years that I have bred the Siskins I have found that many of them retain this ancestral survival behavior in captivity.

These colorful little birds from the Fringillidae family are in such great demand all over the world that the Venezuelan government, fearful of its complete extinction, which is a very real danger by the way, has set very high fines and jail terms for those caught attempting to trap Red Siskins, or for that matter even if one is found in your possession. Only by a hard to come by special permit are a very few breeders permitted to work with them in an attempt to preserve the species. And yet it was with great sadness that on a recent trip to Europe I witnessed a bird dealer there with 30-40 newly acquired birds from South America and he had no real idea of how to feed and care for them and was only giving them thistle (niger) and water. I seriously doubt if a single bird survived.

Contrary to what many Red Siskin keepers believe, the Red Siskin, if it is taught to, will eat a balanced seed diet which contains a high percentage of carbohydrates. The ideal diet is one consisting of: 25% canary; 25% thistle; 25% Panicum (german millet, also called small milch); 5% flax; 5% hemp; 5% lettuce and 10% steel cut oats. Several of the advertisers in this magazine carry a good siskin mix. All year round I soak sprayed millet, using one stem for every 5 birds, greens such as watercress, dandelion, chicory, cucumbers, oranges, etc. are fed daily. Some breeders like to use live food such as meal worms. I use egg yolk, cooked 20 minutes at a slow boil (use the yolk only, never the white) as my source of animal protein supplement and I use it only when I am breeding, I never use more than 1/2 teaspoon egg yolk per
bird.

When breeding I have tried many different nestling foods, they seem to have a preference in this order: seed mixed with a little bit of Protein-25 (or any commercial nestling food); chopped meal worms (I haven't had much luck with these); moistened egg biscuits. All of these are fed in addition to the regular seed of course and with tremendous amounts of greens, which they dearly love.

One good way to get your siskins to eat other seeds when he is used to thistle is to pull a little trick on him at feeding time. What I do is to remove the seed cup as if I were intending to fill it with fresh seed mixture. I blow away the husks and add a tiny bit of fresh seed, shaking the cup to redistribute the seeds and I return the cup to the cage. The Siskin is then forced to eat all the seeds instead of just eating those that are his favorite and ignoring the rest, since he counts on you replenishing his supply daily. Always be careful to change him over slowly so as not to starve a particularly stubborn bird.

The Red Siskin has a tremendous vitality and shows it by his vigorous reproduction and it is very common to see an 8 or 9 year old Siskin breeding true or hybridizing with canaries! The Red Siskin male will hybridize at almost any time with the canary, the best time to breed siskin to siskin is in April or in very warm, humid weather. February and March are best for Siskin-Canary hybridizing. The Siskin is a very strong bird and has a life span approximately twice that of the canary, 10 years not being unusual at all and I have seen and owned many 11 and 12 year old Siskins.

The Black Hooded Red Siskin has a deep red colored body with a head hood of coal black. The wings having a horizontal pattern break which is the same color as the body. The under feathers are grayish black. The color pattern is fabulous to look at, and well and properly cared for the texture is so sleek and glossy. The female carries the dimorphic factor for the species, she is of the same pattern but grey colored. As a matter of fact I own one that has mutated off to white just like a dimorphic canary.

I hope with luck to own some pure white dimorphic Red Siskin females in a few years.

The Red Siskin has been used in many diverse breeding programs, one of the most popular is breeding Red Siskin to female canary, the reds having the gift of producing a F1 generation that is fertile, not an easy achievement, you must admit. However, some of the F1's that have been tried in their first breeding season were not fertile, but did become fertile in their second or third year. In hybridizing I would recommend using a large female that carries the red genes, such as the red factor and either lipochromic clear (clear dimorphic is best) or melanic brown or bronze (also dimorphic). Remember the dimorphic and the red genes (orange ground color) was inherited by these canaries from the siskins! You have a much greater chance of having more fertile F1's and this breeding will produce very fine looking progeny.

Now a days there are quite a few dedicated breeders, breeding the Red Siskin true. It isn't so difficult but it takes lots of attention and patience. The Siskin female acts up and behaves very similarly to the canary hen. They both make the same type of nest. The siskin lays a clutch of eggs, usually 4 eggs, laying one every day for 4 days. She sits her nest for 12-13 days, however heres where your trouble begins. Too much noise and she may decide that she will not sit on that clutch. Yet next to her may be another Siskin female who won't mind at all. I know so many of these stories that I could fill pages with them. But suffice to say that the female Siskin is a good but temperamental breeder. So all this points out the unpredictability, yet the average breeding Siskin is high, not as high as canaries, but you must remember that a female Siskin, 7 years old may still produce you beautiful, healthy babies. With Red Siskins it is best to let Mother Nature decide when she is ready to breed.

Many years ago while I was judging a color bred show in New Jersey, Mr. Neil Rombardo introduced me to an old time breeder (his name unfortunately escapes my memory at this moment) who had successfully bred Red Siskin to Red Siskin for many years and had decided to breed his F1 cross (Red Siskin to Canary) back to the Red Siskin females and pursue a larger siskin, since the red factor gene had already been accomplished in the canary. By the way, this story was verified by many long time breeders from the area. Anyway, this old timer told me that he had produced a few babies the first year and one of those babies (an F1 cross) was bred back to its mother and this breeding was so successful that he bred quite a few F1's back to Red Siskin females, the resulting third generation looked perfectly like a red siskin only about 50% larger in size. He proceeded to tell me that when he attempted to sell these third generation Siskin-Canary crosses the reactions of many of the prospective purchasers was somewhat less than tactful, and many stated that they continued on page 38
NEWCASTLE DISEASE/FEB. '77
continued from page 23

lance will continue.
July 27, 1977
Total number of premises involved in Virginia and California outbreaks was 252, with about 13,400 birds in 23 States. Indemnities for both outbreaks amounted to about $981,700. Total cost of the Virginia and California outbreaks was approximately $1,500,000.

Some day the complete story may be written and it may become a part of the public record. Only then will we really have The End of the Story. It will be the end of the story for the February 1977 Outbreak. The Newcastle story will go on and we will be devastated again and again. That is, unless you and I stop the smuggling. Yes, You and I, not the government. We are the ones who are the customers for the smugglers. They sell us psittacosis and we buy it. They sell us Pacheco’s Parrot Disease and we buy it. They sell us inclusion body viruses and we buy it. They sell us Exotic Newcastle and we buy it. We get a good deal though. Sometimes we even save up to $50.00.

BLACK HOODED RED SISKIN
continued from page 33
wanted to work with pure Red Siskins or only Red Siskin-Canary f1's. So in a fit of pique the old timer threw open the cage doors and released all the third generation Siskin-Canary crosses. Sadly they are now lost forever to the fancy and such a pity that these birds could not have been used as a foundation to continue the work and fix the strain for posterity.

I would very much appreciate hearing from anyone who is working on similar projects. After all we once upon a time did not have a white canary, nor Frills, nor Norwich, recessive and sex linked. All of them came from the Serinus Canarius from the passerine of the Fringillidae family, an inhabitant of an African island. So please folks if you have f2 crosses (female) don’t discard or discount them without test mating them for fertility (if she lays eggs then she’s fertile so please work with her), lets give this fascinating possibility a chance of becoming an established reality.

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