

## THE SECOND NEST

Sunday, 16 May 2010

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The song contest is now a thing of the past, we have conditioned our birds for the breeding season, the hours of work in selecting, the best possible matings, the cleaning cages, seed cups and containers, are all done, our best hen are sitting or hatching few babies and hope, just hope, some of them will make it to the next show and maybe even win some trophies in their class. It is now when questions start. It seems that no one of us is sure, since every year, from novices to master breeders, we hear the same questions over again. When do you take our male out? Or do you leave him in? When do you put him back? Do you add second nest, or do you wait until the young birds leave the nest to place the new nest in the same spot where the old one was? Then we start talking about plucking. Why some hens do that? Do you think it is a form of cannibalism? What do you do to avoid it?

In my modest opinion I think we just worry too much and try to make a one certain rule apply to all our birds. I think that birds, like any other living thing, are all different in certain ways and have to be treated on individual basis. Some males if left with hen when she is sitting or raising babies are nothing but a nuisance to her. They will pull the nest apart, or they will want to sit and warm the eggs also, when the hen is out eating. They can create heavy losses and break a few eggs. Others instead are excellent breeders and seem to know when and how to help. Usually a poor feeder hen that has no problems in raising five beautiful babies will do much better if left alone.

If the hen is to be left alone, I leave the male with her until a few days after the hen has finished laying and she is well set to her nest, unless I need that male to be mated to another hen, in which case I take him out after the hen has laid the third or fourth egg.

I put the male back in, when the hen starts to show signs of wanting to mate and build a nest again. This can happen anywhere between the 10th and 30th day after the babies were born, so in a way, it is her decision, not mine, to when the male is put back in.

At this time I give her an additional nest and an ample supply of nesting material. For the first nest I use burlap and when the nest is almost completed, I give her some white nestling hair to fill out the center. But for the second nest, when there are still young ones in the breeding cage, I supply her with fifty-fifty portions of burlap and nestling hair since the very beginning. Hens will look for something soft to fill out the center portion of their nests and if nothing is available, feathers will do just great, and we will end up with lots of partially dressed babies. She will try also plucking feathers from her partner and even from herself, reason why I do not believe this is a sign or form of cannibalism, since I never heard of a cannibal who has tried to eat himself.

It is important to supply the new nest and an abundant portion of nestling hair as soon as the hen starts to show signs of wanting to mate again, one day too late may just be that, too late. I believe the moment the hen feels the need to find this soft feathery like material; she is going to go out to get it. This urge may be stronger in some hens than it may be to others, and if nothing is available to her, as caged bird, she will use even her own feathers to fulfill that need. This may, from now on, create into her this habit. We do not see this to happen to birds in the wild, so I rather blame myself when it happens. I have seen breeders dispose of excellent hens because they have plucked their babies.

The hen will keep feeding the babies until the third egg is laid, and at the same time I make sure the replace each egg as laid with a dummy one, otherwise some playful babies or a chasing partner will more likely break some of them. When the babies come out of the nest and the hen is set on her new clutch of eggs I transfer the young birds to the male, if possible, to a separate cage, until the babies are 28 or 30 days old when they are left on their own.

It is just by trying to treat your birds on individual basis and b following the course of nature as closely as possible, that best results are obtained. Knowing your birds and making notes on your breeding records for the following breeding season helps you and helps them as well.