

Soft food – who uses it, who doesn't and why?

For decades there has been debate about the use of soft food – does it benefit the chicks or cause more harm than good?

In an attempt to find the answer to this long asked question, I decided to ask a number of breeders their opinions? Below you can read their answers then decide yourself. One thing to take note off though is that is what you are doing is working, don't change anything unless it is for the betterment of the birds.



Alistair Home from Tasmania: Alistair is a very experienced budgerigar breeder and National Judge.

Yes we use soft food for pairs that are feeding and for babies up to their first moult Our mixture is hardboiled egg, soaked hulled oats and Budgie Starter that is vitamin enhance wheat flour basically. We add carrot as well.

We have had no bad experiences, but we make sure no soft food is left uneaten for more than nine hours. It is put in the breeding cages in the morning and any that is not eaten by about 4.30pm goes into the young bird flight where it disappears quickly.



From Geoff Bowley

Yes I do feed soft food as I believe it is a valuable way of giving the chicks the best possible start in life. I use a proprietary brand called SLUIS which is manufactured in The Netherlands. The ingredients of which are as follows:- bakery products, egg and egg products, seeds, grains, sugar, vegetables and minerals. Average analysis – rough protein 13.4%, rough fat 4.9%, fibers 6%, rough ash 2.9%, and liquid 9.7%. Per kilo contains VITAMIN A 57.1401E, VITAMIN D3 11.4301E, VITAMIN E (a-Tocoperol) 4.78mg, Copper (CU) 0.4mg. I use this as a base to which I add the following:- Wheat that has been soaked for 24 hours thoroughly washed under running water then left to drain overnight, dry groats, hard boiled egg including the shell, carrot, broccoli, sweet corn, chick starter crumbs and garlic powder. This is all mixed together in a blender into a crumbly mixture.

This is fed to all the birds whether breeding or not twice a day all year round, pairs with chicks will get a bigger portion as the chicks grow. As with everything I feed my birds it is all year round as I don't believe in the "boost them up to breed theory" preferring to keep the whole stud on a set regime. Two days prior to hatching I sprinkle a small amount of COLOSTRUM powder over the soft food and continue for 3 days after hatching. This product aims to reproduce the mother's first and vital crop milk and is a pigeon based product. This is the first breeding season I have used the product and the results have been very encouraging, so far this season I have rung 94 chicks and I have only lost 2 to not being fed straightaway by the hen,

which is a great start. Although to be honest I can see no other changes in the chicks, the fact that nearly all are fed well straightaway is a big bonus.

As far as problems with feeding soft food go, I think a sensible attitude to general bird management is all that is required. As I have said I feed it twice a day and the dish is wiped out on each occasion, and then thoroughly washed weekly. Any soft food on the floor of the breeding cage is scraped up and thrown away. The above is just part of my general aviary management. The only other problem would be if I saw that a pair was only eating the soft food and nothing else, then I would reduce the amount and introduce millet sprays and keep watch.

All of the above sounds good but I have to admit that my wife Irene is in sole charge of the soft food!!!

Ron Woodhead – Hon. Veterinarian: Soft food is essential especially for birds on a seed only need a boosting protein (amino acids), energy (carbohydrates), vitamins and minerals (especially calcium and phosphorous). Essential for fertility, egg production, egg shell quality, egg size, chick size and viability as well as the chick nutrition for growth, liveability, conformation, vitality, general health, body size, colour and feather quality.

Hi Pro Soft Food is a nutritionally well balanced food supplement and should be fed up to 25% of the bird's daily food intake during breeding (start 14 days prior to mating) until the chicks are fledged. Also feed the young chicks at the rate of 10% of their diet until they reach adult size and condition.

Adult budgies can be fed up to 5% of their daily food intake; however, excess soft food will result in overweight birds, reduced fertility, diabetes, fatty livers and/or aggression.



Neville Spencer: Neville gives a mixture of chopped carrot, soya meal (which is very high in protein), garlic powder, Omnicarb (a calcium supplement), rolled oats to the birds every day.

Neville believes it helps the babies through the initial stages of their lives.



Diane Neale: gives soft food to the breeding cages only. Di gives a mixture of grated carrot, any greens except cauliflower, corn with a sprinkle of Vita Boost on a daily basis. Di feeds this mixture in the morning and soaked oats at night. She also throws in the odd bit of fruit. To the birds all year round, she gives corn and fruit.



Barry & Diane McClennan: give a mixture of rolled oats, carrot, broccoli, fresh beetroot, boiled eggs, garlic powder, corn, weetbix, parsley, celery and budgie starter. This is processed together and given 2-3 times a week to every bird all year round. Also given is a selection of apple, orange, lemon, celery top, parsley on a small tray. They also alternate their water by giving B12 one day, followed by fresh water, followed by Apple Cider Vinegar, followed by water.



Errol Willey: Does not give any soft food at all. He used to but found it made no difference when he stopped.



Keith Gough: We process a combination of corn on the cob, carrot, broccoli, fresh beetroot, rolled oats and garlic powder. Once in the aviary, some soaked oats which has been soaked in water and a drop of bleach (to kill any mould/fungus) is mixed in with the fresh vegetables and given to all breeding cages. If any is left over, then the flights get it. The garlic powder is given as a prevention for mite and is only a sprinkle..

With the water every Friday to Monday morning they are given Vita Boost. Since using this a big improvement on the number of birds with dropped flights, number of youngsters dying within days of hatching and birds seem to be more healthier.

One big difference noticed this year is that we went off our usual Golden Cob Supreme Mix and for about 18 months we noticed no difference. But in early April we noticed the birds were not as lively as they should have been and did not seem to have the conditioning (not fat) that they normally had so we immediately went back to Golden Cob seed and noticed a difference in activity levels in days and conditioning in about two weeks.

Final statement on soft food comes from **Dr. Mike Cannon** who lectured on this subject at the forum held on Tuesday evening at the Nationals. He believes 60% of the budgerigar's diet should consist of seed with the other 40% being made up of a combination of greens (not lettuce or cauliflower) but including Silverbeet, spinach, kale, endive etc. carrots, corn, fruits (not avocado), oats, branches etc. He is hesitant to recommend soaked seed due to fungus. He does not believe birds should be fed pellets in place of seed. All left over soft food should be discarded within 24 hours. If adding garlic powder, do so in a very small quantity as it is a member of the onion family which should be avoided along with all dairy products.