

Daniel Lütolf: the breeding year

When and how many does Swiss maestro **DANIEL LÜTOLF** breed during each year? Fred Wright finds out at first hand

BUDGERIGARS

DURING my visit to Daniel's we talked about his months for breeding. He told me he starts in March and April and breeds through until November and December. In his own words: "I breed for eight months of the year and four months not."

When I visited in the first week in October last year, the breeding season was in full swing and there were lots of babies both in the nest-boxes and the flights. Understandably, he takes a break during the cold winter months in Switzerland.

I believe that Daniel is working with several local fanciers. He says he is moving eggs to fellow breeders and at times pairs for others to use. I am sure he is letting a couple of locals use a good cock or two during his own non-breeding months. I think it's this that enables him to not be breeding for those four months. Daniel describes it as an informal arrangement with a couple of mates.

Budgerigar breeders will know that it's really important that a budgie birdroom is not used for breeding for a while between breeding seasons. This enables a thorough clean-through and it breaks the cycle of any diseases.

How many does the master breeder breed every year? Daniel says he rings about 800 youngsters per year, sometimes more and sometimes a few less, but it's not far from 800 birds each year. For the number of breeding cages and the size of the stud – that sounds perfectly reasonable. He is a dedicated breeder who works full time with the birds and that's a good average for the number of breeding cages that he is using. I think he is getting the maximum output from his birds by constantly moving eggs to make sure they hatch and furthermore lots of chicks are fostered to other nest-boxes.

To me, the main facts about the number of birds he breeds and retains, are extremely interesting and it made loads of sense. If Daniel is breeding 800 youngsters, we need to conclude that approximately 400 are hens and 400 are



In full swing: autumn and it's all action in Daniel's breeding cages. All photos: Fred Wright

cocks. He says that he retains 120 young hens for breeding, so that means he is selling 280. To me, that says he is keeping the best 120 out of 400 hens for breeding. It's no wonder that he is moving his stud forward every year. If only we all could be doing that and working on those figures and percentages!

We did not talk specifically about the number of young cocks that he uses for each breeding season, but it can only be

presumed that he uses a similar number of cocks to the number of young hens he uses. Again this reinforces the idea that by being highly selective with his breeding team he is able to make big steps forward each year.

After breeding with the pairs for the first time, he makes the decisions about what he keeps for another breeding season and for showing. The others are sold. Everything gets sold after the

second breeding season – nothing is kept.

To me it all points to a very successful breeder. Daniel is breeding 800 a year and is only keeping 120 of the young hens he breeds. If the cocks and hens are of exceptional quality, they are kept for a second year of breeding – after that everything is sold.

Daniel is keeping the stud young and it's easy to see that breeding those high numbers and being highly selective he is able to take the stud forward. ■



Consultation: Daniel and Fred talk birds and breeding techniques in the birdroom



Meals on wheels: Daniel tops up dishes with provisions from his trusty trolley



Choices, choices: the standard array of food and drink that Daniel offers in a breeding cage

About the author

FRED WRIGHT has been around top-quality budgerigars since the mid-1960s. He has visited most of the top studs around the world over the years – and still keeps looking. He has judged in many different countries where good budgies are bred and exhibited, and has judged the BS Club Show at least five times, the first back in 1982. Fred has been a regular contributor to *Cage & Aviary Birds* for more than 30 years.

My two-day routine

How much softfood should you feed to your budgies, and how often? **TOM LEWIS** shares the recipes and routines that have worked so well for him during his long career as a breeder

BUDGERIGARS

I ALWAYS prepared my own softfood. The ingredients comprised two large hard boiled eggs (boiled for eight minutes) broccoli and carrot. This

was processed in a large domestic plastic bowl through an old fashioned clamp-on food mincer. I then sprinkled a heaped teaspoon (tsp) of kelp powder over the top, which was followed by a tsp of cod-liver oil (CLO).

The whole lot was then thoroughly mixed using a spoon. The kelp powder was obtained from a local health shop.

Kelp powder provides nutrients derived from the natural benefits of the sea, and the CLO offers Vitamin D which is possibly lacking in budgerigars that do not have access to outside flights. Both of the latter items were very inexpensive because they

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lasted for months.

Breeding pairs and birds up to 12 weeks of age flying in a 3m (10ft) young bird stock cage received softfood every day. There was also an interim small baby cage where self-feeding babies, fresh from the breeding

cage, could be monitored for a further two weeks to ensure that they were coping without their parents. They received softfood every day.

Birds in the flight received softfood every other day leading up to breeding and regularly at other times. Giving occasional softfood to birds in the flight gives them the advantage of the extra nutritional benefits

contained in the mix and, importantly, ensures that they have an appetite for it when they take on breeding duties.

Each preparation of softfood was sufficient for two days. The remainder was kept in the household refrigerator.

A budgie flight and (right) nursery cage. Softfood can benefit self-feeding babies, explains Tom

