My friends know how much I love lories. I can’t resist a new one that comes available if there is any way I can manage to get it. It’s true, they are a lot of trouble compared to the seed-eaters, but I, for one, think they are worth it. I have a nice collection of them, I spend a lot of time with them, and I enjoy them more than any other birds I have owned.

My lories have always been healthy and hardy and I have bred them for several years with no problems. I have studied them carefully and put together a nectar formula I thought best for them and they have thrived on it. As I get new ideas, though, I change things and last year I made my first fatal mistake: I decided they needed more protein and began to use a lot of monkey chow, soaking the biscuits in the bowls of nectar. They loved it and I was happy I had solved the protein problem.

You can imagine my horror when I came out one morning in mid-December to find two of my adult birds dead - well-fleshed birds that had shown no symptoms or signs of problems of any sort. I called my vet and rushed the birds to the state diagnostic laboratory for a post-mortem. We concluded it must be a toxin of some sort since the birds were not in the same areas of my aviaries and were in such good condition.

Some of my collection are kept at my plant nursery a half-hour drive from my home. The next day I was really distressed to find one of my recently weaned hand-fed babies dead and the next day another one, both at the nursery. These were fat, healthy babies that had been playing the day before. Another of my adults at home is very ill and not eating. At this point, panic sets in and I begin many telephone conferences with my vet and other lory people.

Since the only thing my two separated collections had in common was their food, I rushed that to the lab for diagnosis and two days later got the answer: the monkey chow was loaded with Salmonella. By soaking the biscuits in the nectar I had set up a rich culture medium that was ideal for rapid growth of this deadly bacterium. By this time, I had lost another breeding lory and others had stopped eating.

The next fatal mistake occurred when my vet recommended Furacin as treatment. I knew it was potent but at this point I figured I needed something fast. Fatal mistake number three came next when we decided to medicate the nectar since the lories drink little water. We decided on a dosage of one teaspoon per
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gallon and I proceeded to give it to them. I medicated the collection at the nursery on Friday evening before I left and called the next morning to ask how they were before I gave it to my major collection of breeders at home. I was told they were fine but I neglected to ask whether they had drunk the nectar. They hadn't.

Thinking everything was fine, I proceeded to medicate the morning nectar for my whole collection. They refused to drink it after one taste. I decided to give them nothing else so they had to drink enough of it.

That afternoon the nightmare really began. The first to go down was a black lory male at the nursery who started to scream loudly, fell from the perch and went into writhing convulsions, screaming all the time. I rushed him to the sick room, he became unconscious and I concluded he was dead. Half an hour later a black-capped male went through the exact same procedure. When I arrived in the sick room with him, however, I found the black up on the perch. They would convulse for minutes at a time, scream loudly, then recover. If I touched the cage or cage near, they began convulsing again.

When I arrived home I discovered that most of the collection still had not eaten much of the nectar. Now I'm really worried so I give them apple and more medicated nectar. The next morning, a cool Sunday I will never forget, I began my feeding routine and found they had eaten about half the nectar. I was horrified twenty minutes later to hear a chattering lory begin to scream and to see her fall from the perch in convulsions. What was going on? I carried her to the kitchen to be warmed and she quickly recovered but within minutes I hear the now familiar screaming begin again. This time it's a yellow streaked and I catch her in the net before she hits the ground. Already a dusky is starting the same screaming and convulsing. I had a stack of new nest boxes in the feed room, waiting to be hung, so I quickly began placing convulsing lories in them to go to the kitchen. The next hour was hell as my wife, Peg, and I tried to prevent affected birds from hitting the ground as they began the screaming. To see our rare and beautiful favorites go into shock one at a time was a traumatic experience, to put it mildly.

I hurriedly placed a call to Ron Johnson at Metrozoo and told him what was happening. He confirmed my worst fears, that Furacin is toxic to lories and suggested I try to get Susan Club who had some experience with it. Lucki-
ly, I reached her and she helpfully told me to get them warm, try to get them to eat something and that was the best I could do.

Lories are still falling outside and I'm not quite sure what to do next. I call friends Ann and Don Hurst who come running with extra extension cords and heat lamps and lots of concern and sympathy. We hurriedly set up an emergency hospital room in a storage shed for sixteen very sick lories. The reactions of the survivors were strange — convulsions of the worst kind would begin with the slightest disturbance, so that even feeding them was a problem. Some would even become totally unconscious so you would think they were surely dead this time. Within minutes they would recover and begin to eat immediately as though nothing was wrong. All seemed ravenously hungry and ate everything we gave them.

The final toll: nine dead and ten more showing the severe symptoms of convulsing. These ten have now recovered completely and show no signs of problems. We don't know, of course, if any permanent damage has been done but all of them were part of our breeding collection and we hope not.

I summarize with the following advice to lory lovers:

1. Be careful with the ingredients of your nectar and with letting the nectar stand for long periods in warm weather. Remember that you have there a rich culture medium that allows bacteria to multiply at unbelievable rates. Make your nectar under the cleanest conditions possible and be sure every dish is scrubbed with hot water and/or clorox solution before use.

2. Double check every medication before you give it to your birds. Lories seem to be different from most birds in their reactions so be sure the prescription is safe for lories. Obviously, never give Furacin to lories.

3. Be careful about medicating the nectar. They drink much more nectar than water so the dosage is not the same. (It seems like common sense now, after my mistake.)

4. Help form an active lory society so we can share our experiences and publicize the idiosyncrasies and special requirements of these wonderful birds.

I would rather be writing about my breeding success with lories or some rare species I have just acquired than the trauma I have just described. If I can save just one lory lover from experiencing the same problem, however, the time will have been well spent.