

Step 2 – Position the bird for feeding.

The bird should be placed directly in front of and facing you for the feeding process. A young, hungry bird will often open its mouth for you when you tap lightly on the beak. Note that wild birds should be handled as little as possible to keep from taming them before release.

Step 3 – Insert the tube into the bird's mouth and encourage it gently down the throat. Approaching from your right (the bird's left), the tube will be aimed at the esophagus and away from the windpipe. In baby birds, it's easy to see the tubing at the side of the neck as it goes down to the crop.

Step 4 – Deposit the food. Once the tube is at or near the crop, the food can be deposited by gently pressing on the syringe. As the food is delivered, the crop will be seen to expand. The crop should be watched during the feeding process so that the bird doesn't get too full – otherwise, the food will be forced back up into the mouth.

Precautions When Hand Feeding Birds

Cleanliness is the ultimate factor in hand feeding. A common disorder of hand fed birds is *sour crop*, in which the crop becomes full of spoiled food. When this happens, the crop goes into *stasis* (ceases to function) and food isn't moved into the stomach. The crop

contents must then be removed under veterinary care.

Precautions to take to avoid introducing bacteria to the food prepared for hand feeding include:

- **Use freshly prepared food. When this isn't possible, make sure that the food is properly refrigerated between feedings and unused portions are discarded after 24 hours.**
- **Prepare food with clean hands and clean utensils.**
- **Thoroughly clean the syringe and tubing after each feeding.**
- **Wipe any excess food away that may have dripped on the bird's face or body.**

If you feed a bird or clutch of babies for a long period of time, your syringe and tubing may become worn. Your veterinarian or pharmacist can provide you with replacements.

This information was provided to you by your veterinary service provider*. It is meant to be a guide, and is not a substitute for the care and advice of your veterinarian. There may be variations in treatment recommended by your veterinarian based on each pet's individual circumstances.

* Adapted from "Hand Feeding Baby Cockatiels" distributed by Cobb Mobile Veterinary Service. Copyright 1989, 1990, 2003, by Jill M. Taylor.

Hand Feeding Birds



A Practical Guide To Preparing And Delivering Food To Young Or Sick Birds

Hand Feeding Birds

Hand feeding baby hookbills (usually parrots and cockatiels) has long been a popular method of breeders for socializing birds. The young birds look to humans for food, become accustomed to handling, and typically mature into tame and affectionate pets.

There are other reasons to hand feed birds. Sick and injured birds (pet or wild) that refuse food need to be hand fed as a part of their treatment. Likewise, hand feeding is also useful for administering oral medications.

The Hand Feeding Method

The most common method of hand feeding is depositing food with a syringe through a soft rubber tube, often called *tube feeding*. The tube is gently slid down the throat, and syringe contents are slowly forced through the tubing into the bird's *crop* (a storage place for food in birds, where the food will stay before entering the stomach).

The procedure sounds intimidating, but with a little practice most people find it easy and efficient.

How To Tell When A Hand Fed Bird Is Hungry

You can see whether or not a bird has eaten by looking at or feeling the crop, located at the front base of the neck. It is just above where the breast is.

If you see or can feel a bulge, the bird has eaten and has food to digest. If there isn't a noticeable bulge, the bird may be hungry.

How often a bird needs food depends on condition and age. Just like human infants, growing baby birds will need to eat every few hours. Adult birds will need to eat much less often.

Food Used in Hand Feeding

Commercial formulas are available, such as made by KAYTEE or Lafeber, that are ready to mix and feed. Breeders commonly use these because they are convenient.

For people who have an immediate or short term need, or otherwise may not want to invest in a pre-made product, food can be made with ingredients from most kitchens.

Below is a sample recipe for "home made" bird food for tube feeding:

- ❖ 1/4 cup dry dog food
- ❖ Boiling water to cover dog food
- ❖ 1/2 teaspoon creamy peanut butter
- ❖ 1/2 teaspoon rice cereal (for infants)
- ❖ 1 tablespoon cooked green vegetable
- ❖ 1 tablespoon cooked yellow vegetable
- ❖ 1 tablespoon cooked orange vegetable
- ❖ 1 tablespoon soft fruit

In a small bowl, cover the dry dog food in boiling water to soften. Once it is soft, place all ingredients in a food processor or blender and puree. The food is ready to use when it appears creamy and there are no visible lumps to clog the tubing.

Steps to Hand Feeding

When the crop is determined to be empty and fresh food is prepared, hand feeding can be done in a few easy steps:

Step 1 – Fill the syringe with the desired amount of food and securely attach the tubing. The amount of food will vary depending on the size and age of the bird. Make sure that the food is room temperature to luke-warm before using. If you microwave to reheat food, stir thoroughly to ensure the temperature is even and there are no "hot spots."