

Enrichment and Breeding: Lineolated Parakeets

By Fran Andersen, At Feathers End Avaiary

Enrichment:

Enrichment can be provided in many forms.

Dietary enrichment is simply providing your birds foods in new and novel ways. Setting up several stations for him to go to search for his meal. You can wrap tasty tidbits in small pieces of paper for him to chew or unwrap to get to or hang from a string and let him figure out how to get to it. Other ways are to use a skewer so that he may hang from it instead of just sitting in front of a bowl. Hang lettuce, broccoli, carrots, apple, etc from the top or bars of the cage in various spots to keep him moving and exploring.

For a bird that has never had food enrichment it first may simply be putting a piece of paper towel over his bowl and his having to figure out how to get under it to get his food.

All birds enjoy chewing and Linnies are no exception. They do not do the damage that the larger parrots but they sure do enjoy chewing on fresh green branches. Just be sure that the branches are not sprayed and the species that you use is bird safe. I have lots of wild grape vine growing around me and I wrap it up fresh and put it in the cage. I just make sure that I spray it with Pet focus and let it sit for several minutes and then very thoroughly rinse it. I then put it in the oven on 200 for an hour or two to dry out. The birds love it. Other people use fresh curly willow or pussy willow in the spring.

I have found that my linnies tend to like toys that dangle and they can swing from or they can bat about. Laces of leather with pony beads and small shapes strung on them.

Some of mine like the shredders and will spend hours chewing on the dry straw type material. Of course as with many bird paper is a cheap and perennial favorite. Wad up a paper towel. Put some shredded paper and stuff it in a paper cup and watch your bird have a blast especially if you hide a few beads or small objects for it to find. The ideas are endless. Just be sure not to use the colored news adds from news papers.

You can also use toilet paper rolls as long as you make sure they cannot get stuck in them.

Some Linnies like swings and some don't. In my opinion I believe that they like things that swing such as a boing type toy more than an actual swing. Or a series of perches made out of rope that sway when they walk across them. They should have a variety of perching material from the rope perches, to the natural branches (the best in my opinion) to sandy perches (perches that are manzanita and covered in a sand material).

Any type of material other than actual pvc that they can chew the edges a lot is great for making tunnels. Linnies just love to hide. My one caution is that you need to watch for nesting signs and remove any type of toy which causes nesting behavior.

Also there are many types of huts and covers on the market. I would caution against any that have a fuzzy or thick furry type bottom. Because of the habit of our linnies nails growing so fast and curling. They can be a death trap if a nail gets caught and the bird falls out of the hut and cannot get back in and hangs there.

Breeding:

When first introduced adult linnies will often hang on opposite sides of the cage and may even make angry chattering noises at one another. So it is best to introduce them into a neutral cage that has not been occupied by either bird. In most cases within a week or two you will find the the birds starting to sit on the same branch and gradually get closer together. When first introduced and they are challenging one another they will raise their heads and chatter at each other and kind of spar sometimes with their beaks just barely touching each other. Usually one says 'oh heck' and leaves and that is the end of it. Often the submissive one will go to the bottom of the cage. Once they are sitting on the same branch you will start noticing them making soft noises to each other very soft and kind of inviting. They will spend quite a bit of time allopreening. When the female wants to mate she will actively tap or nibble the male around the beak and make little cheeping noises and beg for food or he will offer to feed her himself. This is usually followed by the male placing one foot on or over the females back. The male may also wrap a wing around the hen. The male's other foot remains on the perch as they mate side by side. Once mating has started the first egg is usually laid within about ten days. Some hen will lay every other day but in my experience it seems to be closer to every three days.

Please remember that the ideas and nest boxes shown here are what has worked for me. Other breeders have had wonderful success with other types of material and types of nest boxes. There is no one way or formula for success. Much of raising birds is common sense. A breeder needs to take into account where his birds are housed. Are they in stacked cages. What other species are nearby. Where are the windows. Do dogs, cats, small children or other possible disturbances or scary events take place even the possibility of car lights shinning into the room at night to disturb the birds including a motion sensor light turning on. All can cause nesting failure with babies being deserted or killed and eggs broken.

All during the courting and mating period the birds will be going in and out of the

box. If given the proper materials for them to do so most will build a covered cocoon over themselves and their nest. We provide strips of newspaper with aspen on top of it along with a handful of long coconut fiber. The birds use this coconut fiber and paper to build to their cocoon. The hen will start spending time in the box for a couple of days before she actually lays her first egg. Onset of incubation varies from bird to bird. According to when laid and when hatched I can tell that some of my hens will start incubating after the second egg and some will start after the first egg. In fact I have one hen that started incubating tight after the third egg laid. I say this because of four eggs laid three hatched within 24 hours of each other and the last three days later. The clutch size has varied from three to seven eggs. The normal size for my birds is four or five. The eggs start to hatch 20 to 21 days from the start of incubation. Some males spend a lot of time with their mates sitting right next to them and some males seldom go into the box. So it seems to be a wide range behavior.

As far as being good parents in our experience it has run the entire spectrum. I have had hens that would not raise more than two babies. They feed the first two that hatch and ignore any more and I have had a couple of hens that would raise a clutch of five without any intervention. For me this is rare and if a fifth baby hatches I pull the oldest two for hand rearing leaving the smallest three with the parents.

When first born baby Linnies are fed on their backs. If you have looked in a nest box at a newborn you like I have probably wondered how in the world can this tiny thing survive. But they do and grow quickly. It is my general experience that while it appears that the Linnie seems calm when you are looking at it's nest many do not tolerate disturbances well. In my early days of raising Linnies I would often look in just a peak to see how things were going. Well a baby would disappear or you could see it was buried and not fed. Well the more you went in to the box to try to save it the worse it got. I found that I look to see the first hatch for what the date is and then STAY OUT unless there is a reason to get involved. Do not even peek.

The chicks eyes open at about seven to ten days and I usually band at 10 to 14 days. If I leave the babies with the parents fledging occurs at approximately six weeks of age. Babies are pretty much weaned at 8 weeks.

It has been my experience that many hens start eating feces when nesting. There can be many reasons for this and I have talked to many people including my vet at great length concerning this. It is her opinion that there may be a lack of protein in the diet and I have started giving my birds an insectivore food along with a high quality egg food, dry tea and herb mix all mixed together in a treat cup and the incidence of feces eating has dramatically decreased.

