

# Questions and Answers

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Greetings Birdpeople. It is the winter season and this poses special hardships on those of us who maintain our birds in the out of doors. While a number of articles have been written on how to make the best of this situation, I would like to give just a couple reminders. First, a draft-free location is very important. Birds can keep very warm if there is protection for them. Secondly, make sure that they are dry. Wetness plus a draft is sure death. Now on to the letters.

QUESTION: I am writing to you in the hope you can advise me concerning a problem with my cockatiel. He is very bad. I let him out of his cage nearly every day for at least two hours. During this time he has complete freedom of my apartment. But whenever I go to return him to his cage he literally attacks me and then tries to escape. I frequently have to capture him with a net. I am scared I will get angry and hurt him, since his attacks make me angry and hurt my feelings (these bird creatures are nothing like dogs). I've had him for a year. He talks and is very tame. But what can I do about his meanness? Should I clip his wings? I'm not sure how to hold him if I decide to clip his wings. JT, Maryland.

ANSWER: You say your cockatiel is tame. Does it stay on your hand? If it does not do so when outside the cage it can't be defined as tame. The bird enjoys its freedom. It appears that the time of capture to put back in the cage causes fear for the bird. Try capturing the bird with the net for a while. Then learn to hold the bird so that it is not able to bite.

The best way is to have the bird work its way to the bottom of the net. Then reach in and place your second and third fingers on each side of the neck. With the thumb and the rest of your fingers take hold of the body. Then move your head fingers and body fingers apart slightly extending the neck. In this way the head is immobilized and the bird can't bite. It takes some practice to learn this and you will probably get bit once or twice till you learn how. (And the bite hurts, I know!)

Remember that the bird is not mean, just scared. With some patience and constant handling you should get him to behave better. Also, never retaliate if you get bit for this will only make things worse.

As to clipping the wings. This is a two person job unless you really know how. Have one person hold the bird as described above and then you cut the primaries about one inch beyond the point where they attach to the wing. Cutting the feathers causes no pain to the bird.

QUESTION: I have a few suspended flight cages 8x4x4 and 8x6x4 and am wondering how other breeders provide shelters for these types of cages. Also, I would like to paint the wire black to provide a better view of these birds. Is there any problem with painting the wire? Also, what would be a good way to anchor the cages (they are on pipe legs)? There are high winds in my area. S. Lee, California

ANSWER: First let me comment on suspended cages. I first saw them in the

midwest used for raising small finches. I thought they were ugly. No plants, no dirt to walk on, so unnatural. Now this is the only kind of cage I will build for everything except game birds. Why? To confine a bird over its droppings is to court all sorts of disease. To have the droppings go through a wire grid is to provide a dry and almost germ and parasite-free environment. I believe this method of raising birds will lead to greater success. As to how it looks, the sight of healthy, breeding birds far outweighs any love for dirt at the bottom of a cage. And if you like the natural look, plant vines and shrubs around the cage. The birds will like it and so will you.

What I do to protect my cages is to make an edging of 2x4 boards around the area I want to protect. Then with bolts and wing-nuts I attach corrugated fiberglass panels. I use a rubber washer to provide a cushion between the bolt and the fiberglass. This prevents cracking and allows for easy removal in the summertime when more ventilation is needed. I use clear greenhouse fiberglass as it will last for years and allows all the sun's rays to come in contact with the bird.

An emergency quick fix would be to cover the cage with clear plastic (4 or 6 mils) and secure it with fiber tape much like you would wrap a Christmas present. In any event, when you cover the cage, be sure to allow some ventilation or the birds will cook on a warm day.

As to paint. Any lead-free paint should be okay. Latex paint is probably the safest. To fasten the cage to the

frame you can use screw clamps used to attach hoses to metal fittings. Just wrap the clamp around the wire and the pipe frame and clamp tight. Also available at the hardware store are U-bolts which are used to attach pipes to walls. These will work nicely.

**QUESTION:** I would like to know the feasibility of housing mitred conures outdoors, year-round, in a climate similar to that of Connecticut, where our January mean average is 28 degrees. I have a flight 12 ft. long and 4 ft. wide by 8 ft. high that can be affixed with thermopane glass on the outside of the wire. The glass, along with a solid roof, would protect them from wind, rain, ice, etc., but not from low temperatures.

My problem is one that many of us in temperate areas have. Our "warm" season is too short to move birds outside for breeding, as by the time they settle into their new surroundings sufficiently to become interested in nesting, we don't have enough season left. I have had pairs actively mating in February in their winter quarters (which are shared by several other birds due to lack of indoor space), when it is far too cold to move them out into

separate flights. When we do move them out in late April, all interest in mating stops.  
BB, Connecticut.

**ANSWER:** In my opinion, your cage conditions seem adequate for keeping birds outside. All I would add is some sort of small overhang the birds can crawl into where the body heat can be trapped somewhat. I would also put a 100 watt bulb which is painted black in this space. Thus, if the birds need to get warmer, they can move next to the bulb. The black paint will not mess up their photoperiodism. I would also have a nestbox available all the time. My birds in winter use it as a sleeping area in our winters which can get below 30° at night. This will also keep them from getting cold. Birds need to be acclimated to this type of cold so set them out in the spring and as the fall cool weather comes along they will adjust. Even though we may keep tropical birds, these birds have a remarkable temperature tolerance and will adapt quite nicely to rather cold temperatures.

**QUESTION:** My cockatiels have been laying eggs since March. I don't have

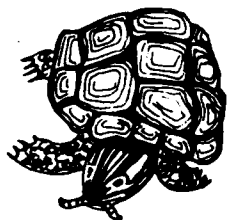
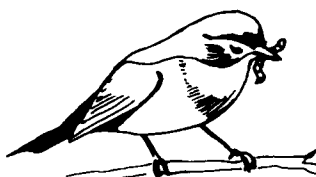
even one chick to show for it. One hen laid over 16 eggs, 13 of which were fertile. None hatched. (Next is described a very adequate care and food regimen.)  
FL, Ohio

**ANSWER:** To have so many eggs and have nothing hatch is indeed truly sad. What appears to be happening here is that your flock has some sort of infection which is getting into the eggs. How, I cannot be sure. There are two possible ways. First, through the egg shell. This is somewhat unlikely as the pores in the shell are smaller than bacteria. The second is that the eggs are being contaminated before the shell is formed. Remember that birds have a cloaca which is a common pathway for both waste material and for the oviduct. I would suggest that you take a few eggs to your vet and have a bacterial culture done. Then ask for his recommended treatment. I have heard of this happening to others and once on antibiotics the problem went away. Let me know how things work out so I can share with the readers.

Hope this column is helpful. Let me hear from you if there is anything that I can help you with. ●

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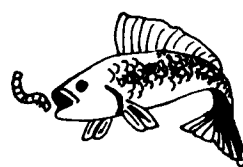
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