

Parrot Rearing

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At hatching time the egg(s) can be removed from the incubator when the chick has pipped internally into the air cell. The egg(s) should be placed into a hatcher at 37.0 C and 60% relative humidity. It may take up to 24 hours from the first external pip to hatch. There is no need to rush in and assist, as it may be fatal.

The chick should hatch cleanly with little blood. It may take approximately 4-8 hours for the chick to dry out.

Before feeding can commence wait until the chick has passed its first faecal. In the meantime lactated ringers or an electrolyte solution can be given via a syringe or eyedropper.

An ideal home is one that is easily cleaned or even better, disposable. The nest will need to be changed frequently, particularly as the chick gets bigger. The bigger the chick the bigger the mess! Plastic containers or cardboard boxes lined with paper towels or woodchips are ideal. It is best to start on soft tissue or cloth. Woodchips are often nibbled on when the chick is bigger and will only be a problem if eaten in large amounts. Crops can become impacted and this is determined if the crop is hard and doesn't empty.

Diet is important. Homemade diets are still widely used by some aviculturists. It is still possible to rear many parrot chicks but these diets are still only guesswork as far as nutritional value and proportions go.

A number of commercially prepared formulas are available. Well known products such as the American 'Kaytee' and the Australian 'Vetafarm' have research based facilities with scientists working full time hand rearing parrots using their formulas. The convenience factor of just adding water to powder is also a plus. When considering the work and costs involved in producing a chick why take the chance of using cheap rearing food.

The food should be watery during the first few days, and the consistency thickened once the chick is older. Initially a 50:50 boiled water:lactated ringers solution should be used to make the food.

Food should be heated to approximately 37.0C which is about the same temperature as regurgitated food.

When the chick is small using a syringe is the easiest way to administer food. Then spoon feeding, tube feeding or crop needles can be used. It is personal preference as to which technique is used.

Spoon-feeding is more natural, the chick is able to taste the food and the spoon is easy to clean and sterilise. However, feeding is slow, the food cools quickly and it is messy.

Crop needles and tube feeding is quick, less messy and difficult, sick or weak birds can be fed quickly with minimal stress. The major disadvantage is the possibility of food going into the lungs. Damage to the oesophagus or crop can occur when chick begs and pump for food. The tube may also come off and disappear into the crop. Chances of vomiting and choking are increased with this technique.

It may be necessary to prepare the chick for feeding – waking them up helps! Rubbing their beaks can stimulate them to beg.

The use of probiotics can prove beneficial. These are bacteria that occur as part of the normal gut flora. It can be added to the diet by mixing acidophilus yoghurt in with the food once a day. Commercial preparations are also available. Probiotics are particularly important if the chick is on antibiotics, as antibiotics kill off not only harmful bacteria but also the good gut flora necessary for digestion.

The size of the crop is a good indication of how much food to give. The crop should be soft to touch and never hard. The crop should always be empty or close to empty before each feed. There may be a problem if the crop is not emptying.

The chicks' weight and feeding response should be monitored daily. A good idea is to plot a growth chart as you go along to get an idea of progress. Overall growth rate is a general increase until weaning. Small fluctuations are nothing to worry about.

When rearing a clutch often one will be smaller than the rest. This may be because the incubation period was staggered with the eggs laid days apart, difference in sexes or if one is sick. Generally by fledging time the runt will have caught up with the others.

Weaning is a critical time. Start weaning by reducing feeds during the day until feeding only in the morning and the evening. Then the evening feed can be dropped, and later the morning feed.

During this weaning time a small, bare, weld mesh cage can be set up. Food can be placed on the ground for the young parrot to investigate and walk through. Sprouts seeds, chunky cut fruits and natural forage should be provided. Offering these foods by hand is also a good way to get them interested. It is not uncommon for a weaning parrot to lose up to 15% of its body weight. Once they are taking more of the weaning foods perches, branches and other things to play with can be added to the cage. A larger cage may be necessary too.

Getting them used to the outside is also essential. Placing them outside in their cage near other birds is important for socialising. Parrots are easily imprinted so contact with adult birds or other juveniles is important, particularly if you are only rearing one. Imprinted parrots can adapt to the wild but may be aggressive or difficult around people, as they do not fear them.