



Purchasing new stock By Rosemary Low

When buying new stock, especially young birds, it is advisable to purchase directly from the breeder. On the premises of a shop or a dealer, birds arrive from various sources, increasing the risk of disease transmission. This is especially the case with young birds because their immune system is not fully functional.

This important point is often overlooked, resulting in deaths which cause extreme disappointment and often bewilderment to the purchaser, who has no idea why the bird died. It might look well, but the stress of moving it triggers perhaps a low-grade infection or a virus, resulting in a fatality. Furthermore, a new bird could pass on a virus to existing stock, resulting in devastating losses. Make enquiries through local bird clubs, or scan advertisements, to find a breeder.

Young birds are at their most vulnerable during the first few days in their new home, especially if they have just been removed from their parents' aviary. Losses can occur in insensitive hands. Great care needs to be taken with small birds acquired from large selling events (such as Stafford) because they have probably been in a small cage in unfamiliar surroundings for a day or more, possibly in a draught or having experienced fluctuating temperatures over a short period.

Here are a few do's and don'ts to smooth the transition period.

Don't turn a new bird out into an aviary if there are less than about five hours of daylight remaining unless it can be placed in an enclosed shelter. It needs to feed and to find a safe perching place for the night. Keep it in a cage, perhaps for a couple of days if it has experienced a long journey. You can then observe it closely and find out on what it is feeding.

Don't assume that it is eating hard foods just because the seller told you this. Many breeders take young birds off soft foods (soaked seeds, egg food, etc) much too early, resulting in their death.

Don't keep a young bird out of sight of its own species. It has probably never been away from its family before and needs the comfort of seeing its own kind close by.

Don't EVER immediately place it in the same accommodation as an intended mate. Place it in the adjoining cage or aviary. In a new location it is at a psychological disadvantage, making it vulnerable to attack. After a few days of close observation place the two birds together in an aviary that is neutral territory. If this is not possible, place your bird in the aviary of the new one, assuming you are satisfied that it is healthy. The correct procedure is actually to quarantine the new bird for five weeks or so in an isolated place. However, assuming that you have been careful in your choice of seller, and you are confident that the new bird is healthy, isolating a young bird would be stressful because being alone could cause it to become depressed. If there is more than one newcomer, this is not a problem.

Do ask the seller on what it has been fed, where the food containers were placed and what sort were used. Some birds could refuse to feed out of unfamiliar containers.

Do ask the seller for a sample of its food, if it needs a specialist diet such as those for softbills or lorries. Do try to learn from the seller about dietary items of which you are unaware.

Do make a gradual transition from this food to your diet.

Do observe a new bird very carefully. If the species is an aggressive one, use a camera and monitor to watch the behaviour when the two birds are introduced and subsequently for some days or weeks.

Do remember to make a note of the bird's ring number or microchip number. If the latter is not on the paperwork, you will need the help of a vet or someone with a scanner to read the microchip number. If your bird is lost or stolen you will be unable to retrieve it without this information. Keep these records, sexing certificate or hatch certificate, in a safe place.

Making up new pairs

Many would-be breeders believe that buying two adult birds to make up a pair is a short-cut to breeding success. However, creating a pair from adult birds, which might previously have been paired up, is often very difficult or not successful. Pairing up young birds is usually easy, especially if they are paired up as soon as they are removed from their parents. Breeders tend to be in a hurry to take them out but unless aggression between adults and young occurs, it is advisable to leave them as long as possible.

These days, when responsible breeders recognise the difficulty in finding suitable homes for parrots, especially the larger species, there is no reason (except greed) to remove the young quickly so that the parents might nest again. The very best breeding birds are perhaps those which have remained with their parents for long enough to help rear the next nest of young!