

## ***Will to Survival and Overcome***

*by Bonnie Black*

During the 2006 breeding season, Bonnie Black reported having a chick with a very strange leg problem. The leg of this chick was growing backwards. With the feet pointing forward instead of back.

Bonnie went on the Internet to ask if anyone had seen something similar and what advice they had for her.

Two theories came forth:

- 1). That the defect was hereditary.
- 2). That it was a deformity that might have been caused by external causes. An injury received in the nest after birth.

In most cases, the advice was to put the poor chick down since it could not live a normal life with one leg not able to grasp a perch.

Bonnie watched the chick closely to observe if it appeared to be in pain. It did not.



Notice the claws point forward.  
*(No this is not a Waterslager)*

Here's the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say...

Remember I sent the picture of it a few weeks back asking your opinions about birth defect or injury?? Some were convinced it was a birth defect and I should destroy the chick. Others thought it was a dislocated hip and it could never be ok and I should put it down. Others offered stories of canaries living good lives in spite of handicaps.

Being a coward about putting birds down, I decided to take a wait and see approach and observe if the chick developed skills to compensate before making a final decision. It amazed me being the first out of the nest and has learned to hover and seemed only mildly inconvenienced when it's foot tangled in it's wing occasionally. I became impressed with it's will to survive and overcome.

Over the last few days it started using the bend in the leg as a support but the new stub kept getting scuffed and raw. Today I decided to take it to my avian vet, David Rupiper, DVM at East Petaluma Animal Hospital to discuss what was best for the bird. I fully expected it to be euthanized or to have it's leg amputated if it wasn't too expensive. As much as anything, I wanted to know for sure if this was some kind of genetic thing or accident.

The avian vet showed me that the problem was originally do to a break in the leg probably soon after hatching. He guessed that the hen may have "helped" too much when the chick was hatching or it may have been caught in nesting material. (NOT birth defect). Exactly how it happened we won't know. The bone had healed and fused in that weird position you saw. What I really didn't expect was for him to tell me he could probably fix it and the chick could go home this afternoon!!

Of course the prognosis would have better for a complete recovery if I had brought it there right away. The "fix" would have been easier too. Now I feel terrible that I didn't take the bird to the vet right away. I just thought there was no hope and nature would take it's course. The vet had to rubric the leg and reset it (under anesthetic of course). Before someone thinks this was terribly cruel, I want to reassure everyone that when I picked the chick up it was eating and drinking and not acting stressed or in much discomfort at all. The vet thinks that there may be a little nerve damage and the chick may have a difficult time making a "full fist" around a perch but other than that, it should heal completely and look normal!

The cost? The vet wants one of my baby Gouldians when they color up!

I wanted to share this story with you all in case you ever see something like that in your bird room. Don't wait as long as I did though to get the bird to a good avian vet!

*Editorial Note: Not all of us have the patience and tender care of nature Bonnie exhibited. But when you take that extra step, the rewards of the will to survive become apparent and you draw closer to the birds you have in your care. Not all stories are successes as this one turned out to be.*

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