Keeping up with the protein

As his Glosters approach the moult, champion breeder **MICK ROSE** is maintaining softfood, including egg, to provide the boost the birds need to reach their potential

CANARIES

MY BREEDING season has almost drawn to a close, with just a few hens finishing off the last round. Most hens have now finished, however, and are living in groups in two 8ft (2.4m) long flight cages. So far, there are 135 young birds and I have singled up the 60 or so young coronas, to ensure that their all-important crests are not damaged in any way. Singling up the unflighted stock also helps to create a natural steadiness among them, which will be all-important in the show cage.

When breeding is completely finished, I will knock the birdroom lights off, which will help induce the moult in all of the birds.

I have a good feeling when I assess the unflighted birds in my birdroom during the daily visits and I am very pleased with how the young stock is looking this year.

At this stage, I am really feeding up the birds and I aim to feed a high percentage of protein. On reflection, last season I may have cut back the diet a little too early, with the result that the birds did not necessarily all reach their full potential. The current softfood mix consists of eggfood, cous cous, pinhead oats, niger, sunflower hearts, apple broccoli and a wild-bird feed made up of a dozen different types of husked seeds.

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All those go into the mix, which I feed twice a day to ensure that growth, weight and feather all have enough fuel to develop to their max. It seems to be working. When I handle the birds at the moment, they seem to have plenty of body, which is needed to complement a good crest.

I have used softfood far more this year than any other. Usually I withdraw softfood from hens that are sitting eggs, but this year they still received a daily ration. This seems to have benefited them greatly and the hens don't seem to be showing any signs of the strains of the breeding season.

The goldfinch-siskin seed mix used during the breeding season has now been replaced by a standard canary mix, which includes egg biscuit. This brings down the energy and breeding drive in the birds.

A yellow corona with great colour

A blue unflighted consort bred this year

Another thing to watch for!

There are a high number of cinnamons among the unflighted stock and many of them are catching the eye, particularly in regards to feather quality.

Observation of the stock remains one of the most important tasks, and recently this was brought home to me again. I noticed two coronas that seemed to be dropping back and losing weight. Thinking they were unwell, I administered some medication to treat coccidiosis.

I decided I would give some of the solution directly and syringed some into the beaks of the two affected birds. They seemed to perk up at first, but then started to look unwell again, so I decided that I would administer a second dose in the same way.

I was surprised when both birds spewed out a white substance when I opened their beaks. On closer inspection, I worked this out to be softfood that had lost its yellow colour after sitting in each bird's beak for a period of time. I administered a second dose, but a short while after that it dawned on me the birds' tongues had not been obvious when I had opened up the beak! In both cases I had another look and, using the fine thin strip of plastic on a biro pen lid, I investigated around the mouth cavity. In both cases, with some investigation, the tongues suddenly popped forward into their usual position and began flickering away.

I can only assume that both birds had, for want of a better phrase, swallowed their tongues and were unable to release them. That would explain the loss of weight and the softened but unswallowed food in their mouth. Both birds are now well on the mend and from now on when a bird appears unwell I shall check inside the beak as a standard measure. ■

Mick Rose: 'Many of the cinnamons are catching my eye,' he comments *Photos: Mick Rose*

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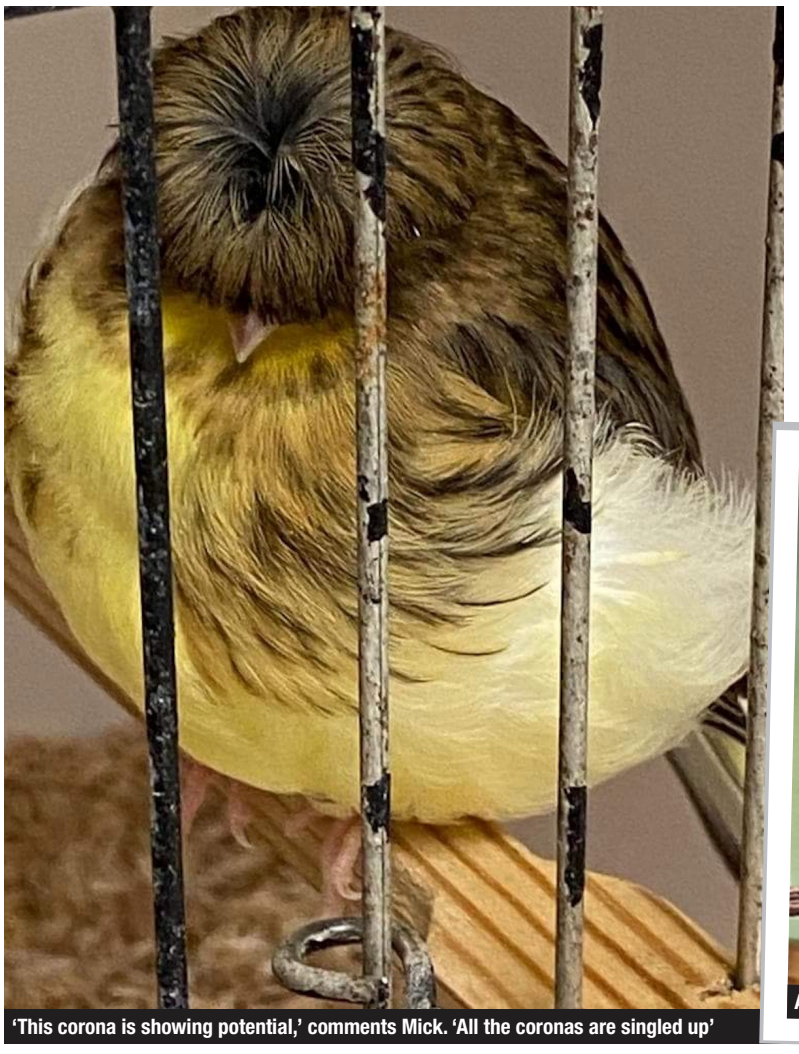

'This corona is showing potential,' comments Mick. 'All the coronas are singled up'

A young consort