



A STUDY ON MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SELECTION, HOUSING AND FEEDING PET BIRDS IN THRISSUR DISTRICT

M.P. Sreeshma., N. Geetha., P. Reeja George.,
Manju Sasidharan², Sabin George²,
K.S Anil. and C Sunanda.

Department of Livestock Production Management
College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences,
Mannuthy - 680 651

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Abstract

A systematic intervention was made in the present study in the subject of selection criteria, housing and feeding strategies followed in pet bird rearing by their owners. A detailed questionnaire was prepared and data was collected from 35 aviculturists to operationalise the study. General appearance, type, breeds, active nature, coat, nature of droppings and eyes which were the physical indications of health and pedigree of the bird were checked by the owners while selecting the birds. Pigeons were the birds of preference due to the monetary gain from bird rearing but difficulty in treatment of birds were experienced. Most of the owners constructed comfortable aviaries instead of cages for the birds. The roof was made of aluminum sheets. No bedding materials were used but sand with shell grit was practiced by few rearers. In feeding pet birds, owners adopted advice from sources like internet, television, magazines etc. and followed their own feeding schedule for birds.

Key words: *Pet birds-management practices-selection, housing and feeding*

Introduction

Birds have been kept as the pets from time immemorial and people all over the world have been fascinated by this hobby. The earliest records of birds being kept by the Greeks can be inferred from their ubiquitous presence in the history of lekythos paintings (Lazerrby, 1949). Preferences for birds were however highly variable. Pheasants were the birds of choice for the Chinese where as the Egyptians preferred pigeons and Indians preferred parrots as birds of pleasure. Rearing of pet birds serves as an important societal measure for stress alleviation, besides opening up new avenues for employment and income generation among unemployed youth. For these reasons, there has been an increased interest in this sector. Pet birds have many distinct features

1. M.Sc Scholar, email ID: sreeshmaponnappan7@gmail.com, phone no: 9497869813, Part of the M.Sc thesis submitted by the first author to the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad

2. Assistant Professors

3. Asst. Prof., Dept. of Veterinary & Animal Husbandry Extension, CVAS, Mannuthy

4. Professor & Head

5. Asst. Prof. & Head(i/c), Dept. of Statistics, CVAS, Pookode

such as attractive colours and the ability to make good companions both of which have enhanced their popularity. Moreover, there is a wide range of over 400 varieties of pet birds to choose from and the choice extends from Love birds, Budgerigars, Cockatoos, Macaws, Amazon parrots, Pigeons, Cockatiels, Finch, and the Parakeet. However, there is a paucity of information on the management practices followed by bird owners in selection of birds, housing and aviary construction and feeding strategies as well as the constraints faced by them. An understanding of these parameters would be beneficial in developing and designing suitable strategies for intervention in this sector which would go a long way in ensuring a sustainable livelihood option for budding entrepreneurs as well as maintaining minimum standards recommended for the wellbeing of these birds.

The present study made a systematic enquiry into the subject of bird care including selection criteria, housing and feeding strategies followed in pet birds by their owners. Based on the aforesaid discussion, the present study was undertaken to study the methods of selection, to explore the housing and construction of aviary and to identify the feeding pattern in pet birds.

A comprehensive perusal of all literature is required for any research. Besides serving to develop a robust methodology for the study an extensive review of literature is also crucial. The concepts are operationalised to shed light on the present study in a scientific manner. Most of the owners purchased birds from local breeders and outside of the state. Vriends (1989) also opined that in order to gain real pleasure from bird keeping, quality birds should be purchased from reputable pet sources and never be tempted to buy inferior stock. This is true as the price of the birds depended on the breed quality and pedigree. Wilson (1998) observed that people have been buying parrots in increasing numbers without sufficient understanding of this bird. He further opined that a parrot in the wrong home, living with wrong people would be totally depressed and would make people around it equally depressed.

Markey *et al.* (1996) reported that a pet enclosure generally had a hollow box shaped base and a roof which was attached to the base of the box. The attached roof helps simplified access to the interior of the enclosure for cleaning and whelping. According to Claudia and Thomas (2003), one of the first concerns when obtaining a pet bird is its housing. Birds may be allowed to remain free on perches when under supervision, however, they should be confined to a cage while their owner is away to prevent injury to themselves and destruction of the household. Unsupervised pet birds allowed “the run of the house” often get into trouble. All homes contain furnishings that are harmful either directly or indirectly to the bird. These include mirrors, windows, houseplants, electrical cords; open sources of water such as an open toilet or a sink with soaking dishes and objects containing harmful chemicals. They suggest that, to be safe, most caged birds should have their wing feathers trimmed. If done properly, this will not prevent the bird from the ability to make a controlled glide to lower areas from higher objects. Wing trimming merely makes confinement safer for the bird. Trimming the wings usually makes taming the bird easier and shortens the time it takes to tame the bird.

Vriends (1989) insisted that birds should be supplied with unpolluted fresh water at all times and honey water once in a week and in sugar water in summer. Earle and Clark (1991) observed that the nutrients needed for the budgerigars are similar to that of other avian species. Great care should be taken with dietary supplementation to avoid problems of toxicity. Genetic selection of the budgerigar has produced a bird that is phenotypically distinct from its ancestors but whose diet is still considered to be similar to the original native Australian diet. Butcher and Miles (1996) noted that a diet of any companion animal should be a balanced diet. A balanced pet bird diet should contain a combination of nutrients to meet the nutritional requirements of the bird and the diet being fed should furnish the nutrients required by the animal in relation to its age, health, and breeding status. Malnutrition is a major culprit in nine out of ten and this is largely ignored of all clinical cases, by veterinarians who continue to recommend inappropriate diets for birds.

Hess *et al.* (2002) suggested that the optimal diet for pet birds was high in a complete and balanced formulated product, with little human food and a limited amount of seed, supporting the manufacturers' claims that formulated products provide a more complete and balanced diet for birds than human food and seed. They also added that research is needed to improve the diets fed to companion birds. The nutrient requirements of psittacine and passerine birds need to be established, together with the differences due to variations in age, sex, physiological state and species. More complete data are needed on the nutrient content of the food birds consume, especially formulated products. Finally, long-term studies of the health and longevity of individual birds fed different diets are needed to establish potential correlations between diet and disease.

Materials and methods

A study on the present management practices followed by pet bird owners was taken up in Thrissur District of Kerala. Data were collected from pet bird owners at their own premises by personal interview using a pre-tested questionnaire. This study deals with the research methods in different aspects for the selection of the locale. A detailed questionnaire was prepared and data was collected from aviculturists to operationalise the study. Various procedures were adopted to select the respondents and measure the variables. Also many tools of data collection were employed and the statistical tests were carried out. Thrissur District was purposively selected for the study. Snowball sampling was resorted for selection of the respondents. A total of 35 aviculturists were thus selected for the study.

The variables for the study were selected based on their relevance to the objectives, through a thorough review of literature as well as by discussion with subject matter experts. The variables thus selected included management practices such as selection, housing and feeding. In order to assess the adoption of modern pet bird rearing practices under various domains, various subject matter specialists in the field

of rearing of pet birds and field veterinarians were consulted. Various literatures such as the Package of Practice Recommendations of (Kerala Agricultural University, 2010) were also used in this study. Responses to each practice were learned as to whether the said practice was being resorted to or not.

Results and Discussion

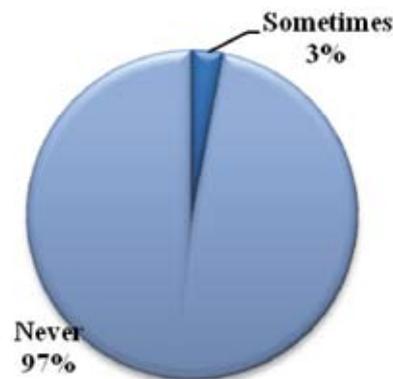
Data collected with respect to selection, housing and feeding from 35 pet owners were analysed and presented in three subsections as given below.

1. Selection

Details of procurement of birds and selection criteria followed by pet bird owners are given in this section. All the owners procure the birds directly.

Here only three per cent owners consult veterinarians before purchasing birds, but 97.14 per cent of them never do any consulting before procuring birds.

Fig. 1. Consulting Veterinarians



Age of birds at which the owners purchased them are classified into four groups namely 2 to 4, 4 to 6, 6 to 8 and above eight weeks. Classification according to this is given in Table 1.

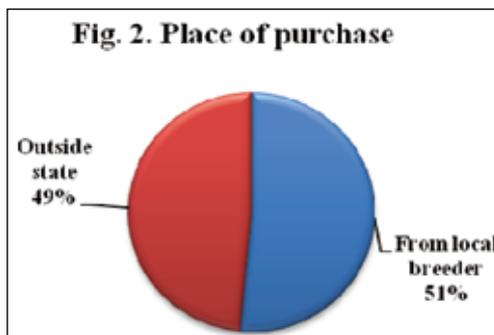
Study shows that about three fourth of the owners (74.28 %) purchased birds at 2-4

Table 1. Age of purchase of birds

Age (weeks)	Frequency	Percentage
2-4	26	74.28
4-6	6	17.14
6-8	1	2.85
Above 8	2	5.71

weeks of age and 17.14 per cent purchased at 4-6 weeks old birds. Below 10 per cent owners procured adult pet birds above six weeks of age. All the bird owners gave equal importance to appearance and health conditions. Pigeons were the birds of preference to be reared by number owners due to monetary gain from bird rearing. General appearance, type, breeds, active nature, coat, nature of droppings and eyes which were the physical indications of health. Pedigree of the bird was also checked by the owners while selecting the birds. Also, people face difficulty in treatment due to the lack of experienced veterinarians in pet bird practice.

Fig 2. Showed that about 51 per cent of the owners purchased the birds from local breeders and 49 per cent owners purchased birds from outside of state. None of the owner's sought advice from a veterinarian while selecting birds.



2. Housing

Housing management like location of the cages, type of cage, number of birds kept in the cage and type of house adopted by the selected pet owners are given in this section.

Table 2. Housing details of pet birds

Details	Variables	No.	Per cent
Location of cage	Terrace	14	40
	Garden	14	40
	Others	7	20
Type of cage	Permanent	29	82.85
	Temporary	6	17.15
Advice for aviary construction	Veterinarian	1	2.87
	Neighbours	4	11.42
	Others (owners)	30	85.71

All the bird owners surveyed had constructed aviary for their birds. Among this, 40 per cent of owners constructed aviary on terrace and other 40 per cent of cages were constructed in garden. About 82.85 per cent of birds had permanent house and only 17.15 percent of houses were temporarily constructed. About 85.71 per cent of cages were constructed by consulting other pet bird owners, 11.42 per cent of cages were made with the help of neighbours and a few per cent of pet owners installed aviary with the advice of veterinarian.

House constructional details

Details of type of house in terms of floor, platform, roof and bedding materials used in the house are discussed in this section (Table 3).

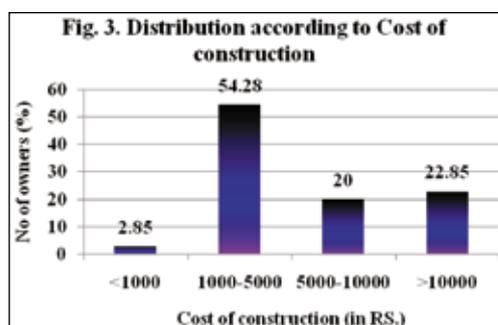
Table 3. Housing details of the birds

Details	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Floor	a. Wood	4	11.42
	b. Iron mesh	9	25.71
	c. Wire mesh	1	2.85
	d. Concrete	21	60
Platform	a. Ground level	15	42.85
	b. Raised	16	45.71
	c. Hanging	1	2.85
	d. Others	3	8.57
Roof	a. Concrete	4	11.42
	b. Aluminum sheets	17	48.57
	c. Plastic sheets	3	8.57
	d. Others	11	31.42
Bedding material	a. Sand	6	17.14
	b. News papers	3	8.57
	c. Wood shavings	4	11.42
	d. Rice bran	7	20
	e. No bedding	15	42.85

More than 60 per cent of pet bird owners used concrete for making floor of the cages. Iron mesh (25.75%), wood (11.42%) and wire mesh (2.85%) are also used as flooring materials by some of the owners. Commonly cages are constructed with raised platforms (45.71 %) or ground level platform (42.85%). Raised platform will help to prevent the attack from predators. Very few cages (2.85 percent) were hanging type which was used for ornamental purposes. About 48.57 per cent of roofs were made of aluminum sheets. 11.42 percent of roofs were made of concrete. Only 8.57 percent used plastic sheets as roofs. Bedding materials were not used by most of the owners (42.85%) and 20 per cent used rice bran as bedding. Nearly 17.14 per cent of owners used sand, 11.42 per cent had wood shavings and 8.57 per cent used news papers as bedding materials for pet birds.

Concrete formed the stratum of floor in more than 60 per cent of the aviaries. But in the tropics as the atmospheric temperature is high and the concrete floor will reflect the heat, concrete is not a right choice for flooring. The roof was mainly constructed using aluminum sheets. Most of the owners have not used any bedding material. Some owners provide sand as the bedding material because it may contain some shell grit which may supplement the birds with some calcium and it is easy to remove the sand when it gets spoiled by faeces.

The cost involved in construction of aviary were collected in the study and presented in graph Fig. 3. It showed that 54.28 per cent pet owners constructed house costing between Rs.1000 to 5000. 22.85 per cent of aviary cages were built for more than Rs. 10000 and 20 per cent of bird owners constructed



house for Rs. 5000 to 10000 rupees. The cost of aviary was less than Rs.1000 for 2.85 per cent pet owners. Results showed that majority of the owners (more than 97%) spent more than Rs. 1000.

3. Feeding

The feeding practices followed by the owners to pet bird chicks and adult ones, time of feeding, age at which feeding starts, ingredients in feed, feed supplements, feeding schedule and consultation advice followed by owners are given in Table 7. Feeding was done twice a day by majority of owners both for chicks (51.43 %) and adult birds (48.57 %). Some owners (20 %) fed the birds all the time in a day while 48.57 per cent people preferred both morning and evening for feeding. All the owners followed their own feeding schedule. Majority of the owners started first feeding at 1.5 months of age.

Table 4. Feeding pattern of birds

Feeding details	Variables	No.	Per cent
Feeding chicks	one time	10	28.57
	two times	18	51.43
	three times	7	20.00
Feeding adults birds	1 time	13	37.15
	2 times	17	48.57
	3 times	5	14.28
Time of feeding	Morning	11	31.43
	Morning and evening	17	48.57
	All times	7	20.00
Age of first feeding	1.5 months	30	85.72
	1.5-2 months	5	14.28
Ingredients in feed	Vegetables	5	14.29
	All of these	30	85.71
Feed supplements	Salt	4	11.42
	Ash	2	5.71
	Shellgrit	6	17.17
	Turmeric powder	9	25.71
	All of these	8	22.85
	None of these	6	17.17
Feeding schedule	Sometimes	4	11.42
	Not adopted	31	88.57
Advice followed	Local breeders	19	54.25
	Others	16	45.71

More than 85.71 percent of pet owners give all types of feeds like grains, pulses, vegetables and minerals. Only 14.29 per cent owners gave vegetables to their pet birds. Majority of the owners were feeding home-

made feed to birds. The major ingredients of the feed were cereals and pulses. Cereals include wheat, maize, and de-hulled rice, jowar, thina and ragi. Pulses include green gram, green peas, ground nut, dal etc. Different owners had formulated their own ration containing cereals and pulses. Also most of the owners give extra feed supplement for their growth and development. To supplement feed 25.71 per cent of owner gave turmeric powder mixed with feed and 22.85 per cent of owners gave all type of feed supplements such as salt, ash, shell grit and turmeric powder to their birds.

Conclusion

A detailed study was done in the areas of selection criteria, housing and feeding strategies followed in pet bird rearing by their owners. A detailed questionnaire was prepared and data was collected from 35 aviculturists to operationalise the study. General appearance, type, breeds, active nature, coat, nature of droppings and eyes which were the physical indications of health and pedigree of the bird were checked by the owners while selecting the birds. Pigeons were the birds of preference due to the monetary gain from bird rearing but difficulty in treatment of birds were experienced. Most of the owners constructed comfortable aviaries instead of cages for the birds. The roof was made of aluminum sheets. No bedding materials were used but sand with shell grit was practiced by few rearers. In feeding pet birds, owners adopted advice from sources like internet, television, magazines etc. and followed their own feeding schedule for birds. Further study may provide more information on pet bird rearing.

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