

Gordon Strachan's Canary Birdshed

Designed by D Strachan 2008

Hello I'm Gordon Strachan

Welcome to my Birdshed



Standing outside my birdshed

I've kept birds for over 50 years and would like to pass on what I've learned in the hope that you will get as much enjoyment from the Border Fancy Canary hobby as I have and still do.

I started keeping birds in 1949 as a teenager after I won a canary at a fur and feather show. It was a beautiful buff hen. I bought a yellow cock from the local barber, then got a pair of canaries for my Christmas and it's been a big part of my life ever since. I've learned a lot over the years and would like to share my knowledge and enthusiasm.

I've been a local champion many times and a BFCC panel judge since 1967. I've judged as far south as Galashiels, the biggest Border Canary show in Scotland and as far north as Orkney. I also helped to set up the local Spey Valley Cage Bird Society in 1975.



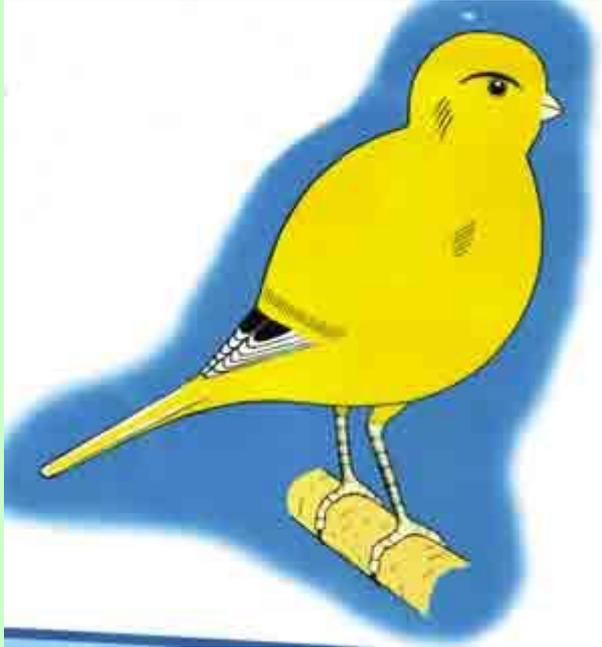
Inside my birdshed

I enjoy the challenge of trying to breed a quality bird, something of beauty and grace. It's a really interesting hobby, although a lot of work. I enjoy meeting up with other bird fanciers, learning new tips, passing on ideas and just the general chat.

I hope you enjoy looking at my website and learn something useful from it.

*Yours in the Fancy,
Gordon Strachan*

Birdkeeping



Border model

When starting the hobby it's best to go to a reputable bird breeder who can advise you on what to buy. The Border model shows you what to look for in a Border canary and is the ideal bird you should be aiming for. The main things to look for are shape, size and quality of feather. A Border canary should have a curved round shape with no corners and a round head. The feathers should be silky smooth, the front body solid with no split down the middle of the chest and the wings should be neat and compact and fit above the tail but not cross one another. The bird should be 5 1/2 inches long from the top of the head to the tip of the tail. It can be difficult to tell the sex of a canary but a cock canary will sing, the hen doesn't and the cock will be more bold and aggressive.

Buy a couple of pairs of birds to start off with to see how you get on. You should expect to pay about £30 for a decent bird. You can pay hundreds even thousands of pounds for a canary from the top bird breeders but for them keeping canaries is a business not a hobby.

You'll need somewhere to keep them. You can build a small shed or keep them in your garden shed. As long as the birds get plenty of daylight and are draught free they'll be fine. You can either make your own cages or buy two double breeders. Your cages should be 18 inches by 12 inches. The Cage and Aviary Birds newspaper has lots of adverts for suppliers or try your local pet shop. You'll need perches, seed boxes, drinkers and grit hoppers. It's best to get perches that have a bit of bounce to them rather than rigid to avoid your birds getting slipped claws.



2 double cages

I feed my birds plain canary as their staple diet. You have to blow the husks off the seed boxes everyday and give them fresh water. I put rough sawdust in the bottom of the cages but you can use newspaper, wood based cat litter or shavings and clean them out once a week. I give them a little hopper with condition seed once a fortnight. They also like a little bit of apple, lettuce or carrot.

You can keep hens together in the same cage but you will have to keep the cocks separate as they will fight. Only pair them up during the breeding season.

Breeding



Pair nesting

You need to start preparing for the breeding season in January. Help take them into condition by feeding egg food twice a week. I use CeDe egg food with a boiled egg and a little maw seed. Feed this three times a week during February, then every day in March, along with condition seed and greens e.g. lettuce and dandelions. You should also make sure they have plenty good quality grit which the hen needs to form the egg shell. A hen will often eat a lot of grit in the evening before laying an egg. A good pinch of charcoal will help to provide essential minerals.

You should wash your cages with disinfectant and I also spray mine with an anti-mite spray called Zodiac.

At the beginning of the year you should introduce the cock and hen to one another. Have the birds in cages next to each other and pull the slide away for a few minutes so they can see one another. By doing this it means when you do pair them up they are less likely to fight. Also the cock's singing helps to bring the hen into breeding condition. You'll find that the cocks will feed their feet and the bars of the cages as they come into breeding condition and the hens play about with bits of sawdust looking to build a nest. The courtship song is different from their normal singing. It's also a good idea to dust the birds with anti-mite powder before pairing them up and check their claws to see that they aren't too long. To trim their claws cut them at an angle of 45% in front of the dark part where the blood vessel is. Pair your birds up at about the end of March.

When deciding which birds to pair up look for birds that complement one another in terms of type of feather and shape of bird e.g. if a hen doesn't have a round curved back then pair her with a cock that has a high back. Pair a long feathered bird with a short feathered one. I never pair up birds that are related. Here I've paired a buff cock with a yellow variegated hen. Always pair a buff and a yellow, never two of the same kind.

After the birds have been together about a week put in a nest pan. I prefer to use nest pans on tripods as they are easier to keep clean. A friend of mine who was a blacksmith made them for me. I don't know if they are commercially available. Put a nest felt in the pan and give them nesting material. You can use squares of hessian teased out, cotton wool and moss once the nest is nearly finished.



Clutch of eggs

A hen usually lays 4-5 eggs and doesn't sit on the eggs to incubate them until she has laid her last egg. The eggs hatch 14 days after incubation. The hen sits close on the eggs. Her open feathers on her chest go round the eggs. Only feed plain canary seed while the hen is sitting. If the cock is being aggressive and annoying it can be a good idea to take him away during incubation. Return him once the eggs have hatched to help feed the chicks.

Rearing



Newly hatched chick

The day before the chicks are due to hatch start to introduce eggfood. Introduce soaked seed a few days after they are hatched. I use Haiths Easisoak. Add enough water to dampen and a teaspoon of malt vinegar, mix well and put somewhere warm for the seeds to germinate. It is ready to eat when the seeds crack and little shoots appear. Rinse thoroughly before feeding. Give fresh eggfood and soaked seed every day, two or three times a day as the chicks get bigger. These foods are easy for the chicks to digest.

It's also important to give them greens. Dandelions, chickweed and shepherds purse are good. Collect dandelions just before they burst into a clock and chickweed that has little white seed pods, as this is the part of the plant they eat. I always keep a bag in my car in case I see any weeds in people's gardens or in fields. I must be one of the few people who likes weeds. It's probably a good idea to wash them if you are not sure how clean they are and make sure they haven't been sprayed with weed killer. If you can't get weeds, then you can give small amounts of cress, lettuce, spinach and curly kale.



Feeding chick

When the adult birds touch the side of the nest the chicks will raise their heads for food.

Once the chicks are about 10 days old they do their droppings over the side of the nest. Before that the adults clean the nest by eating the droppings. Their feathers start to mature as well. You can tell chicks are healthy by the inside colour of their beaks. If it is a beautiful red colour then they are in good condition. At 15 days take the nest pan off the tripod, sit it on the floor and put a new one in. By 18-20 days the chicks will sit on

the side of the nest. It's important to give a new nest pan and nesting material as the hen will probably want to build another nest. If you don't give her nesting material she will pluck the feathers from the chicks and use that.



Chicks ready to leave the nest

Once out of the nest keep giving the chicks soft food to help wean them. It's easy for them to peck in order to learn how to eat. Once they leave the nest they won't go back in if they are fit and healthy. You can separate them from their parents after 20-22 days.

Once they grow up they moult and take in adult feathers which is stressful for them. You have to build up their bodies to produce new feathers. Continue giving them eggfood and soaked seed and add some red rape to the plain canary seed. A sprinkle of condition seed in their eggfood helps too. All adult birds moult once a year and it takes about 6 weeks.

It's a good idea to ring your birds to help to identify them and keep records. Ring them once they have left the nest. I prefer to use split aluminium rings.

Showing



Canary in training cage

The most important thing about showing is training your birds. You need to let them get used to being in cages, being handled while in the cage and used to people. Start by hanging a training cage on the front of their stock cage to let them hop in and out of it. Put in condition seed, red rape and plain canary to encourage them to go in and out of the cage. Once they are used to that put them in a show cage for about 2 hours a day to help them get accustomed to being in a show cage. If you take the time and work with the team of birds you have picked to show they shouldn't get stressed. You need them to be able to stand properly and show good posture.

Don't be tempted to handle the bird yourself before showing, as the bird will then want to preen in order to clean its feathers and won't stand properly.

Give them a plastic container with fresh water to bath in every day. This gets them to preen so their feathers are in good condition. Or you can spray them with water but they enjoy having a bath. Healthy birds will want to bath every day. A good idea is to add glycerine to the water, a few drops to 1 litre. This helps to tone up their feathers.



Cullen Bird Show

When preparing for the show make sure your cages are scrubbed and painted with high gloss black paint. Check the perches are clean and you have all your drinkers. Put oat husks in the bottom of the cage and put mixed canary seed in the seed box. I like to take a small bag of condition seed with me and give them a small pinch in the corner of their seed box after the judging has finished as a titbit. You need to join the border

specialist clubs, for example BFCC and BBFCC, in order to win their rosettes and trophies. You will find these mentioned in the show schedule.

You start showing as a Novice then move on to Champion. Birds that you've bred that year are classed as unflighted.

When showing even if you don't do very well at one show its still worth entering other shows, as there will be different competition. It's also a good opportunity to meet other bird breeders, talk about birds and maybe learn some new tips. There's always the chance you might be picked as a steward and you can learn a lot from the person who is judging.

Sadly the hobby of being a bird fancier has changed a lot. Some people will spend a lot of money on birds just in order to win and don't try to breed them themselves. This is a real shame because it's not what the fancy is all about. The hobby is not as popular as it used to be with a lot of clubs having to fold through lack of interest and therefore a lot less shows. However, I still get excited when I get a show schedule and enjoy picking my team of birds.

Birdshed Blog

The following is a diary of a year of bird keeping, mainly the breeding season. Unfortunately I had a poor season and didn't breed as many birds as I normally do but it gives you a good idea of what is involved.

Tuesday 12th May 2009

Launched Webcam on site



Finally managed to get webcam up and running. It is following a buff variegated cock paired with a three parts dark yellow hen. They are both unflighted which means it is their first breeding season. The hen has laid 5 eggs only 2 of which have hatched. Above them are a buff heavy variegated cock and a yellow variegated hen.

Wednesday 20th May 2009

Babies have left the nest

They have went from this



to this



to this



in just 15 days. They have now left the nest though are still being fed by the parents who have started building a new nest. The babies are both cinnamon variegated and both hens I think. The green stuff you see in the cage is dandelions which luckily I have found an abundant supply of. The parents are kept busy feeding this along with eggfood and soaked seed.

I won an award this week from earthcam.com. They voted me in their top ten webcams of the week. I'm really pleased they like the webcam.



Friday 22nd May 2009

Look at us



The 2 chicks are now on the perches and have started feeding themselves some of the time but still like to be fed by "mum and dad". The hen has started laying again and now has 2 eggs.

I have 15 babies all together, 3 of them are out the nest. I also have 5 hens sitting on eggs.

Saturday 30th May 2009

Round 2



The hen has laid 6 eggs and they are due on 6th of June. The chicks are growing and mostly feeding themselves.



Friday 5th June 2009

Ring on and ready to leave



Now that the chicks are 20 days old I have put a ring on their leg to help to identify them. Every year has a different colour and this year it is purple. They are weaned now and feeding themselves so I've taken them away from the parents and they are in a cage with other youngsters.



Saturday 6th June 2009

Chicks hatched



The second round of eggs are now hatching. Three out of the 6 hatched today.

Sunday 7th June 2009

Clutch hatched

Only 4 out of the 6 eggs have hatched as one of the eggs were infertile. Unfortunately I found one of the chicks dead on the bottom of the cage this morning. When the hen jumped out of the nest the chick must have been underneath her wing and fell out by accident. This can happen when the chicks are so little.

This morning when I was in the birdshed the hen came off to feed, the cock jumped onto the nest fed the chicks and when the hen returned they fed each other.

Wednesday 10th June 2009

Sad news



Another 2 of the chicks have died. I came home yesterday to find 2 chicks on the bottom of the cage. I don't know how they fell out of the nest. Maybe they got caught up in the hen's feet. This is her first year as a mum and so she is inexperienced but it's really disappointing. If I'd been at home and found out soon enough I could have put them back in the nest. That just leaves 1 chick now.

Saturday 13th June 2009

No luck



None of the eggs of the pair of birds above the main pair have hatched. All of the eggs were infertile. I have given the hen some epsom salts and a new nest to try again.

Saturday 20th June 2009

Aren't we growing



This is the chick at 14 days old. It is a three parts dark. I have dummy eggs in the nest to help to support the chick because it is on its own.



These are the chicks from the first round of eggs. They are eating plenty and getting bigger. They still get eggfood and soaked seed and greens. I give the birds iceberg lettuce as there aren't any dandelions now. However if I find some chickweed I give them that instead.

Wednesday 24th June 2009

Busy Day

The chick jumped out of the nest this morning and has been jumping about the cage and even managed to fly on to the perch though is a bit unsteady.





Friday 26th June 2009

In Training



I've attached a training cage to the cage of the big chicks so they can pop in and out of it. This is so they can get used to the cage and is the start of training them for the show season.

Saturday 27th June 2009

Third Round

The hen has started laying again. She has 1 egg. This will be her last time.

Tuesday 30th June 2009

Egg Update

The hen has laid another egg so now has 2. The pair above have 4 eggs which are due on the 6th of July.

Thursday 2nd July 2009

Happy Families



The hen has laid another egg today so now has 3 eggs. Normally a hen lays all her eggs over a few days. I don't know why she is taking so long to lay her clutch of eggs. It's been 7 days since she laid the first one.

It's really hot this week and I have a fan on in the birdshed to try to make it a bit cooler. Make sure you give fresh food everyday as food will go off quickly in this heat.

Saturday 4th July 2009

Big Chicks

The big chicks are getting used to popping in and out of the training cages. I put some condition seed into the cage to encourage them in. In about a week I will start putting them in the training cage for a few hours at a time so they can get used to being in a show cage. They are starting to go into the moult and get their adult feathers.



Tuesday 7th July 2009

One egg hatched



The yellow variegated hen has 1 chick. It hatched yesterday. She has 2 eggs left.



The chick above is growing and I think is going to be a really good bird.

Thursday 9th July 2009

Update



Unfortunately the chick from the top pair died yesterday. I don't know why. Possibly the hen didn't feed it. The other 2 eggs didn't hatch. That means that pair don't have any chicks. I've split them up and put the hen in a big flight cage which is 4 double cages with 11 other hens who have finished breeding. They are all starting to go into the moult. The cocks are kept in cages on their own. I've washed and disinfected the nest pans and laid them past for next year. I've also washed and disinfected my whole shed. Cages, slides, drinkers, seed hoppers, perches, the lot.

I have 12 chicks on the perches and 3 hens sitting on eggs waiting to hatch. Two of the hens have 3 eggs and 1 of them has 4. I've never had such a poor breeding season. I normally breed about 40 chicks. It's really disappointing. I'm not sure what the problem has been. I'll blame global warming and the changeable weather!

Friday 10th July 2009

Left Home



I moved the chick to a cage with 3 other chicks that are about the same age. That leaves the hen sitting on 3 eggs and due on the 13th. I've moved the big chicks into individual cages on their own. This is because they are now at the stage where they are getting more boisterous and will fight and probably pluck feathers out of each other, especially the young cocks.

Sunday 12th July 2009

Foster Parents

Yesterday the hen knocked 2 eggs out of the nest, so that just leaves 1. They were both clear, possibly she knew. I've put 3 eggs under her from another hen because the cock she was paired with died and it looks like she is going into the moult which means the chicks probably wouldn't get fed.

Monday 13th July 2009

Last Round

There is 1 egg hatched so far this morning. Three to go. This is the only hen with eggs now.

The hen that had 4 eggs, 2 of them turned out to be clear and the chicks were dead in the shell with the other 2. We had a lot of thunder the other night and I wonder if that's why they died.

Wednesday 15th July 2009

Still 1 Chick



There is still just 1 chick. The hen knocked one of the remaining eggs out of the nest. I'm not sure if the other 2 are going to hatch. The cock that was the father died so maybe he wasn't healthy enough to produce chicks.

Friday 17th July 2009

The breeding season has ended

Unfortunately the hen knocked the chick out of the nest today. She is going into the moult, you can see this by her loose feathers so doesn't feel like feeding her chick. The 2 eggs didn't hatch. The chicks were dead inside the egg. That's the end of the breeding season for this year. Out of the 12 I've bred I think there are some good ones especially 1 of the three parts darks. I'll continue to let you know what's happening with the chicks that were bred from this pair.

Friday 4th September 2009

Chick Update



I only have 2 out of the 3 chicks from the pair left. There was a tragic accident and 1 of them was killed by a sparrowhawk. I left the window to my birdshed too far open and a sparrowhawk got in, knocked the training cage off and got to the canary. All I found left were the wings and some feathers. It was a hard lesson to learn because I think that chick was one of the best I bred this year. The other 2 are well into the moult and I'm beginning to see their potential.

Friday 15th January 2010

End of Show Season



Of the 2 chicks left from the pair of canaries the webcam was following I only showed 1, the other one was too small. The photo above is the cock that I showed. He came second and third at the local shows. I didn't have a very successful show season. Overall I entered 3 shows Fraserburgh, Cullen and the North East Scotland Border Show in Keith and judged one which was in Wick. I put a team of 12 birds to each show and got firsts, seconds and thirds at each one. One fancier had an excellent team of birds and won most of the local shows. The shows are getting smaller and there are less of them but the quality of birds is still good.

I've bought 6 birds to add to my stock for the breeding season this year. Two buff variegated hens, 2 yellow variegated hens, 1 clear yellow cock and 1 white cock. I hope I have better luck this year.

Monday 18th January 2010

Start of preparations for the breeding season

I've started giving my birds a finger tray of egg food which is about 1 teaspoon, twice a week. I use Haiths Nectar Blend. I add 1 small hard boiled egg to about 6 heaped tablespoons of the eggfood and 1 dessertspoon of crushed hemp and 1/2 teaspoon of brewers yeast. If the egg is freshly boiled it should bind it together but if it's a bit dry I add a little water to moisten it. I have a little coffee grinder that I use to crush the hemp seeds. I also give them a little bit of apple twice a week. But only enough that they can eat in one go so that it doesn't frost and then upset their stomachs and no greens. I don't have any extra lighting or any heating on. Over the last few weeks I've had some frozen drinkers in the morning but I just take the ice out and fill them up again. I'm retired so can look after my birds during the day but if you are working you need to leave the light on for a while after you've fed them to give them time to eat. The canaries have been bathing in their drinkers so I've given them some bird baths that

fit on the front of the cage and they're really enjoying splashing about in the water. The fact that they like having a bath shows how healthy they are, especially in this weather. Rather than me!

Tuesday 26th January 2010

Spring Clean

This week I'm going to wash my cages with Dettol diluted in water to clean and disinfect them and I've ordered nest felts and animal hair nesting material.

Saturday 6th February 2010

Soaked seed a big hit



I haven't washed my cages yet. The weather has turned colder so I decided to wait until it's bit warmer. I'll paint them as well before the breeding season. I started feeding them soaked seed today, just a teaspoonful each and they love it. I use Haiths Easisoak. All I do is rinse it under the tap in a sieve, then put it in a bowl somewhere warm e.g. next to the radiator with just the water from rinsing and in a couple of days it will have sprouted. It's ready to use as soon as the seeds have cracked. I add a tiny amount of bleach about 1/2 teaspoon to 2 cups full of seed. This is to kill any bacteria. Make sure you rinse the sprouted seed thoroughly before feeding it and only sprout as much as you need.

Wednesday 17th March 2010

Man at Work



I've been busy this last fortnight painting my cages to freshen them up ready for the breeding season.

Wednesday 23rd March 2010

All paired up



I finished my painting last week and have decided to pair my birds up now. I know it's a couple of weeks early but the birds are showing signs that they are ready. The cocks are feeding their perches and their feet, making a right mess, and some of the hens are beginning to draw. This is when they pull themselves long and thin which shows they are coming into breeding condition. The cocks are whistling their heads off too which also helps bring the hens into breeding condition.

I pulled the slides to let them see one another and they were very keen. It also helps to try to decide if the pairing is right when you have them together in the same cage. I have put jute fibre and animal hair in as nesting material and the birds are interested in it. I am not using cotton wool this year because the hen can sometimes accidentally eat it when cleaning the nest and cause her to go soft. I am now giving them eggfood everyday and will start giving them soaked seed everyday too. I am also feeding them a very small piece of apple and broccoli.

Hopefully I'll have a better breeding season this year.

Thursday 20th May 2010

Breeding Season so far

I have 14 pairs of birds and so far 13 chicks have hatched. The first lot hatched on the 30th of April. I had another 2 nests of chicks but they died during the cold spell we had. The nests weren't well enough built to keep the chicks warm. I have also had 1 chick fall out of another nest and die. So that's 6 pairs with chicks and the rest with eggs. There's heaps of dandelions just now and the canaries are loving them.