

## Thinking About Hand Rearing Your Chicks?

This article was not written as a “how to hand feed” tutorial. I have deliberately not inserted photos of feeding chicks.

There is a mountain of information on the practical aspects of hand rearing chicks on the internet and in books readily available from libraries and book stores. Learning to hand rear birds cannot be learned solely from a book, article or a few YouTube clips, no matter how well written. But in saying that, research is an essential element to becoming proficient at hand rearing.



3-4 week old chick ready for hand feeding

### **Bird breeders hand rear chicks for a variety of reasons.**

Some include, wanting to rear birds for the companion pet market, increase production from your birds, or it could be that rearing chicks is the only option due to poor parenting i.e. parent birds plucks the chicks.

It can be a very rewarding experience, but is also an extremely time consuming process. So, if you have a choice in the matter, consider carefully whether you really are able to devote the time and commitment to it. If you do decide that you wish to hand rear your chicks, then there are some important principles to follow to ensure that your chicks grow up happy and healthy.

Let me begin by stating that just because a chick is hand reared, it does not necessarily bestow good social behaviour, or a friendly companion that will give unconditional love complete with kisses, (leaving lips intact) cuddles and all the behaviours we desire from our new friends.

I believe there are two clear distinctions to be made before I venture on. Hand fed and hand reared.

Hand fed chicks can often be timid, nippy, and flighty. This then requires a great deal of time and dedication from the new owner to build enough trust in the young bird so as to become a loved member of the family. This could be partly due to the breeder having too many mouths to feed at breeding season, not enough time to spend with the chicks due to work commitments, or other legitimate reasons that don't necessarily reflect negatively on the skill or dedication of the breeder.

Hand reared chicks on the other hand, in addition to feeding, are more often given time to become accustomed to being held, scratched, kissed, cuddled, turned upside down, and maybe able to step up and step down before being taken home by the new owner.

## **There is nothing like getting hands on experience.**

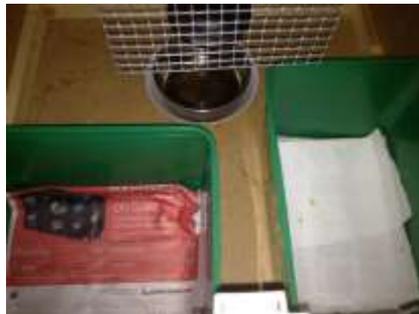
Visiting an experienced breeder and learning the ropes in my opinion is a must do. Some of the benefits include:

- ✓ When to pull the chicks - new born, feathered, parent co sharing
- ✓ Housing – brooder, cage, light, heating, humidity and hygiene
- ✓ What to feed – brand of formula
- ✓ Leg rings – size codes
- ✓ How to feed - holding, position, technique, frequency, with assistance
- ✓ Tools – syringe, crop needle, spoon, thermometer, hot water
- ✓ Weaning – nutrition, seed, fruit, veg, pellets, sprouts, millet
- ✓ Wing clipping



This is the equipment I use.

I was fortunate enough to be given an introduction to hand rearing by Murray Greenslade (NQ Aviaries). This enabled me to confidently move forward and begin hand rearing my own chicks. I now enjoy helping beginners to take that first step in becoming proficient hand rearers.



One of the brooders I use to maintain my chick's temperature

## **Some guidelines**

As you can see by the guideline examples, the process does have things we have to learn to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our chicks.

- ✓ Keep feeding utensils and feeding area clean
- ✓ Use fresh food, never reheat old food from the last feed
- ✓ Always use a thermometer to check the temperature of the food before feeding.
- ✓ Personal hygiene, wash hands before feeding
- ✓ Maintaining the temperature appropriate for the chick's age
- ✓ Never heat / reheat food in the microwave
- ✓ Don't mix chicks of different species in the same brooder / cage
- ✓ Don't change your hand rearing food once you start

The risk of losing a chick is significantly increased if we attempt to hand rear before we have acquired the necessary skills. Before considering hand rearing without direct supervision, ask yourself these questions. Then ask yourself if you are equipped to start the journey of hand rearing chicks.

- ✓ What temperature should the formula be?
- ✓ How do I tell if my chick is comfortable with the temperature in the brooder?
- ✓ I have seen small containers of water in rearing brooders. What is that for?
- ✓ What is crop slow down?
- ✓ What do I do if I go to feed my chick and it is still partially full
- ✓ What is gas crop?
- ✓ What is a good bird to learn hand rearing skills on?
- ✓ Why is my chick gagging and it can't seem to swallow the food?
- ✓ Why is my chick vomiting?
- ✓ How do I tell my chick is full after a feed?
- ✓ What are those strange bubbles on the back of the neck after a feed?
- ✓ When to start the weaning process?

Hand rearing chicks is a wonderful journey that can bring a great deal of satisfaction to the breeder /bird keeper. With some hands on tuition and some research, we can quickly build confidence to be successful at hand rearing our chicks.

The Thuringowa Bird Club is fortunate enough to have many members that have years of experience in hand rearing chicks. So there is a good place to begin the journey.... Just ask.

Article by John McDougall Feb 2014