Budgerigar Breeding

Budgie Milestones

BABY BUDGERIGAR MILESTONES
By Betty Rea (permission given to Kaz to post on the site)

When I first began breeding I was amazed at the way in which the birds cared for their young. The first babies I experienced were canaries and finches but the budgie babies were just as delightful. Just waiting to see what was coming out of each nest was a very special experience.

As time passed I wished that I had a "timetable" to check birds against. Just occasionally there would be a bird about which I had the gut feeling that all was not as it should be. After much reading from many sources I have put together my "Budgie Milestones" which give a rough day by day guide to the "ages and stages" of chicks during those first few weeks.

Those of us who have had children know that every child is different and budgies are no different. The "milestones" are meant only as a guide but they may be helpful to beginners who are not sure what to expect of their newly hatched chicks.

Day 1 If well fed a newly hatched chick can double its birth weight during its first day.

During first few days chicks are fed flat on their backs, day and night.

After 4-6 days babies sit their front half up to call for food and then fall back flat to be fed.

6-8 days begin to develop down on their backs.

8 days sit to be fed. No longer fed at night.

8-9 days able to hold up head and begin to wander around.

9-days Tail feathers begin to show.

7-10 days pin feathers begin to show on the wings.

10 days down should be fairly dense.

12 days pin feathers begin to emerge from head.

15 days by now covered in dense down.

20 days Dad can take care of chicks if necessary from this age onward. It should be possible to tell the colour of birds at this stage.

21 days begin to feed and scratch each other

22 days start to investigate. Nibble on feathers droppings etc.
Wander around the nest box quite a lot.

28 days can have developed to 28 times their birth weight. Some chicks may leave nest. Buffier ones take longer.

29 days at 4-5 weeks the wing feathers are ½ of their full length, tail feathers 2/3 of theirs.

30 days Chicks who left the box at 28 days may come in and help feed younger ones – still get fed themselves.

33 days Most chicks leave the box at about this time.

35 days Should be feeding themselves. Flight feathers full length. Colour and markings not as clear and vivid as they will be after the first moult. Cares not definite until they are sexually mature. Mother possibly now sitting on next round.

During the first few days after hatching the newborns are nestled all the time. The mother completely covers them. As consecutive chicks hatch they huddle close together with the youngest at the bottom. They rest their necks on each other and stay in this huddle even when the mother leaves the nest. The reason for this is their intense need for body contact – staying in the huddle provides this contact, maximises warmth and happens to be a very good resting position.

That for the first week of its life a newly hatched chick is entirely dependent on its mother and siblings for its body heat. It is only when it reaches a week old that it becomes "warm blooded" and from then on maintains its body heat for itself by oxidising its food.

At fourteen days the hen might sit with her wings closed beside the chicks. As they move more she sits less and when the youngest reaches 16 days she stops sitting altogether.

In the first few days a mother will only feed a new chick if it cries and kicks its legs.
When it has had enough it cries even louder as an indication for her to stop.
If a newborn is too weak after the exertion of breaking out of the egg to cry for food it may perish.

To encourage them to eat she will run her beak over their bodies to make them "open up". When they sit for their food (10-12 days) they still call but when they've had enough they turn their heads away and crawl under mother's wing. By three weeks they wander around the box following mother begging for food.

Ringing occurs when the chick's leg is sufficiently large for the ring not to fall off.
In large show birds this may be as early as 4-5 days, in medium birds 6-7 days and in small ones you may need to wait until the bird is 7-10 days old. There is nothing to be lost by putting on a ring too early, if it comes off again in your fingers you can put it away and try again a day or two later. If it is left too late the bird may miss out or it may be difficult, needing a lubricant, to assist with putting on the ring.
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