

The Cricket Chronicle



Orphaned nestling



Cricket was six days old on 29 June 2007, when he was found under a nearby carport. Although he was not in the sun, it was a 90-degree day, and Cricket was very hot on the pavement. He was probably also dehydrated.

Cricket was easily identified as a European Starling based on his yellow flanged mouth, which would eventually turn into a beak.

Tiny bird



Cricket weighed 36 grams when he was brought inside. Due to his lack of feathering, he needed to be kept in a warm room.

At six days, Cricket's eyes were only beginning to open, and his legs were not weight bearing.

Cricket chirped constantly, and therefore he was named Cricket.

New wing feathers



Although Cricket's feathers were mainly the soft downy feathers of a new hatchling, he was already starting to grow his first wing feathers.

These feathers emerge from little tubes, known as the sheath. The sheath protect the bird's new feathers until the feathers are strong. Then the sheath disintegrates and remnant dust from the sheath is preened away.

Baby starling diet



Because starlings are insectivores, Cricket required a substantial amount of protein in his diet.

Cricket's food was a mix of baby bird formula and dog food (Purina One Senior Formula, for extra protein), with an avian vitamin supplement.

Extra water was added to Cricket's food initially, but after a day he was given food of a thicker consistency.

Cricket's food was warmed to 100-110 degrees F. He ate from the end of a chopstick.

Big ears



Since nestlings are not feathered, it is possible to see that their ears are quite large.

Birds generally have a poor sense of smell, but they hear and see very well.

Pin feathers growing



At eight days, Cricket's feathers were beginning to grow.

He was now able to scoot, although his legs could still not yet support his weight.

Grand canyon



At 10 days, Cricket's feedings ideally should have been every 30 minutes. It was possible to feed him only at less frequent intervals, so he was given occasional supplemental feedings in the evening and at night.

Cricket was normally ready for breakfast at 6 AM.

After his feedings, Cricket would fall asleep in his owner's hand.

New feathers



Cricket's first feathers were now starting to emerge from the sheath.

Cricket already weighed over forty grams, and he became increasingly active after feedings.

Stronger bird



Also at 10 days, Cricket's beak was starting to grow.

In addition, his legs became partially weight bearing. Cricket was now able to move around and explore.

Baby with feathers



At 12 days old, Cricket was almost fully feathered. He was a fluffy, cuddly baby.

Cricket was now able to keep warm in an ambient temperature of 85 degrees F.

Baby with feathers (continued)



Cricket's feathering developed last on the forward edges of his wings (near shoulder) and keel (breast bone).

Bare spots were still visible at 12 days.

Cricket was starting to learn about his surroundings, and during his feedings he took breaks and investigated the nearby floor clutter. He also started to perch on his owner's finger.

Ready to fledge



At 14 days, Cricket's beak was nearly fully formed and the yellow flanges had receded considerably.

Cricket was now hopping, and he had hopped out of his box twice between feedings.

Cricket could also perch without falling forwards or backwards.

Soon it would be time for a cage ...

Cricket's new home



Cricket's first cage, a flight cage measuring 30" x 18" x 18", became his permanent cage. Although the cage was large at first, as a juvenile bird, Cricket would soon need a lot of space for exercise and play.

During his first week in the new cage, Cricket's blue box, where he was previously living, was put in the cage with him. This enabled him to feel secure as he adapted to his new environment.

Getting acquainted



Cricket's was initially curious about his new cage, and he investigated it from all sides ...



Then he hopped in!

Busy fledgling



At 21 days, Cricket weighed 60 grams and was fully feathered. His cage was moved to the living room, where he quickly adapted to more stimulating surroundings. Cricket was ready to play and explore.

Cricket's cage had many toys, including a baby's cell phone.

He eventually learned to operate the phone, after observing many demos. Later, this phone was upgraded to a more advanced phone with more challenging features.

Playtime all the time



Cricket quickly became king of his cage.

Cricket was a confident, secure, independent bird, however he also enjoyed, and demanded, constant attention.

After his first molt, Cricket settled down, and many of the pleasing personality traits that he had shown as a baby came back.

From baby feathers ...



In early September, Cricket began his first molt. He gradually lost his soft, grey baby feathers and acquired more familiar adult starling markings, including his “stars”.

Cricket also learned to take care of his feathers, and he became an experienced flyer.

Cricket's first molt lasted for about three weeks.

... to the starling look



By mid-September, Cricket's feathers had darkened and his white spots ("stars") appeared, first in front, then on his wing feathers, and eventually on his head.

Cricket was now eating on his own, and tuna was added to his diet to provide extra protein for new feather growth.

In addition, Cricket's diet also now included softbill pellets and finely chopped vegetables, which were added to his nestling food mix.

Wings



Cricket liked to fly. With his new wing feathers, and a better knowledge of his surroundings, he mastered hovering and learned to make vertical landings.

Eventually he also became skilled at performing complex maneuvers, such as sharp turns, touch-and-goes, and pivots on a vertical axis.

Cricket learned flight paths to known destinations in the living room, where he now routinely plays during outings from his cage.

Time to fly



This picture shows Cricket, still half molted, launching into flight just as the camera shutter opened.

Beautiful adult bird



By the end of September, now fully molted, Cricket had acquired beautiful black, white, and golden brown plumage, as shown. In certain light, his feathers appear iridescent.

Cricket's beak lightened in color, and later turned yellow with lavender at the base of the mandible. This beak coloring, along with the appearance of his iris, indicate that Cricket is male. In addition, Cricket's adult weight is over 73 grams, which is also characteristic of male starlings.

Starling talk



After his first molt, Cricket was introduced to phonics. He did not repeat sounds and letters, but he sang through his lessons joyfully.

About ten days later, Cricket began to talk. His first learned phrases were those that he had heard as a baby. Later he began to learn new phrases and sounds from his cell phone.

To hear to a recording of Cricket talking, click on the symbol shown below.



Relaxing in the sun



Cricket enjoys sunbathing. He spreads his feathers fully to catch the sunlight, and stays in this position for about fifteen minutes.

Here, Cricket is shown sunbathing on his owner's arm. In the background is Cricket's sun cage, another favorite spot for relaxing in the sun.

Along with sunbathing, Cricket also enjoys bird watching through the window. Although he was hand raised, he seems to be aware of the fact that he is a bird.

A starling's life



Starlings live an average of fifteen years, often longer in captivity. Kuro, a starling who lived in Japan, earned a Guinness World Record for living 19½ years.

Another famous starling was Mozart's starling, whose song reminded the composer of one of his piano concertos.

Hopefully Cricket will live a long, happy, healthy starling's life.

Cricket is pictured on his owner's arm.