

PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Choosing a Formula

Although some homemade hand-feeding formulas have been used successfully, commercially formulated products, such as Harrison's Bird Foods Recovery or Juvenile formulas are consistently superior in nutritional content and are easy to prepare. Extra ingredients should not be added to these formulas unless recommended by an avian veterinarian.

Food Temperature

The food should be warmed to 101° - 104° F and the temperature measured with an accurate thermometer. If the food is too cold, the chick may not want to eat it. Heat the water using only a hot plate or coffee maker, then add it to the formula powder and cool water to achieve the ideal temperature. This should help prevent hot spots and vitamin degradation. If fed too hot, the food may burn the bird's crop. **Do not use** a microwave for heating the formula as it can result in hot spots and severe crop burns.

Watch Your Chick's Growth

It is important to feed young birds the optimum amount of food to stimulate growth. As a chick grows, so does its crop and crop capacity. Formula should be fed frequently when chicks are younger (unfeathered) to affect optimum growth. Underfeeding can lead to stunting syndrome where chicks simply stop growing. Underfed birds often exhibit unwanted behaviors such as aggression or screaming at maturity. With Harrison's formulas, overfeeding is rare; the crop should be filled each time it empties up until weaning begins.

Monitor Your Bird's Weight

Monitoring your bird's growth is the best way to evaluate your hand-feeding success. Keep records of your bird's weight on a daily basis. Chicks should be fed 10 -15% of their body weight each day. Get familiar with what is known about the species you are hand-feeding: published growth rates, normal developmental characteristics and behavior. At each feeding, observe the skin - which should be plump and pink - and the droppings, which should be soft and brownish from a formulated hand-feeding diet.

HEALTHY HAND-FEEDING CHECKLIST

- ✓ Ask the aviculturists about their preventive care program, including vaccinations and disease testing.
- ✓ Present chick for preliminary examination by an avian veterinarian.
- ✓ Early development: provide a dark, quiet environment that mimics a nest.
- ✓ Later development: house in transparent container to expose to family activity.
- ✓ Separate babies from different clutches.
- ✓ House babies away from household fumes (bleach, cigarette smoke, hair spray, perfumes, cleaning fluids, air fresheners and pesticides).
- ✓ Monitor environment for temperature and humidity.
- ✓ Make formula fresh at each feeding.
- ✓ Test formula water to make sure it is pure and uncontaminated.
- ✓ Use a sterile feeding tube or syringe for each bird and clean thoroughly after each use.
- ✓ Feel the crop before each feeding to see if residual formula remains.
- ✓ Make note of feeding response and skin tone at each feeding.
- ✓ Weigh chick daily and compare to published normal weights.
- ✓ Examine the vent of newly hatched chicks and monitor closely to make sure feces do not build up and block the digestive system.
- ✓ Check the color, consistency and volume of feces.
- ✓ Do not allow feces or hand-feeding formula to accumulate on the bird or enclosure.
- ✓ Change bedding at each feeding or when soiled.
- ✓ Contact an avian veterinarian with questions or concerns.



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HARRISON'S BIRD FOODS

TIPS FOR HAND-FEEDING CHICKS



BEFORE YOU START

Hand-feeding a psittacine chick is rewarding, but it does involve a major time commitment and some training. The current trend is for the breeder to hand-feed until the baby is fully weaned or at least requires less than two feedings per day.

Setting Up the Nursery

The nursery can be established in any temperature-controlled room that is separated from family activity. It must be free of cigarette smoke, cooking fumes, hair spray and other aerosols.

Proper Temperature and Humidity

The nursery must be kept warm until the bird grows enough feathers to regulate its own body temperature. The temperature should be 94°F for featherless birds, and gradually decreased to normal room temperature as full feathering occurs. The humidity for tropical species should be in excess of 50%.

Making a "Nest"

In the first few weeks of life, the chick is best housed in a dark, quiet environment that mimics a nest. An individual container with safe bedding material, such as paper towels, is preferred. In time, a plastic-covered wire mesh underfoot may be used to support the legs as the bird begins to stand. As it develops curiosity about the family's activities, the chick can be moved to a transparent enclosure. Housing clutch-mates together at this age encourages socialization. Fully feathered chicks are capable of flight and should be kept in secure enclosures.

What to Expect From Your Chick

Young birds may be uncoordinated and splay their legs when trying to walk. Until weaning, they sit on their hock joints, rather than up on their feet. Nestlings have relatively little muscle mass and a large, protuberant abdomen. As the bird ages, the muscle mass will increase. Normal nestlings have yellowish-pink skin with a supple, warm feel. The first feathers appear on the head, wings and tail, followed by feather emergence on the rest of the body.

The Crop

The crop is a sac-like enlargement of the esophagus at the base of the neck, where food is held after swallowing before it moves down the gastrointestinal tract. Located beside the esophagus is the trachea, which leads to the lungs.

HAND-FEEDING PROCEDURE

Feeding with a Syringe

Feeding with an irrigation syringe is probably the most universally successful technique. As one faces the bird, position the syringe to enter the oral cavity from the left side of the bird's beak and direct it toward the right side of the bird's neck. Deposit the food into the bird's mouth, and as it swallows, the normal feeding response closes off the trachea and prevents aspiration of the formula into the lungs. Taking the extra few minutes to allow actual "tasting" of the food with this method pays off with an accelerated weaning time.

Caution: A bird may inhale a small amount of formula if it is tired, if the feeder is inexperienced or takes too long to feed, or if the formula contains too much fluid. Such an event is a true emergency, and the immediate involvement of a veterinarian is a must.

Step 1

- Gently feel the crop to determine that it is almost entirely empty before feeding.

Step 2

- Mix fresh formula. Heat to approximately 109°F (check temperature).
- Fill a clean syringe and remove any excess air.
- Deliver formula into the back of the bird's mouth with gentle, steady pressure on the syringe plunger.

Step 3

- Feed the chick until the crop is full but not over-stuffed.
- Clean excess formula from the chick's beak, feathers and enclosure.



Scan QR to view:
Syringe-feeding a chick



Scan QR to view:
Spoon-feeding a chick

Normal Feeding Response

Hungry nestling birds display a feeding response that consists of rapid, thrusting head movements and bobbing up and down. These movements can be stimulated by touching the sides of the beak or pressing lightly under the jaw. While the bird is displaying this behavior, the glottis is closed and large amounts of food can be delivered quickly with less fear of passing food into the trachea.

The Daily Schedule

Chicks with their eyes opened should be fed 3 to 4 times daily, and birds with feathers emerging, 2 to 3 times daily. The crop should be filled to a "plump" capacity at each feeding (not over-stuffed) and allowed to become almost entirely empty before the next feeding.

MAINTAINING HEALTHY CONDITIONS

The standards for cleanliness in a nursery should be higher than you would maintain for yourself. Particular attention should be paid to the food, water supply, feeding and food preparation utensils, other birds in the nursery and the hand-feeder. A veterinary evaluation is recommended for every new chick.

If your bird becomes sick, you should first evaluate the nursery environment, your hygiene practices and feeding methods. Possibly one of the most overlooked factors in raising healthy psittacine chicks is providing them with ample rest periods in which they are not disturbed between feedings. If a young bird is not eating on its own and refuses to eat for two to three feedings in a row, it may have a medical problem that should be evaluated.

- Store opened packages of dry Harrison's formula in the original bag, sealed in the fridge or freezer.
- Mix the formula fresh before each feeding.
- Wash hands after each bird to avoid transmitting diseases.
- Use a separate syringe for each bird.
- Do not dip a syringe used to feed a bird back into the formula for a refill.
- Discard any leftover formula from a feeding.
- Thoroughly rinse/disinfectant from feeding implements to reduce the chick's exposure.
- Replace bedding frequently throughout the day.
- Wipe or wash the chick as necessary (a facial tissue bib prevents spills).