in answer to questions posed in Issue 7 of the Just Finches and Softbills Magazine.*