

MATING ONE COCK WITH TWO OR MORE HENS

by Brian Byles Courtesy N.S.W. "Budgerigar"

It is not usually as difficult as some beginners may think to mate a cock Budgerigar with two, or more, hens in a season. However, while one cock will accept a number of different mates, not all are co-operative. In some families cock birds are so vigorous that they will mate, or attempt to mate, with any hen that is placed in the same cage. This is not always the case, however, and it may be found that in an inbred strain which has lost some of its vigour, the cock will not be interested in more than its original mate.

In addition, even vigorous cocks can get so attached to a hen that they refuse to have anything to do with others. When planning to mate one cock with several hens it is, therefore, a sound idea to make sure that the cock is not allowed to stay with any one hen long enough for this to happen.

Before describing the different ways of achieving the pairing of one cock to more than a single hen in a season, it should be stated that unless a fancier has special reasons for utilising breeding stock in this way, it is better to stick to using one cock with a single hen. These days there are enough problems in the breeding pen using straight-forward procedures without complicating the issue.

Now why try to pair one cock with two or three hens? The most obvious reason is that one has bought (or bred) an outstanding bird and would like to get as many offspring from it as quickly as possible. Also besides having numerous chicks from a valuable specimen, a programme which produces youngsters from one cock mated to two, or more, hens will allow the start of line breeding or inbreeding.

This is undertaken to produce a family, the members of which have, or should have, all the good features of the outstanding cock in successive generations. For this reason only the best birds available should be used. If mediocre quality stock is utilised for this purpose the result will be second rate offspring. When planning to use one cock with a number of hens the first step is to pick out the hens which most suit the breeding programme one has in mind, It is, probably, best that the hens should not be related.

The simplest way to put this system into operation is to pair the cock to the most suitable hen which is in condition at the time breeding is to commence. Let the pair go to nest and lay a round of eggs. Once the eggs are laid the breeder can take the eggs away from the pair and put them under a foster hen to be incubated. Alternatively, the hen can be left to incubate her own eggs while the cock is moved to a second hen. If it is possible to have fosters ready at the same time as the good pair goes to nest this is, obviously, the best plan as a hen left on her own can get restless and desert her eggs. They can also get cold when she comes off to feed. In addition, by giving the eggs to a foster pair the original hen can be rested until required again.

Once the cock has been taken away from its first hen it can be mated to a second and the procedure repeated. Provided there is time, and everything goes according to plan, the hens can be remated to the outstanding cock after it has been paired to all the hens selected for it.

As an alternative they can be mated to other cocks and allowed to rear chicks in the usual way.

Another way to get chicks from one cock mated to several hens is to run the outstanding male with two females at the same time. This method is particularly useful when a fancier is in his early days in the hobby and is able to purchase a trio (one cock and two hens) but cannot afford two good pairs of birds.

For this system to work, all three birds must come into condition at the same time and it is best to use a double breeder with a slide in the middle. When the birds are paired together the cock should be left with one of the hens for the first part of the day and then moved to the second. It is necessary to have a double cage with a slide between each section because the cock can then be run from one to the other without the need for it to be caught each time it has to be moved.

Having spent the latter part of the day with the second hen the cock bird is then moved back to the first. This procedure is repeated daily as long as required. Each hen incubates her own eggs. If a large number of chicks are hatched it is advisable to move all but two of them to fosters. This is necessary so that there is not too much strain on the hen while it is feeding its young.

I have used a combination of these methods with success over the years. In one case I obtained 27 chicks from one cock paired to four hens in a season.