Budgerigar Breeding

Care of baby budgies in the nest

I am going to share some knowledge I have of care of budgie babies in the nest.

Firstly, when new to breeding, arm yourself with a great deal of knowledge and all the things you need to help you through to the end with healthy lively baby budgies.
Parents in the nestbox.....
Many times you will find you have both parents in the nest box from the very first moment. No reason to panic if Dad Budgie is in the nestbox. I would say an average of 70% of my male budgies stay in the nest box with their hens or at least spend a lot of time in there with them. I have had Budgie Dads helping to incubate eggs right from the start, and feeding newborn chicks right through

While "sexual maturity" in budgies usually occurs at approximately six months of age, researchers have shown that young male budgies may produce spermatozoa within 60 days of leaving the nest. This rapid sexual development is a physiological adaptation to an arid environment and enables very young birds to reproduce quickly when conditions are favorable. That's the scientific facts but mentally and physically a budgie is NOT ready to parent babies until around 12-18 months of age. Budgie females are determinate layers, meaning that a hen will lay a predetermined number of eggs per cycle, usually four, six or sometimes eight or more. The incubation period lasts from 17 to 21 days, depending on the temperature in the room and the relative humidity. In a warm room, with temperatures between 65 and 72 degrees F (18 and 22 degrees C), the embryos develop faster, but the brooding period is never shorter than 17 days.

The egg incubation calendar:

This is a calendar you can use to simplify when your eggs will hatch for Budgies and Cockatiels with an incubation time of 18 days. Just look at the date the eggs were laid and look below that date and that is when they should hatch. E.G.. If you look at Jan. 4 and look below you see Jan 22 when that egg should hatch. If you look at Jan. 23 and look below you see Feb. 10 when that egg should hatch. If you look at November 30 and look below you see Dec. 18. That is when that egg should hatch. Etc. I think it was made during a leap year but should be accurate to one day before or after.

to fledging. So, I am guessing most of my budgie males are "in touch with their feminine side"

EGG INCUBATION CALENDER

Diagram of an egg

Embryo at 2 days in the egg

Embro at 4 days old in the egg

1. Baby is Born / Hatched.....What To Do ?
When you notice your first born baby budgie arrive, it may have only been there for an hour or two. If the eggshell is still very close by, it is probably very newly hatched. Mother budgie removes the shell out of the way a short while later. She may toss the shell out of the nest, move it aside or eat it for the extra calcium. Check for signs of food in baby's crop...a slight yellow creamish coloured tiny bubble on the skin on the base of its neck. If there appears to be food in the crop all is well. If not, don't panic, but look again a few hours later. Often a newborn may not get fed for up to 8-10 hours. If there are other babies in the nest and they are a great deal larger, you may want to slightly move the tiny one into an area nearer the entry hole where Mum can watch it and feed it better and it not get trampled on. It will be fine after a day or so and a good feed or two as it gains strength and can

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wiggle away from or out from under most brothers and sisters. Try not to be afraid to handle the newborns. They are very resilient and can cope with most handling. Just try not to overdo it.

2. Baby isn't Being Fed....What To Do ?
If you are sure the baby isnt being fed after a decent amount of time (up to a full day) you can feed it it's first feed yourself, but try to allow the parents all opportunities to do so first. Don't be afraid to handle the baby as tiny as it is, for it's parents and siblings will trample all over it in the nest anyway and they are very resilient little rubbery things. You can make up a very sloppy mix of slightly warm handrearing formula (just a few small drops) and apply it to the baby's beak near the beak opening. In the absence of any handrearing formula you can use a baby rice cereal mix or some plain yoghurt. You can use the end of a matchstick to apply the food or a very small syringe. No need to prise its beak open. The baby will sense the food and suck it in. Within a moment you will see the food in its crop. Place it back with the parents and watch for further signs of parents feeding it over the next few days. You may have to do this once or twice before the parents get the idea of it. Some new parents cant quite figure it out straight away but may do after a day or so.

3. Nesting materials.
Many types of nesting materials are used, although most hens will get rid of them straight away. You can use wood shavings, bran, rolled oats or coarse sawdust.....or a combination of some of these together. If your budgie parents removed all the nesting materials when they were egg laying, often they will accept nesting materials being placed back in the box at this point when babies have arrived. They are usually more distracted once babies arrive to think of removing the wood shavings or nesting materials of choice for a second time.

4. Access to Nesting Box.
To gain access to a nesting box, just tap on the outside of the box and parent/ parents will usually hop out and allow you to check the babies. If the parent stays in the box and squarks its head off, try putting your hand in with palm facing down and back of hand upwards. That way you can gently access under the hen and lift her slightly on the back of your hand to check what's underneath. Be prepared for getting a nip...it's hardly ever blood-letting but just a warning nip from parent budgie to you. Some new Mums squark their head off and act very annoyed, others just let you look but watch closely to see what you are doing. At this point the hen may move to the outside of the nesting box while you check everything. Be careful of eggs that may break, and watch for signs of a cracked egg that may indicate an imminent arrival. If you see a chick half out of an egg, leave it be. They can usually manage to sort themselves out and interference sometimes can be fatal to the hatching chick.

5. Do Not Fear Checking Out the Nesting Box and Babies.
Checking nesting boxes when chicks start to arrive is a must. You can time it for when parents are looking for food early morning and early evening. It is a good idea to check boxes twice a day.

You really need to check to be sure..... A. Babies are being fed
B. No eggs are broken or damaged
C. Parents aren't eating their eggs and or babies (Yes...it can happen)
D. Check for dead babies (some are born through the night and die as they haven't been noticed or fed) . This is a must as there is nothing worse than finding a dead baby budgie days later and knowing there is bacteria and illness in the nest from that.
E. Check nesting materials
F. Check for possible spiders, cockroaches or insects in the nest. Check for mouse activity in the nest.
G. Check for possible deformities in the babies. i.e. Splayed legs, (which is correctible if caught early enough and treated), bone and beak deformities. Much later when their eyes are open,check to see that they have both eyes, as some chicks can be born missing an eyeball.
H. Check for food build up in babies beaks (see Item 8).

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6. Cleaning a Nestbox with Babies in It.
If the nest box has wood shavings or similar in it, the nest box should be fine up until the babies are around 14 days old. At this point you will need to start keeping the nest box as clean as possible as babies and parents make it pretty messy. Generally about every second day depending on how messy the box gets.
Best way to go about this is
A. Tap on the box to allow the mother to leave
B. Working quickly, gently remove the babies into a container to keep nearby. If there is any eggs, gently remove them also, trying not to handle them too much.
C. Remove the old soiled bedding materials and with a scraper, scrape out and clean the base of the box.
D. Put new nesting materials into the nesting box and replace all chicks and eggs, after checking over the chicks as described in
items 7 and 8.
Note ....If the nest box is very dirty and has wet droppings in it, it can be a sign of illness in hen and /or chicks. Make a a note to pay particular attention in checking this nestbox more and keeping it cleaner. Keep a close watch on the parents and chicks for signs of illness.

7. Checking Baby Budgies Feet.
This is really important to check the feet of the baby budgies at the stage where they are getting poopy, especially from the age of 2- 3 weeks onwards, if the hen is not cleaning them. More often than not, the babies feet get caked in poop, that then hardens and interferes with the movement of the toes. It needs to be removed as it can set like clay and cause deformities in their feet. I have heard of some budgie owners who didn't check for this and then had to deal with toes and feet that were literally seized up and didn't work properly....feet were encased in dried poop that has set like pair of concrete boots....meaning the need for veterinary care and splints etc.
You can use a couple of different methods to clean their feet. Gently picking away the minor stuff attached to the feet with your fingernails after soaking it with lukewarm water to soften the caked mess, or in bigger babies a gentle clean with a very soft wet toothbrush and pat it dry afterwards. You can use a soft damp cloth or paper towel if it works well for you too. Be very careful in picking away caked droppings from the toenail area as it has been known to have a toenail come away in trying to get it clean.

8. Checking Babies Beaks.
It is really important to check the babies beaks for food getting stuck to the "roof of their mouth" so to speak.
UNDERSHOT BEAK.
The most common cause is soft food being permitted to get lodged and caked in the upper mandible of young birds while in the nest and being fed by the parents. This causes the upper mandible to stop growing properly which allows the lower mandible to grow over the top one.
The best thing to do is have with you a fine toothpick or even a feather (quill end). I gently get the babies to open their beaks using the feather or toothpick, and I look up into the top beak area. If food is collected there I gently remove it with the feather or toothpick and place baby back into the nest and check the next one. While doing this check baby over for feet and other problems.
Some baby budgies may be born with a deformed beak and you need to look out for things like this as well, as it may affect their ability to feed properly. Some cases are congenital (present from hatching) - may be from hereditary defects, egg infection, mineral deficiencies, or incubation problems.

9. Check for Retarded Feather Development in the Chicks
Keep a close watch on the feather development of your babies. At a stage where they should be covered in down and developing their first feather quills, if you notice any bald patches or retarded feather growth, you may well have chicks with French Moult. If this is correctly diagnosed as the problem, it would pay to not breed with these parents again. There are many schools of thought on why French Moult occurs, hereditary causes, viral, stress breeding conditions, pre egg, post egg.....it can be very confusing to actually attribute a good reason that everyone agrees upon.

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10. Be Aware of Any Parent Plucking their Chicks

Pay close attention to any possibility that a parent may be plucking it's chicks. If it is early stages and you do not think the chicks are in any danger, changing the nestbox environment may have some effect. You can clean out the box and add a deep bed of nesting material such as wood shavings to distract the mother from her plucking routine. If you replace the nestbox lid with one made of clear plastic or glass, this also has some benefits. The see through nestbox lid makes the mother a bit more wary of predators. She will generally pull the chicks in closer to her and keep them warm and safe. She is generally more concerned about the safety of her chicks at this point and less likely to pluck. When using this method watch carefully to be sure both parents are still attending to the chicks needs, as a small minority may abandon the nest. But on the whole, this is a method that works. If the chicks are in danger from their parents however, you may need to remove them and foster to another pair or hand rear them yourself.

11. Chicks at Point of Fledging

Often a chick may fledge (leave the nest) before its fully feathered. I often pop these unfeathered ones back into the nest as it is most often a chick leaning out of the nesting box hole to be fed that makes this happen too soon. Only when a chick is fully feathered do I leave it outside the nest. My chicks mostly fledge at around 4-5 weeks of age. The chick should be safe on the floor area of the breeder cage where Dad budgie will feed it. I also have a tray of seed down there for it to try, and some egg and biscuit mix (wet or dry). Daily, the parents have a tray of fine sliced greens and grated carrot sprinkled with seed and the babies watch Mum and Dad eat from that and usually try it themselves as well. A small water container is accessible for the chicks, but not the type they can drown in as chicks often drown in fairly shallow water dishes or containers they can't get out of.
Keep a close eye on fledged chicks. Make sure they are eating and or being fed by either parent. You may need to put a shelter down for them to hide in. I find a little plastic hutch designed for mice or hamsters to be ideal (looks like a little plastic igloo). But, try and check the chicks in the hidey places as they can hide away and forget to eat. I usually remove the igloo for the daytime and return it for the night. Unless the chick needs the shelter due to a parents aggressiveness towards them.
If your chicks are fledging into a colony aviary you will need to watch them very closely for any signs of aggression towards them from other budgies or other birds. Their life is a little more precarious in these situations. I have both colony bred and breeder cage bred chicks in the past. The chicks born into an aviary with many other birds have a lot to be wary of. Other males can dominate and attack chicks. Other hens can kill chicks. Even chicks that fledge into a breeder cage can face attack from its own parents. A chick that appears too "needy" or urgently seeking food or attention noisily and or returning to the nest where parents are trying for another round.....these chicks have been knoiwn to be killed on some occasions by an exasperated parent. Not often thank goodness but be aware of the possibility.
If you have a mouse problem in the aviary the chicks can get seriously ill or die from salmonella poisoning from contaminated seed or food dishes on the aviary floor. Chicks have been known to be attacked and eaten by rats and terrorised by mice. Other birds such as quails can sometimes attack a newly fledged chick.

In short....their life is in your hands.

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