

## Roller Canary Items - April & May

Friday, 10 January 2014

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The breeding season for birds living in their natural environment outdoor starts in the spring. In the Northern Hemisphere, the first day of spring is the Spring Equinox, which is made up of equal day and night hours, this year falling on March 20th. That makes the spring period in 2014 from March 20th to June 20th. Let us just round them off to April, May and June. As the season cycles from winter to spring, the hours of sunlight get longer, the temperatures get warmer, and natural foods sprout, grow and become plentiful. These are all prerequisite conditions required to stimulate the birds' energy and fertility cycle.

However, the timing, of the natural spring, does not allow you adequate time to get your youngsters molted, matured, trained, and in full song, ready for the Song Contests which start in November. Because of this you must advance the natural spring three months ahead in the January to March period.

You must have done all the tight things for at least 4 months prior to this time to have them in good condition. If they are not, you should consider advancing the season until they are. However, if they are, start making the necessary changes to get them into perfect breeding condition.

**Advancing the Season:** It is essential that you adjust the daylight, warmth, and food gradually and a bit at a time. You move the daylight up to 13 hours by providing artificial light in the early morning hours. Do not extend the artificial light into the evening, as the hen and babies must have a normal sunset. At the same time you utilize an electric heater to maintain the temperature within the range of 68 to 70 F. You also adjust their diet to include more nourishing food, which I will talk about later in this article.

Now you have light, heat and food all adjusted, which will bring an early spring to your birds in the breeding room. Everything is happening, as it should, because you made these changes gradually. At the same time, you observed the progress of your birds' breeding activities.

Let's see where you are at this point in time. You reviewed your show results from the past season and your Inbreeding program. You carried out the adjustments of light, heat, and food that you planned and you finalized your pairings. Now, when the hens were shredding paper and flipping wings, they are ready to be paired.

The best way to do this is to put each of the cocks you have selected for breeding, into their own breeding cage. A few days or weeks later, when they have got accustomed to the cage and are singing to the hens, put the selected hens in with the cocks. The reason you follow this procedure, is to give the cocks time by themselves to recover from the strains endured in the small show cages and to establish the breeding cage as their territory. Additionally, the hens will tend to be more subdued and submissive when they are introduced into the cock's territory instead of the other way around. Less fighting will be the result.

By April, and May, you are well into your breeding season, and you know whether you are having poor, fair or good year. If you have done everything right since the previous breeding season, you will be getting rewarded with many successful nests, and enjoying great pleasures as a result. If you started with 3 to 4 cocks and 10 to 12 hens, all in excellent condition, it would be quite possible for you to raise 100 youngsters. Providing you are inbreeding, and providing your cock to hen ratio is favorable, you could have 3 to 4 good 4-bird teams to raise and train for the upcoming shows. The following are bits and pieces of information that you should keep in mind.

**Inbreeding:** There are three basic types of inbreeding. The first one is linebreeding, which calls for breeding father to daughter and mother to son. The second is breeding brother to half-sister, and sister to half-brother. The third is any combination of the other two.

**Blood Refreshment:** If you find that faults and hardiness are showing up in your birds' song, and you suspect that the decisions you made regards Inbreeding and selections are failing, then you may benefit by adding blood refreshment into your strain. As I have said before in previous articles, when you are carrying out blood refreshment, keep only the resulting female youngsters. Do not keep any of the young cocks. In addition, you must maintain your own strain pure at the same time, until you find a successful blood refresher.

**More Nourishing Food:** In order to get your birds into breeding condition, you must give them more nourishing food. This means that you enrich their diet by increasing their protein intake with egg food, increasing their intake of Vitamin E with hulled Sunflower Seed, and coating their regular seed with Wheat Germ Oil. These are in addition to their regular seed diet of Canary, Rape, Flax, and Niger/Inga. Feed small amounts of treat. Feed small amounts of treat seeds once or twice a week. Natural Bee Pollen is another great food use.

**Green Foods:** There are many green foods suitable for canaries. Some of these are leaf lettuce, romaine, chicory, spinach, broccoli florets, broccoli stems (halved), chickweed, curly endive, kale, cabbage, dandelion, and collard (variety of kale). Let me remind you of important precautions that must be taken. When you are gathering greens from garden or fields, ensure that fungicides, insecticides, or toxic chemicals have not been used in their cultivation, and always wash the greens really well before feeding them to your birds.

**When to Feed Green Foods:** The rule that is essential for your birds to receive washed, fresh greens throughout the year is a good one. However, there are two times that this rule should not be followed. When the hens are setting the eggs, the greens should be substantially reduced, and when you have babies in the nest, no green food whatsoever should be fed until the babies are pushing their excreta over the side of the nest. This is usually when they are 5-6 days old. Heed these two exceptions, or you will suffer losses.

**Sprouted Canola Rape Seed:** Although some fanciers use it, and some do not, I have never heard of any creditable evidence against the use of sprouted Rape Seed. Perhaps some fanciers are misled by false information that says sprouting rape reduces its nutrition. Actually, it is an excellent green food, as the nutrition is increased when sprouted into young plants. It helps the youngsters to start eating on their own, and parallels what he birds eat in your garden. You must remember though that it is essential you rinse it well each day to prevent it going sour, and it must always be kept in the fridge. You can also sprout a seed mixture as follows: 2 of Canary, 1/3 of Flax, 1/3 of Niger (Thistle, Inga), 4 of Rape (Canola), 2 of Sunflower (black), and 2 of Wheat. Just make enough to last several days. You can also grind it in a coffee mill, using care with the Rape, Niger and Flax, as their oil content may tend to gum up the works.

**Removing Eggs from the Nest:** Nested hens lay one egg per day, for as many as six or more days. However, the normal range is 3-5. It is ideal that all the babies be hatched on the same day. This is required so they will stand at the same height, and thus be equally fed. They will then have an equal chance of survival and growth. To attain this, remove the newly laid eggs from the nests each morning, and hold them in containers numbered to match the breeding cages. Do not use small containers half-full of seed; one of these seeds can get caught between your finger and the egg, popping a hole through the shell, thereby destroying the egg. This hole can be sealed with clear nail polish, and bring success. Check the number of eggs in each holding container every evening, and where there are three eggs being held, return them to the nest. Now, when the hen resets the nest to lay the fourth egg, she will stay there, and all four should hatch very close to the same time. If there is a fifth egg, it would probably hatch a day later. Successful breeding requires a good nutritional diet throughout the year, special conditioning during the two months prior to breeding, and extra supplementation during breeding.