

Baby Birds Born With Splayed Legs

What can be done if a baby bird's legs are born spread too wide apart?

Q: I have baby lovebirds that were born with their legs spread too wide apart. I have read that you should tie a string around their legs. Is that the correct treatment? If it is, what age would you begin at? I have tried using a wool string, but the bird always gets out of it no matter how tight I put it. Can you suggest something else that will hold better, or is there something on the market I can buy?

Margrethe Warden explains:

Splayed legs can be caused by one of several factors including dietary deficiencies, unsuitable nesting substrate, egg positioning and even congenital defects. There are a number of ways to correct this problem in a chick; however, if you have never worked on this problem before, consult with an avian veterinarian before attempting anything on your own.

The best time to start corrections is when the chick is very young, even as early as 10 days old. Once the chick grows up and the bones become firm, it could be too late. Be careful about using string or yarn to create a "hobble" because the fibers can come loose or the parents or the chick could chew at them. Loose pieces of string can be hazardous to nestlings. Some aviculturists use pipe cleaners, soft pieces of foam or sponge, soft plastic tubing or even first-aid tape. These are wrapped around the legs in a figure-8 to keep the legs in a normal position. If you're using foam (including Styrofoam) or sponge, cut a small strip of it and, using the width of the chick's body as a guide, cut two holes in it. Place one of the chick's legs through the hole, and this should hold the legs in a normal position. Since very young chicks grow quickly, the treatment might last up to two weeks, but could also be completed in a matter of days.