

Protecting Your Birds Through Quarantine

By Joanie Doss

Almost everyone says they quarantine their new birds. However, it is surprising how many make no attempt at all to keep the new bird separate from their collection.

To many people, putting a bird in a separate cage from their other birds for a couple of days is what they consider adequate quarantine procedure. Many times this cage is not only in the same room as the other birds, but is placed next to another bird's cage. For a true quarantine situation, the bird should really be housed in a separate building away from your other birds.

Although people seem to understand about bacteria, viruses, etc., concerning human health, they act as if these things do not exist when it comes to birds. Since they can't see them, they assume they aren't there. They seem to feel that nothing bad will happen to them.

One of the biggest downfalls of some owners and breeders is that they feel they can tell a sick bird just by looking at him. I wish they could but unfortunately when a bird shows signs of illness, he is very, very ill. Birds are food for many animals. In the wild, if a bird appears ill, it will attract predators. Fellow flock members may pick on the sick bird or chase him from the flock. Instinctively, the bird knows that he will not survive if he shows any signs of illness. He will try to act normal for as long as possible.

Recently a breeder purchased a pair of new birds and immediately placed them with her other birds. Her safety procedure was to remove one of her birds that looked a little suspicious. Since she bought the pair from a person that does regular vet checks and blood tests, the woman felt confident that the new birds were healthy. These birds probably were healthy but what about her own birds? What disease could they spread to her new pair? If one of the birds appeared "suspicious", the rest of her flock may not be up to par as well.

People will get away with lax quarantine procedures for years but eventually, it will catch up with them. Because their parrots are not showing illnesses immediately, the person feels his birds are healthy. He will never understand when a disease suddenly runs through his aviary killing most of his flock. These people are playing Russian Roulette. It is not a matter of if their birds will become ill, but rather when their birds will become ill.

Whenever you purchase a new bird and add it to your collection it **must be vet checked and quarantined**. Since the stop of importation we can no longer be lazy and careless with our present stock.

A person told me that her birds would not pick up any disease as they were never stressed. She believed that only stressed birds became ill. What she failed to understand was that stress takes many forms. A change in food, water, temperature, environment, caretaker or mate as well as producing young can all stress a bird. Even healthy birds can pick up a viral, bacterial or fungal infection, just as people can pick up the flu or a cold by being in contact with a person that is sick with these.

So why don't more people quarantine their new birds? Most of them do not like the inconvenience of not having all the birds in one room and of having to wash their hands between handling the birds. Others are eager to get males and females together so that they can start raising families. Another big reason is the lack of another building to house the new birds or even space in their home. Most birds are regulated to a bathroom or bedroom. Their owners are eager to be able to have those rooms free again. Incidentally, bathrooms make a very poor quarantine area. Too many people are coming and going out of the room and it generally exposes the bird to several types of bacteria. Many people think that a disease just won't happen to them--that it is something that happens to other people!

The dictionary defines quarantine as:

"Keep away from others for a time to prevent the spread of an infectious disease. Detention, isolation, and other measures taken to prevent the spread of infectious disease." The root quaranta means forty, with reference to 40 days as the original period of isolation. Forty is still a good quarantine number with 60 being even better yet for the number of days that a new bird should be isolated from your other birds.

Any bird added to your present flock can endanger your birds. Some people feel that a parakeet is so small and common that it won't hurt their other birds. Parakeets can carry some terrible diseases that will kill even the largest parrots. Quarantine rules apply to all birds, regardless of where they are purchased from, size, type or price.

People who rescue birds from abusive or negligent situations or buy birds out of pity from a bad environment run a high risk of infecting their other birds. These birds can easily be ill from poor diets, abuse, no vet checks, and filthy living conditions. I admire people who try to help these birds, but they must take precautions not to infect their present birds. As responsible bird owners, they owe it to their present birds to protect them against disease. If you are rescuing birds, you must follow very strict quarantine procedures and be willing to put up with the extra work and inconvenience that quarantine imposes.

Another area where you must be careful is taking care of a friend's bird. Even your best friend's bird should be quarantined from your birds. This is not an

insult to your friend, but rather good bird care habits on your part. One should never be over-sensitive and think that someone has quarantined your bird because they think you do not take good care of your birds. Also if you board your bird at a pet store or any other place where there are other birds, you are again exposing your birds to possible disease. When you take them to bird shows or meetings where there are other birds you increase the chance of picking up a disease. When you go any place where there are birds, you run the risk of bringing a disease back to your birds. Changing clothes and showering will help to keep down the odds of transferring a disease to your flock.

People selling or caring for baby birds must also use quarantine procedures with the babies. Those people that buy babies for resale from different breeders should not place all the babies together. They definitely should not use the same feeding utensils unless they disinfect them between use. They should also be washing their hands between handling of clutches. Babies are very prone to disease as their immune systems are not fully developed. The nursery should be kept very clean and strangers discouraged from going into this area as well as handling the babies.

So what should one do to quarantine a bird? Ideally it should be a building separate from where your other birds are kept. You do not want the birds to share the same air from heating and cooling systems as they would if they are in the same building. Not many people's friends would be bird free and willing to keep a new bird for 30 days or more. If a separate building is not possible, then a room with a door that can be shut and that is away from the rest of your flock will have to do. You do not want to walk through your quarantine area in order to get to your own birds. If possible there should be a hall between your quarantine area and where your other birds are kept.

Slippers or shoes should be left in the quarantine room so that you will not carry anything on your shoes to your other birds. If you are going to hold the bird, you should also have a smock or shirt that you wear only in the quarantine room. Your hands should be washed thoroughly with an antibacterial soap between handling of the bird in quarantine and your other birds.

Cages, toys, dishes and perches should not be shared with the bird in the quarantine area and your other birds. Anything that the bird touches should not be shared with your other birds. Anything from that room should not be near your other birds. You should care for and clean your birds before your new bird.

Daily check the bird's droppings, feed dishes, and general appearance to see if there are any signs of illness. Feed dishes that remain full mean that your bird is not eating. Empty water dishes may mean your bird is bathing in his water

dish or that he is drinking a large amount of water. This could be caused by stress or by illness. The color and consistency of the droppings may suggest illness or it may reflect what he has eaten. A bird that is fluffed up and listless may indicate that your bird is trying to keep warm. If the room is kept at a comfortable temperature, this may be an indication that the bird is ill.

No new birds should be added to the quarantine room. If another bird is added, the quarantine times starts all over again for the one already there.

Keep the new bird in quarantine for at least 30 days and better yet, 60 days or even 90 days. After your observations fail to show any signs of illness, he has been taken to an avian vet for a complete checkup and all test results are in, you can put him in the same room as your other birds (provided your other birds have regular vet checks and have proven to be healthy).

Quarantine is time consuming, inconvenient and more work. However, it also saves the lives of many birds and prevents many others from becoming ill. It can keep your breeding stock in top health and thus producing many clutches of strong, beautiful babies. For the pet owner, it ensures that you and your pets will spend many years of quality time together.

People seldom regret having taken the extra time and effort that quarantine requires, but many people have said that they wished they would have taken proper quarantine procedures after a tragedy strikes.