The Littlest Siskin
The Story of Siskin with Band #333, Studbook T363

by Mary Cahow
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The pair arrived on a blustery February Sunday afternoon amid some confusion and turmoil. Opening the small cardboard box revealed two Red Siskins in sad shape: overgrown beaks, spiraled toenails, yellow plumage. They were both so weak they couldn’t fly to the top of the small double-breeder I had prepared for them — the last spare cage I had on such short notice. The hen was blind in one eye, and called with a gravelly hoarse voice followed by loud wheezing.

I quickly recognized the urgency of the situation and went into gear. Out came the clippers, Ivermectin, Batryl and Gatorade. Supplemental heat, fresh greens and goodies and plentiful seed choices filled their new home. Over the course of the next couple weeks, their strength came back, and their fecal smears were negative for TB. However, the Batryl and Ivermectin did not seem to treat the hen’s wheezing, and I found it was to be a chronic condition for all the time I had her.

The male was named “Cimarron” which is Spanish for “wild” and the hen “Esperanza,” Spanish for “hope.” Their bleak condition upon arrival in Stevens Point is not unlike the tenuous status of siskins in the wild today. The symbolic reference in their names reflects my heartfelt desire for the pair as well as for all of our siskins.

Esperanza was five years old according to her band, but had never bred. Cimarron was three years. They got along reasonably well together, but I was concerned whether Esperanza could fend off Cimarron’s growing aggressiveness as he responded to the bright lights and extended day length. My fears were laid to rest when just five and one-half weeks after arrival, Esperanza had thrown all the sunflower seeds from her treat cup and nestled in it, looking at me as if to say, “Hurry up and get a nest basket in here!”

Of course, one basket was not enough — this siskin had to have options. She took her nest building quite seriously, all the while putting Cimarron in his place without any outward signs of problems other than her chronic wheezing.

From February to June, Cimarron and Esperanza attempted three differ-
Little Siskin "Omega" was fed with a fine artist's paint brush, but soon advanced to a 3 cc syringe.

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