Handfeeding (baby)budgies

HAND FEEDING:

Hand feeding usually becomes necessary when a parent has died, or has just abandoned the eggs or babies and no foster parents are available. Because excellent balanced rearing diets are available, there is little point in making your own. You can use your own but it is safer to buy a pre-made formula. All of these come with instructions. Most formulas require just the addition of warm water (sterilised but not distilled). A plastic eye dropper or syringe can be used to administer the food or you may find a teaspoon with the sides bent in is more convenient. Newly hatched parakeets are small and tender, and have tiny soft beaks. By gently tapping the beak with the utensil you often will encourage the nestling to gape (open its beak). If it refuses to gape, you will have to open the beak gently with a toothpick or similar item. As soon as the beak is open, drop a tiny drop of water into the throat. The bird soon will get used to this and will open its beak voluntarily when you give it a gentle tap.

Babies do not understand syringe feeding and they must be force fed. Since they cannot smell food in a syringe they will try and get away. If you cannot do this correctly, you can try a tiny spoon with soft food or the formula you are using in the syringe and touch the birds beak with the spoon and hope it can smell or taste it and will open up for it. Otherwise you must force feed the bird. In time it will understand that the syringe is food and accept it readily.

When to Feed:
Newly hatched chicks rarely feed in the first 10-15 hours. During this time you can start with a drop of lukewarm water. One hour later give it another drop containing some clean (pure white), powdered cuttlefish bone and natural yoghurt.
Whether you use the oatmeal mix with added vitamins and honey or brand name rearing diets such as Hagen or Rowdybush etc. is your choice. Some people have had the same success with either rearing diet. The oatmeal rearing food is mentioned here but you can substitute either of the rearing foods. If you use a brand name rearing food of course you do not have to add sweeteners such as honey or sugar although the honey may make the food more acceptable to the babies.

Day 1 to 3:
After the 1st 12 hours you can give it the same and thereafter feed a few drops of highly diluted hand rearing diet every hour. Once each day, I mix in a little yoghurt as this contains vitamin K, the blood clotting vitamin. This vitamin also can be found in some grains, Soya meal, and so on, which usually is included in the rearing food, so the inclusion of yoghurt is not absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, I like to give it to the birds as an additional supplement, even if it's not the birds' favourite food. A thin oatmeal porridge is also excellent for the 1st few days. Feed every three hours (6 times a day) for the 1st 3 days. Sometimes a bird will not accept the food we offer them, in that case a little sugar or honey can do wonders. Be sure to keep the crop full, but remember that filling too much is not good either. A good time to feed is 7am, 10am, 1pm, 4pm, 7pm and 10pm. Night feedings are not necessary as most adults would not feed them at this time anyway.

The 1st 3 main feedings consist of oatmeal possibly supplemented with honey, cane sugar or powdered sugar. The 4th and 5th feeding consists of finely crushed oven dried bread and baby cereal in addition to the oatmeal, sugar and honey concoction. The 6th feeding should consist of just oatmeal with sugar or honey. The oatmeal should be made with water and not milk for the 1st 5 days. On the 3rd day you can add a little raw apple sauce sweetened with honey or sugar warmed up to room temperature. An example of a typical feeding schedule for hand-reared nestlings, from day 4 to day 25 is as follows:

Days 4-14:
Feed every three hours, except between the hours of midnight and 5 AM. Prepare the food to the consistency of creamy milk. At this stage you can add mashed carrot served lukewarm. A few drops of cod liver oil or a vitamin supplement are highly recommended at this stage. Finely ground eggshell and a small amount of ground cuttlebone can be added to the oatmeal.

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URL: https://faq.budgiebreeders.asn.au/content/8/162/en/handfeeding-babybudgies.html

Days 15-20:
Prepare slightly thicker formula and feed every four hours. (8am, 12pm, 4pm, and 9 or 10pm) After 20 days, house birds in a cage with low perches and a shallow dish of water. Birds of this age will begin to experiment for themselves, so provide a few "snacks," such as crushed canary grass seed, powdered cuttlebone (clean and white), egg food, and millet spray. The latter should be scalded with boiling water to sterilise it.

Days 21-25:
Continue hand feeding with rearing mixture two to three times a day, but encourage birds to feed themselves by offering a free choice of sprouted seeds and millet spray (fresh and not scalded). Mix some dry formula with the sprouted seeds and also give finely chopped fruits and greens, and cuttlebone powder. If at all possible, you can usually try and place a slightly older bird with the babies that can eat on its own to show the new babies how to eat. This may speed up the eating on their own process.

Feeding Method:
Hold the baby bird in one hand in such a manner that its head is held between the thumb and index finger and use the other hand to feed him. After each feeding clean the beak with lukewarm water and a soft cloth. No spilled food particles should be left on the beak or elsewhere on the body. Warm water (100-110 degrees F.) (not distilled) or apple juice is added to the rearing mixture and mixed well until it has the consistency of creamy milk. Never try to give too thick a mixture as it can compact in the bird's crop and cause a serious stoppage. If this problem occurs accidentally, it usually can be corrected by giving the bird lukewarm water and gently massaging the crop. Place the nestling on a flat surface, preferably on a warm towel, and support it with one (warm) hand, while feeding it with the other. The mixture can be administered from a syringe or plastic dropper, or let it roll off a bent-sided teaspoon. All feeding implements should be warmed to the temperature of the mixture before use. The temperature of the feeding mixture (100-110 degrees F., but not higher to avoid "crop burn") can be maintained during feeding by placing the dish in a pan of warm water.

If the bird won't open its beak, try stimulating it with a gentle tap--this generally will do the trick. Examine the bird's crop before each feeding to determine the frequency and quantity of feeding required. The crop should never become completely empty but it can empty itself in three to four hours. On the other hand, try not to overfill the crop as this could cause various complications, including asphyxiation. If the food starts flowing back into the mouth, stop feeding and give it a rest before trying again when the mouth is completely empty. Feeding should be synchronised with swallowing. When the nestling swallows, accompanied by head bobbing, deliver the mixture quickly. Place the feeding device in the mouth, over the tongue. After each feeding, rinse the inside of the bird's mouth with a few drops of warm water and clean its beak, head, and any outer parts that may have become soiled, plus its vent, then return it to its warm brooder. Keep separate feeding utensils and feeding dishes for each bird and do not go from one bird to the other with the same utensil. Always clean all feeding utensils after use and sterilise by immersing in boiling water.

Once the birds are independent you can transfer them to a roomier cage so they can practise their flying. If you successfully hand rear a bird, it will become very tame and affectionate, as it will regard you as its parent. Such birds are the best to use if you want a tame pet and, perhaps surprisingly, they can turn out to be exceedingly good parents, bringing the strongest of offspring into the world.

These sample feeding practises are taken from the books "Parakeets of the World" and "The New Australian Parakeet Handbook" by Mathew M. Vriends

Unique solution ID: #1131
Author: Kaz
Last update: 07-Jun-2007 15:09

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