

Breeding Softbills

Written by Kateri J. Davis of Davis Lund Aviaries, Copyright 10/98 All Rights Reserved.

Birds cannot be forced to breed, but they can be enticed.

Several requirements must be met before your birds will become successful parents. If these requirements are fulfilled, then any species of bird can be bred in captivity. The hard part is, first, understanding what these requirements are, and , second, figuring out how to fulfill them to the birds' satisfaction. Despite the sometimes hard work and time-consuming preparations, nothing makes an aviculturist happier than to see a pair of birds successfully raising chicks!

Consider the pair of birds you want to breed.

Are they really male and female? That's not as easy as it sounds as many birds are sexually monomorphic (males and females look alike). Are they healthy? No infections or parasites. Many birds, especially imports, can harbor minor bacterial infections or parasites that do not make them clinically ill but hinder breeding . Do they behave normally? Are they mentally and physically content?

Consider the diet you are feeding.

Birds in the wild do not feed on the same thing day in and day out. Many birds require a certain change in diet to stimulate breeding and to raise their chicks. For instance, many softbills require large amounts of livefood to raise young.

Consider the amount of territory you are giving the pair.

Often, aviculturists try to get birds to breed in enclosures that are just too small. Sometimes it works, but all birds need a certain amount of territory to feel secure enough to raise young in. Plants can be used and arranged to provide separate areas of territory.

Consider the nesting sites and materials provided.

Birds can be picky, but they know what they do not want. Some birds prefer open boxes, some baskets, and some platforms. Some birds like to nest on the ground and some in the highest corners. Rotate a wide variety of sites and materials until you know what they will use. Change the form of presentation also, such as grass on the floor and grass draped on branches.

Consider the photoperiod

(length of daylight) and **water availability** as these are often breeding stimuli. Frequent misting or wet leaves to simulate rainfall, or running water in the flight, such as a pond and fountain, is a requirement for some birds.

Consider the amount of stress they endure.

Most birds will not nest if there are too many human or other animal interferences. Generally, birds want lots of privacy to do what they need to do. If other birds are in the same flight, be sure they are not distracting or harassing the pair that you want to breed.

Many bird owners tend to constantly check and bother the nest, forgetting that, even though we would like every egg laid to hatch and every chick hatched to live, it just doesn't happen that way, even in the wild. Much instinct is involved, but parent birds must still be allowed to learn as they go, and some eggs and chicks will be lost to genetic and other natural problems. If all breeding requirements are met and the parents are left alone, they will nest again. The birds know what to do.

Too much stress can cause birds to abandon the nest or chicks, toss out chicks, or eat them.

Communication is a key element in ensuring that aviculture grows. Talk to others about their experiences and read as much as you can about the birds in the wild, as well as in captivity. Compare what you are providing to what the birds would have available in the wild. And communicate your successes and failures with others so our knowledge about these wonderful creatures can be expanded to the point where all birds can be kept and bred in our care.