

The Molt

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The Canaries Molt

To start any article on the molt one must first speak to what most people already are aware of, which is, what the molt is something all birds go through each year.

Canaries' feathers are derivative structures of the skin, but biologically speaking they are dead. This means that they do not require a blood supply, but for that same reason they do not have the ability to regenerate. Therefore, the molt is an especially important physiological process: It renews these structures that are so important to the life and development of the bird.

The hours of sunlight and heat have an impact on the canary's thyroid gland, which produces a rise in thyroid hormones in the blood. These are the biological trigger for the start of the molting period. The molt will first be observed in the wings, followed by a shedding of the tail feathers and finally a massive molt in the chest, back and head.

In the case of canaries, their first molt will not entail the shedding of all feathers. Those in the tail, wings, and other areas necessary for flight will stay intact, these birds we refer to as unflighted instead of adult birds who have progressed through a full molt being called flighted, since the wings and tail feathers are referred to as flight feathers, thus the names.

How long does a canary's molting period last?

As mentioned previously, the elevated levels of thyroxine - responsible for the onset of the molt - are due to an increase in heat and sunlight hours. This is because the feathers then become less necessary owing to the temperature and abundance of available food.

The canary's molting period starts around the beginning of the summer and will last from 1 to 3 months - 2 months is the most common length. However, molting is an incredibly stressful process for any bird, and the degree of stress will directly influence the duration of this physiological process.

Diet during the molting period

The canary's diet plays an especially important role in the molting process, since optimal nutrition will be essential in achieving a durable, shiny, and beautiful plumage.

The most important nutrient during the canary's molting period is protein, since it helps to generate new structures and synthesize large amounts of collagen. Please take note, there are two general forms of protein, one being animal and the other being vegetable, and then many different sources of each. Many in the canary fancy have learned that animal protein is given to adults feeding young **and only given during this time of the year**, and generally in the form of hardboiled egg. No time other than when the adults/parents are feeding young do you give egg or animal protein. During the molt we give vegetable

protein and lots of it, or what birds in the wild would seek out, which is protein from ingesting insects.

To meet the canary's protein requirements during this period, you should turn to two elements of great importance for its diet:

- Protein-rich seeds, which should comprise 35% of the diet. Hemp is one of the highest, but many others as well. We also give oil rich, fatty seeds currently for their assistance in the molt and shine they give the feathers such as sunflower, thistle and flax. Do not over do these fatty seeds, one due to the fat, we don't want are birds to get overweight but also some such as flax if given in to high a quantity can cause loose stools.
- Many greens are high in many additional micronutrients, such as Kale and Dandelion as well as carrots. Greens add the luster and look we see when we see a bird one would refer to as having great feather quality.
- In addition to seeds, the canary will also need an extraordinary intake of micronutrients, that is, of vitamins and minerals.
- Lastly, some people swear by adding insects for protein. This is a subject of debate. Some say in- sects can introduce ailments, or bad bacteria, others swear by them. I have used them and do, but I also find it safe to generally bake them in a 225-degree oven for a few minutes to kill of any bacteria to be safe.

Nutrient and vitamin supplements for molting

The molting process should be supported by a vitamin complex that also incorporates minerals. You should choose a product that is specifically designed for the canary's molting period and follow the recommended dosage for each case. Two well-known ones are Nekton Bio, and another is Morning Birds Feather Fast. There are many more I have just listed two I know lots of people use and ones I have tried myself.

Finally, you should maximize caring for your canary during this period, since its stress levels will rise, and this usually leads to a reduction in its defense system. By following the proper steps, you will guarantee a healthy molt. Your canary might stop singing during this period, but that should not be a cause for concern in any case, as it comes down to the low levels of testosterone during this process.

I am aware most people reading this here have their own, seasoned experienced way of dealing with the molt. I have added just a few things most people have not tried or may want to. Either way, caring for your birds at this time of year is crucial to how they will perform for you in shows and in the next breeding season. I cannot emphasize the need for greens during this time. Nothing will give your bird and its feathers what catches a judge's eye and other exhibitors than great, vibrant, shiny feathers.