

"Fledge", "Wean", "Socialize" baby birds ~ Judy Brumley

When each baby is between two weeks and three weeks old I take it from the parents to 'hand feed' it with a pre-formulated mix with hot water added to it, to the recommended consistency to about 8 weeks old. For hand-feeding 2 week olds, I usually feed (with a 12cc curved syringe), 6 cc's of formula every 3-4 hours.. (increasing to 12-15cc's). The formula should be fed close to the internal temperature of a bird's body (104 degrees). We have between 100 degrees and 109 degrees temperature we have to stay within. At 100 degrees the chick uses precious body heat to digest the food aggravating a slow crop, 110 degrees will scald the babies crop. The babies are kept very warm, 90 TO 92 degrees until feathers open (then 80 to 90 degrees) and fed on a schedule determined by their age.

"WEAN"...age 4+ weeks old is a critical stage for the hand - feeder is during the stage when a baby bird's instinct tells it to slim down to fly. In this stage, the babies mind is on getting airborne and eating is put "on hold". Some hand-feedings will be refused. Hand-fed and parent raised babies are still very dependent at this age. They still want and need a full crop at nightfall. Chicks are individual personalities and they don't become independent or confident at the same time, and I don't want to force wean when they are 6 weeks old. My average weaning time is 8 weeks. Parent raised chicks understandably become independent earlier than hand – fed chicks.

"FLEDGE" is FLIGHT, A bird's basic life skill. Allow the babies to fly before trimming their flight feathers.

At around 5 weeks old, while you are trying to hand-feed them, they just take off and are airborne! Like when your human baby is learning to walk, these babies are flying into things a lot. A wing trim, when properly done, should result in a bird having just enough flight feathers left to (hopefully) break it's fall, but at the same time is unable to gain speed and altitude in flight. Mastering the basic life skill of flight gives a bird confidence, and self assurance. It would be easier for me to clip some flight feathers before the babies get airborne, but I want to let them have a good fly once or twice before wing trimming. It can be quite a circus in the house with a few babies trying to test their wings!

"SOCIALIZE". Hand-feeding guarantees a baby bird gets handled enough that it will become used to it, learns to trust, and eventually will bond to a human. The hand-fed and socialized baby birds that get used to different sights, sounds and new people before leaving the breeder will make a wonderful pet.

INSTRUCT CHILDREN on holding because if the baby bird's wings have a severe clip, or in new fledgling stage, it could crash to the ground, breaking or badly bruise it's leg. Chipping it's keel bone (breast bone) can cause INTERNAL bleeding, and eventual death.

Thinking of buying a baby bird and finish hand-feeding it? Don't be talked into a crash course on hand-feeding. A good breeder can raise a loving, sweet bird who will quickly bond to you and become part of your family flock. You do not need to take on the risky, sometimes extremely difficult task of hand-feeding.

All rights reserved.
Judy Brumley.