

NZ Federation Clubs' Newsletter

March 2012



THE NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF BIRD CLUBS (INC.)
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With the show season only just around the corner, now is a good time to look over your show cages and make some minor repairs or paint touch ups. Currently I have my birds out in their outside aviaries enjoying a bit of freedom, plenty of bathing while they are still in the moult and hopefully getting fit. I'm offering plenty of greens using rareke, chickweed, dandelion, watercress, broccoli, as well as soft food and the occasional cob of corn for a treat. Some of you, already ahead of the game, will be in show training mode with training show cages hanging in your bird rooms while others, like myself, will be sprucing up their breeding units in readiness for the show team.

I hope you enjoy getting around the shows in 2012, that you have some successes but more importantly you have the opportunity to catch up with fellow competitors and friends.

A number of clubs will be celebrating significant anniversary shows in 2012, Palmerston North Bird Club 80th, Poverty Bay Bird Club 80th, Rotorua Bird Club 50th, Southland Bird Club 50th and North Otago Bird Fanciers Club 50th. Hope your shows prove to be a great success!

Do you have any news or photos from your club which you would like to share with other clubs around the country? Please email silk.family@paradise.net.nz with any items of interest that you would like included in the newsletter.

Your Federation Management Committee is always keen to hear from members about any issues or concerns. A reminder again of who your club's representative is:

Don Birch – Whakatane, Piako, Poverty Bay, Auckland, Hastings, Hawke's Bay, Taranua

Gerald Dolan – Rotorua, Palmerston North, Stratford, Nth Taranaki, Levin

Steve Parry – Southland, Huntly, South Auckland, North Shore

John Peck – Ashburton, Dunedin, North Otago, Timaru, South Otago

John Perry – Nelson, Christchurch, Tauranga, West Coast, Northland

Stephen Silk – Hamilton, Hutt Valley, Upper Hutt, Wellington and Porirua, Kapiti, Wairarapa, Te Awamutu

Remits for Federation AGM

A reminder that remits must be in the hands of the Federation Secretary by 31st May, including rationale and signed by your club's President and Secretary.

In this month's newsletter we feature an article written by our most southern Federation Management Committee member, Steve Parry, who is serving his first term. Steve discusses the perennial dilemma of how we can attract and retain new club members. His thoughts certainly resonated with my daughter!

Also included is an article sent to me from the fascinating finch website about "Do Finches need Grit? To finish I've included a couple of paragraphs describing a summer project I took on to keep cats inside my back yard and not out, a cat proof fence!

Stephen

Attracting and retaining new members – Steve Parry

A constant refrain I hear from many around the traps is the need to attract new and younger members. With a furrowed brow, a number of seasoned fanciers have told me the Clubs are struggling and the average age of members is approaching eligibility to draw a pension.

While I don't doubt that is true, I think we need to be realistic about the issue. The first point to emphasise is that young people in the modern era tend to be more individualistic and less inclined to join an organisation for their recreation or hobby. There are a host of sporting clubs and special interest organisations suffering from this phenomenon. It is not endemic to Bird Clubs.

Secondly young people are "wired up" through social media forums such as Facebook and therefore traditional means of attraction and capture are unlikely to have the success that they may have had in the past. This is one of the reasons why the Federation has made an update of its web site a key priority in the coming year. We want to be able to communicate with potential new members in a format that they are comfortable with and readily understand.

Thirdly, the attrition rate of junior members is likely to be high. Changes in personal circumstances due to entering the work force or moving away to attend tertiary study are likely to militate against continuing with the new found hobby. There is also the other "elephant in the room" which we need to take in our stride. Having an interest such as ours may not be "cool" for a few years where peer pressure and the opinion and approval of friends are critical.

But to me the vital criterion for us all to measure ultimate success is how we treat new members who come into the hobby. Frankly, I think we could do better.

It is not that we are unfriendly --just passionate, absorbed people. With this passion comes an assumption that a new member knows enough to get started. I often wonder whether we could be more helpful in inquiring about how a new person intends to set up their aviary and / or birdroom. Information on design options, materials and costings can be quite daunting, yet most seasoned fanciers assume that the new person irrespective of age has these matters sorted. On top of that there are breeding cages and show cages to acquire all of which can weigh heavily on a newcomer without a mentor or helpful senior member to guide them.

Then there is the delicate matter of acquiring birds to get a decent start. I think this is probably the most influential factor in retaining a new member. If we treat them well and they enjoy some initial success, these memories will resonate for a long time. Even if the person drifts away from the hobby as other priorities in life such as a growing family and work pressures take hold, it is my firm belief that the pleasure gained from breeding some nice birds and exhibiting them will be in the back of one's mind as the family grows and there is more time to be able to pursue an individual interest.

Conversely, selling less than quality birds with perhaps a track record of inconsistent parenting is a fast track to disillusionment and quick exit from the hobby.

Even if we do sell some quality birds to give a newcomer a start, I think we should try and keep in touch with that person and offer advice and encouragement. A wise word and a little bit of reassurance from the breeder who got you started can provide a real boost when things don't go according to plan. How many of us do this?

Finally I think we need to be more proactive in bringing new members together at either our Club meetings or shows. They need to feel a sense of belonging. Fostering contact among newer members so that they can

discuss similar problems without feeling awkward or inadequate is a good way for our new people to feel at ease.

So next time you see a new face at the Club meeting or the local show, take an interest and stop to chat. Five minutes of your time might be the tonic that ensures the new member maintains a life-long interest in our fantastic hobby. Because first impressions, have an enormous impact!



Do Finches Need Grit?

This is a question that comes up frequently and the simple answer is found in their environment. Grit is everywhere all of the time in both soluble and non-soluble forms (limestone, crustaceans, sand, etc).

Soluble calcium grit is the best calcium supplement you can offer your finches as it allows them to regulate their calcium intake naturally. Non-soluble grit allows your finches to consume grit when they feel the need for grit without consuming calcium. Parent birds use grit to help grind the food they are feeding nestlings in addition to providing

calcium for the nestlings' development and to replenish calcium in the hen's body lost through the production of eggs. Finches will also consume grit throughout the year to a lesser extent as a dietary supplement.

A good grit mix is about 90% soluble (egg shell, oyster shell), 5% non-soluble (sand), and 5% charcoal .

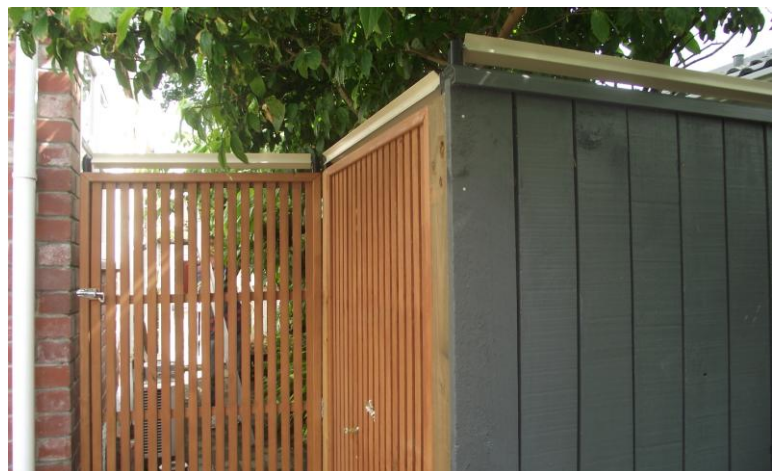
Fixed doses of calcium supplements in water or foods require a bird to eat or drink more or less of the food or water to regulate the amount of calcium they are getting. How much calcium does a hen that lays 4 eggs need vs. a hen that lays 6 eggs? A fixed supplement dose of calcium can't be right for both! And does she have to drink more water or eat more of a certain food to get it? This can lead to gorging on food or a calcium deficiency/overdose if you guess wrong on the water supplement dosage. Excess calcium accumulates in the liver and can lead to liver damage. Too little calcium in the diet can lead to a number of health problems. Calcium supplements must be free choice. Many foods have natural levels of calcium, so the answer is a high quality natural diet with a cup of soluble/non-soluble grit on the side to let the birds decide.

Grit is simply part of a well-balanced nutrition program for species that consume grit in the wild, and the science of finch nutrition has reached the point that offering grit is quite appropriate and in fact an optimum practice.

Installing the Oscillot Alikitty-Paddle system – Stephen Silk

So, do you want to keep your cats in, or keep neighbouring cats out? This summer I took on a summer project to cat proof our back yard.

No, the plan was not to keep cats away from our bird aviaries although this has proved to be a bonus, it was primarily done to appease my daughters who had lost 3 kittens over the last two years because of a cat's natural urge to roam and the fact that we live on a very busy road.



Rather than consigning themselves to never having another kitten my daughter Brittney decided to do some searching on the web and brought to my attention a solution she thought might work. Welcome to Oscillot AliKitty-Paddles.

Put simply, the Oscillot™ AliKitty-Paddle™ System consists of a series of four-bladed paddles which are mounted along fence lines between end brackets containing bearings that allow the paddles to spin freely when touched.

As soon as a cat trying to scale a fence places a paw on the Oscillot™ paddle, it acts like a step which then begins to spin. The cat cannot get traction and drops back harmlessly to the ground. The paddles are best installed on 1.8 metre high fences and gates.

We imported the paddles from Australia, the first time they had come to New Zealand although they have been installed in Canada. The company was easy to deal with and helped out with organizing the door-to-door freight.

The paddles were very easy to install, once I had the fences and gates in shape and the girls had all the painting done. We now have a tidy and stray cat free garden and a safe kitten.

Watch out for TV Documentary on "Keeping of Birds as Pets" - Graham Evans

TVNZ 7 (Free to Air) or Sky 77 will be showing the program titled "Animal Academy" on the 8th April starting at 7pm.

The Christchurch Bird Club was approached at the Christchurch Pet Expo by Whitebait TV about filming birds for a documentary.

The program was filmed at the aviaries of Graham and Anne Evans, from 1pm to 7:30pm. A freelance team of 3 arrived which included a director, a camera man and a sound technician. We have not seen the results yet but it should be interesting to watch.