



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Bird of the Month

Hand rearing Quarrions

(*Nymphicus hollandicus*)

(also known as Cockatiels or Weiros)

(ASNSW Meeting – February 2013)

Michael Wolstenholme interviewed by Barry Wolstenholme

Graeme Phipps (ASNSW President) introduced the 'Bird of the Month' the Quarrion, thanking Michael and Barry for agreeing to share their experiences in hand-rearing these birds.

Barry: How did you first become involved with Quarrions?

Michael: Well firstly I liked the birds, they are an easy bird to house, they are acceptable to hand raise, I love the colour of the mutations, they make very good pets and they have a good lifespan of about 20 years.

Barry: How many years have you been hand raising Quarrions?

Michael: For about 12 years now.

Barry: Are Quarrions a colony bird or should they be housed in single pairs?

Michael: They are both actually. You can have them either way.

Barry: How are you housing your birds? The size of the aviary and numbers of pairs per aviary?

Michael: I have two main aviaries for Quarrion which are 2.5 metres long by 1.2 x 2.0 metres high and the other is 3.0 x 1.8 x 1.8 metres and I house four pairs of Quarrions in each aviary. One is for white faced mutations and the other is for normal faced mutations.

Barry: When do they breed?

Michael: They can breed all the year round but more frequently in the warmer months which is normal. At present they are going into moult so they have virtually stopped at the moment. It is a good time to clean them all out and get ready for the season ahead.

Barry: What is the size of their clutches?

Michael: I have had them lay up to six eggs per clutch and I have had six actually hatch. It just depends on the male I would imagine and that the incubation period is at just the right time.

Barry: **What is the incubation period for the eggs?**

Michael: Roughly about 21 days. About three weeks.

Barry: **What age are the young taken from the nest for hand rearing?**

Michael: I take them at about two weeks. At this stage they have got pin feathers and some of the feathers are just starting to open up. I do not take them beforehand unless the parents reject them.

Barry: **How are the chicks housed for hand rearing?**

Michael: The chicks are housed in a purpose built nursery inside a bird room that I have. The little nursery is 1.5 x 600 x 500 high with roosting perches and a complete wire top of ½ inch x ½ inch bird wire and it is very comfortable for about a half a dozen birds.

Barry: **What method do you use to feed the young?**

Michael: I only ever use a syringe needle. I use a syringe for my hand rearing as time is a factor and I can guarantee the quantity of the food per serving.

Barry: **What do you feed the young?**

Michael: I use RoudyBush Formula 3 Hand Rearing Mix which is an American product. I have found it a very good mix. I have tried some other ones, which are a lower grade mix, but I find that it comes nowhere near building the young birds up quick enough so I just keep to RoudyBush Formula 3.

Barry: **What is the ratio of water that you add to the mix and what sort of temperature do you feed it at?**

Michael: The younger the bird the more water that it needs. There is no doubt about it. I break it down to a very fluid mix when the bird is two weeks of age and later on I make the mix a bit more of a paste, a little bit more substantial. The mix is generally at room temperature when I administer it to the birds, and I always do this by putting the syringe needle (after it has been filled with the mix) on my face or on my hand just to check the temperature reading. I don't actually put a thermometer in it, I just check it by body temperature and that is generally very successful. The temperature is approximately the same as you would use for a human baby's bottle.

Barry: **How often do you feed the chicks?**

Michael: Only twice a day even when they are only two weeks of age. Only twice a day, morning and afternoon and they get 20ml per serving.

Barry: **How long do you have to hand rear the chicks for?**

Michael: It takes somewhere between six and eight weeks. I find that some chicks will take to the seed very quickly and others will just drag on and drag on and drag on. One bird in particular was still dragging on after about eight weeks. I have four that I am rearing at the moment and one in particular, a beautiful white face, it just doesn't want to get on the seed and stay on the seed, every second day I have to give him a good feed from the syringe just to keep his body weight up too.

Barry: **Generally at what stage do you reduce the hand rearing mix?**

Michael: As soon as I start to see the bird start cracking seed but just because they are cracking the seed doesn't mean that they are getting sufficient seed nutrients in their system because they might crack it or play with it and they don't swallow it. I have noticed that so I keep feeding them but I will keep reducing it back to one feed per day and that is in the evening once the birds have started cracking the seed.

Barry: **At what stage is a bird independent?**

Michael: A bird is actually fully independent when it is feeding on its own accord. I notice with my particular birds they will stand quite proud and tall on the perch, they will let their bodies brace up off their legs at a full stance, they are a confident bird, the body weight is looking good, eating on their own accord naturally and at this stage I won't release a bird until I observe it has been feeding independently for at least a week. If that is not the case and I let it go early the birds will stress and there is no doubt about if they are stressing you have to start again and put them back onto the RoudyBush diet again.

Barry: **What is your satisfaction in hand rearing Quarrions?**

Michael: I find they are a very easy bird to rear, free from complications, easy to train as a pet and they are not vicious birds, they are quite tame. Syringing them I find quite easy if you follow the guidelines with the crop needle, hold the bird's head in its neck area, two fingers, and you make sure the syringe enters down in the right side of the crop. If you get the wrong side you will get the trachea, but with Quarrions I generally find that they generally take that down and they get their 20ml or something like that.

Barry: **Once the birds are independent what is their diet?**

Michael: They like a lot of lettuce, we give them Cos lettuce, we give them endive, we give them chicory, we give them parrot pellets, corn, whole grain bread and seeding grasses and they will eat the whole lot it. Some of the birds like corn and others don't, but they all get it, some of them waste a bit of it, but I find in general that's their diet plus they get cuttlebone and they also get some shell grit.

Barry: **Thank you very much.**

Discussion/question time following the interview:

Michael: Barry also holds and breeds Quarrions and we have swapped young stock because what we are always trying to do is to breed brighter coloured birds and maintain good blood lines as well.

Graeme: It is a good practice.

Question: **Are you hand rearing them to keep them tame?**

Michael: Yes, to keep them tame. We hand rear them for the pet market. They are not an expensive bird and they are very popular. Where Budgies are the most popular, Quarrions are the bird up from that again. Quarrions are a little bit larger, they live longer, and it is a very clean bird. Its droppings are very small and very tight, they are not like Lorikeets, and as we said before, they have a longer life expectancy and they do become very good pets.

Graeme: Obviously you are going to be able to charge a premium for a hand reared bird?

Michael: Hand reared birds in the shops will sell for about \$160 or thereabouts. When you sell them to the dealer he is going to put his mark up on them so it could be less than that. I breed them because I want to breed them; I am always looking to get a different blood line and also trying to increase the colour strength and the colour variations. All of the birds we breed are all mutations, none of them are commons. I have bred one that is nearly black and it was a white face. It is unbelievable when you get them so dark, charcoal; they are truly a really dark charcoal.

Graeme: I am really grateful to you both for doing this, because again for the students, all they have got to do is go to the ASNSW website now and look at how you go about hand rearing Quarrions.

Michael: Once you have a bird out for a few days you can actually show the crop needle to the bird and it will grab it and swallow it. Then you just squeeze it; and when the bird doesn't want it and is weaning off it, it just backs it head away, it will back away and stay away from it and it doesn't want it. So you get an understanding of the bird's development and how a bird is reacting to wanting to be fed. When they first come off the rearing mix they lose just little bit of body weight because they haven't had all those nutrients that they have been getting from RoudyBush Formula 3 hand rearing mix. It's a very good product. So you keep an eye on them. You leave them for at least a week when they are eating on their own, and when you see that their body weight is starting to come back up then you know they are alright. If it doesn't, you will just go back and give them a couple of squirts every couple of days to keep the body weight up so that the bird doesn't lose any condition.

Question: A lot of people use a spoon because they say that the babies are tamer? Do you find that Michael?

Michael: No.

Question: Do you hand rear different species?

Michael: I used to. I have hand reared Lorikeets. I used to hand rear a lot of birds.

Question: Do you find that Lorikeets are tame using the syringe as well?

Michael: No. They don't like the syringe.

Graeme: No they don't.

Michael: If you hold them and get the syringe into them, you stress the bird. You do not ever, ever, syringe a Lorikeet. You have got to take the time to spoon feed them.

Question: I have hand reared Scarlets and Bourke's and with Scarlets if you use a syringe they are not tame when you are finished.

Michael: I think it is a lot to do with the handling. The nursery I have got I have the birds out at a certain stage and as I am trying to feed them they are walking up my arm. I am actually training the birds while I am feeding them. I don't just feed them and walk away. I stay with the birds and I let those birds get tame and walk up my arm.

Question: It is only twice a day that you are feeding them, it's not a lot of time, there is a definite difference in behaviour. There are not too many birds that you could feed twice a day and have tame.

Michael: When you walk past the nursery you can lift out a bird and pat it and put it back again. You are always with the birds. Their nursery is constructed so you can just lift the top up, it is all hinged up. This is for cleaning purposes as well. It's always clean. For hygiene purposes we put a bit of newspaper on the floor and pine shavings on top of that because they are absorbent. We are always on the ball with cleaning and they are always cleaned out, generally with a bit of bleach or something as well. So you are always keeping an eye on the birds, their eyes and their vent, making sure the birds are alright. We have found that over the years that we haven't had any trouble.

Comment: Students probably make the mix too hot. You see that a lot and it can burn them.

Michael: It is the same temperature that you would use for a baby's bottle.

Barry: I use my wrist. Michael uses his cheek. As long as it is warm on your wrist and not too hot that is fine.

Michael: If it is too hot it can come straight out the bird's neck. It will have a hole in its neck.

Question: It is only a thin layer of skin isn't it?

Michael: Yes it is only a thin layer of skin so it is very critical for it not to be too hot. If the syringe is too hot it is just going to burn the bird's throat all the way down. So you can imagine what that would be like.

Comment: It would kill the bird.

Barry: I always clean the syringe as well. From that bird to that bird to that bird. I always clean the syringe for each bird.

Question: What do you clean it in?

Barry: I just clean it in clean warm water from bird to bird. You don't need to disinfect or anything like that.

Graeme: Well they all have the same bugs.

Michael: Well yes. They don't all have the same parents. So that's what we do with that.

With the syringe, Barry usually puts it on his wrist but I just usually put it on my cheek and if it has just got a touch of warmth in it that is fine. But definitely not hot.

Comment: Lorikeets will have it hotter.

Michael: Yes with hand spoons it has got to be hotter but with the syringe you can actually dispense the syringe in one, two, three, four, five seconds. I have them standing up on their perch which is inside the nursery all looking at me and when I feed them they all stand up like soldiers all waiting for their turn and you know, even if they don't want it they just back their head off. They don't fly away, they just back their head away, and they are just backing off saying leave me alone I don't want to be fed. It is amazing what they do. Instead of taking off (if they are frightened they will generally take off, but their wings are clipped), but generally they will just sit there and cop it. You know they are all lined up, one at a time, and I just pick them up, the next, the next, the next, and they are happy.

Barry: I just point the syringe at it and they grab the syringe.

Question: When you say their right side, that's their right side?

Barry: You get the bird in your left hand and hold it by its cheek bones and once the crop and the throat is straight you get the syringe and you come across the bird that way so it is goes to the right side of the bird. I feel the head of the syringe with my thumb as it goes into crop. I feel it so you don't go too far. You feel it go down so you know you are in the right passage. Go in the opposite one and you will kill the bird. You will suffocate it.

Question: Have you used those flexible tubes?

Michael: No I just use the rigid ones. Just use the right size for the right species.

The discussion concluded at this point and Graeme Phipps thanked Michael and Barry Wolstenholme for sharing their experiences with Quarrions as bird of the month.

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