

Ensuring The Health Of Budgie Chicks

How can I help my budgies' chicks survive?

Q: I've never bred birds before and hadn't planned on mine breeding, but two of my budgies have bred their first clutch. Two eggs hatched, but the chicks died shortly after hatching. I got the parents a nest box and gave them newspaper to tear up for their nest. Now they have started breeding again. How can I help these chicks survive and keep the parents in good health?

Linda S. Rubin explains:

Budgies are usually very good parents from the start, so there might have been two primary reasons why you lost the babies. One might be the nest environment. Did your nest have a concave nest block included? The block is concave in order to help keep the eggs together to allow the mother to incubate them more easily and more safely. At the same time, once chicks hatch out, the babies can be more easily kept together under the mother within the shallow of the concave.

Nest-box material can also play a major role. Offer clean, fresh, white pine shavings only, which help absorb the droppings from the chicks and keep the nest clean. Pine chips are too sharp and rough for budgie chicks, so make sure to provide shavings. Cedar chips contain a residue that can be toxic to young chicks that ingest them, and sawdust can get into the air sacs and cause respiratory distress. Add only enough pine shavings to help keep the nest clean without risking the budgies becoming buried and lost in the litter should they accidentally wonder off.

A second possibility is that you might not have provided any soft foods at the start of egg-laying to help boost nutrition to the forming egg, or when the parents were feeding the new babies. In the wild of Australia, budgies feed the soft, milky stage seeds during the rainy season. In captivity, we mimic that by providing them with soft foods.

My own longtime favorite is a corn/rice/bean diet, made with warmed frozen corn niblets, instant brown rice and long-cooked beans (lentils), which is made up in advance and stored several days in the refrigerator, warmed and served as needed. Alternatively, you can provide hard-boiled, mashed-up egg (boiled for at least 20 minutes to remove Salmonella bacteria), with grated carrot and pieces of whole-wheat bread added. You can also offer commercial breeding products for budgies from your distributor or retailer. Change any soft foods at least twice a day, and always provide as much as the parents and chicks will consume. Bear in mind, this amount will increase over time as the chicks grow.

Offer handfuls of fresh, crisp dark green leafy vegetables, such as carrots and tops, dandelion greens, kale, spinach, parsley, turnip tops, beet tops, Swiss chard, broccoli, etc. and other items if you wish (cooked yam or sweet potato and squash also have plenty of vitamin A). The parents will teach their babies to eat all these foods during weaning. Always wash all fresh produce thoroughly to remove pesticides before offering them to your birds.