Zeolite for Cleaner Lory Boxes

Lloyd Marshall, Northbridge, Western Australia

People who keep birds are always looking for better ways to do things and a solution to messy lorikeet and finch nestboxes has been found in Western Australia. Some birdkeepers use gravel on their aviary floors, with others preferring sand, dirt or a covering of straw.

A red mineral called zeolite has been crushed and used in fish tanks for a long time and when I bumped into Ron Gresswell at the Perth Garden Show and he told me about his experiences with the little red granules I realized they could be very useful for birds.

Ron, who keeps Gouldian Finches at his home in Albany, on Western Australia’s south coast, had overcome the problem of wet, messy nests by putting little bags containing zeolite under the nesting material in his nestboxes.

“Zeolite is a great absorbent material,” Ron said, “and it removes smells as well as moisture.”

“More importantly, it removes ammonia from the nests and ammonia can be harmful to young birds.”

Ron is the distribution manager for SuperSorb, the Western Australian company that mines zeolite and crushes it for use in fish tanks and as kitty litter.

“It is also used in cattle feed lots, where the odors can be overpowering,” Ron said, “as well as in poultry sheds.”

He said some cattle feed lot operators who mix zeolite with cattle feed had noticed less smell, firmer droppings, and increased weight when the beasts were sold.

“The same thing happened with poultry,” he said, “with reported weight gains of 10 per cent and additional eggshell thickness.”

Ron said it wasn’t a case of the mineral sitting inside the animals and adding weight.

“When they were dressed the gain was appreciable,” he said.

He said he has had no problems with his birds eating the zeolite.

“It’s a natural product with plenty of calcium, which is good for the birds,” he said.

When Ron told me about zeolite’s absorbent properties I gave it some thought and decided it could be the answer for the three-day Perth bird show in June this year, where we were going to have hundreds of parrots and finches on display in small cages.

Sand had been used in the cages in previous years, but it was not easy to handle and went rock hard when it got wet.

Ron agreed to supply enough zeolite to do all the cages and aviaries at the show and it worked really well, with no smells this year and a much easier job cleaning out the cages afterwards.

The show includes a sale section where people bring birds in their own boxes and leave them to be sold by the organizers.

This section in past years became very smelly after a day or two and the problem was overcome this year by placing containers of zeolite under the staging, where it absorbed the unpleasant odors.

I knew that breeders of lorikeets often ended up with very messy nests and it occurred to me that they could also benefit by using zeolite-filled pads under the nesting material.

I approached Frank Parker, who has bred many lorikeet species for a long time, to see if he would give the mineral-filled pads a trial run.

He said when he had lorikeet chicks in nestboxes they become a sloppy, disgusting mess.

“In the hot summer months I have taken chicks from sloppy nests that contained many large maggots,” he said, “and our lorikeet nestboxes are set up with 50-75mm of clean, fine wood shavings and all goes well until the chicks hatch.

“The Little Lorikeets’ log never became messy, instead it remained quite dry and when he sold the youngsters Frank was pleasantly surprised to find the nest still as dry as a bone.

“In the past I have sometimes found this same log.
with slop dripping from the bottom,” he said, “and I found that using zeolite resulted in a more hygienic environment for the chicks as well as saving me the time and effort of continually removing chicks, then cleaning and refilling nests.

“When there are many lorikeet boxes or logs containing chicks, the time taken to remove chicks and clean and refill the nests at least twice a week is considerable.”

He said using zeolite in the base of all lorikeet nests he felt would be of great benefit to the chicks and to the aviculturalist.

“Any product we can use that results in a better environment and also saves us time I feel is beneficial,” Frank said.

After Frank’s experience I tried zeolite on the floors of some of my finch and small parrot aviaries and found it to be very good and really easy to keep clean.

It’s much easier to remove because, unlike sand, it moves smoothly when raked and doesn’t end up like cement when it gets wet.

Putting it in is also simple – it spreads much easier than sand and can be pushed around with no trouble.

Perth Cockatiel and lorikeet breeder Spencer Stewart does a lot of hand raising and uses zeolite in the bottom of ice cream containers where he keeps his chicks.

“I found it really useful,” Spencer said, “because when it gets dirty you just take it out, rinse it off with hot water, let it dry and put it back, which definitely beats paying for all the paper towels I used to use.”

He said all his birds have zeolite in the bottom of their cages because it cuts down the smell.

“This is particularly the case with the lorikeets,” he said, “where they spray droppings everywhere and the mineral absorbs it and removes the odors.”

**OZINFO**
More information on SuperSorb zeolite, together with stockist details, can be obtained from Ron Gresswell on 08 9842 1955, fax 08 9842 1644, email ron@albanyis.com.au

**UKINFO**
More information on SuperSorb zeolite, together with stockist details, can be obtained from Mark Baty at Euremica Environmental Limited on 012 8720 4020, email markbaty@euremica.com

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