

# How to use a crop tube

When birds fall ill, they need as much supportive care as we can provide which includes supplemental crop feeding and/or administering medications. Knowing how to use a crop needle is critical for treating sick birds. Hopefully this sequence of photographs will be more useful than a description alone to help you learn how to use a crop needle.

An 18 gauge size crop needle or smaller is needed for finches. The most difficult part is getting a finch to open his mouth, sometimes

the finch will bite at the crop needle when you place it near his beak and you can slide it in, other times you may need an assistant to open its mouth for you.

Before inserting the crop needle make sure you have filled the crop needle itself with the liquid from the syringe, otherwise you will push the air that was in in the crop needle into the birds crop. While this isn't harmful you need to take advantage of all of the available crop space for food, not air.



You need to extend the bird's head and neck upward by pushing your thumb under it's mandible.



Direct the crop needle towards the bird's right side, the needle will automatically go into the crop. Keep your thumb positioned over the right side of the bird's neck and you will be able to feel the needle as it goes down. This crop needle is just shy of being 1 1/2 inches long. Notice in the photo that you can insert it almost the full length into the crop, which you should do. The deeper you are in the crop the larger amount of liquid you can deliver.

If you insert it too shallow then the liquid will quickly begin to come back up thru the mouth. The photo on the left illustrates how to both hold the bird and push the syringe at the same time. Always use a 1cc (Tuberculin) size syringe for finches, you can not maintain slow enough delivery with a larger syringe.



Here the bird's feathers have been wetted back so the crop can be visualized. The crop is so thin that you can clearly see the crop needle and see that the crop is completely empty. Notice where my thumb is positioned, normally the feathers would be obstructing this view but I would be able to feel the hub of the needle against my thumb.



The fluid should be delivered very slowly. If delivered too quickly it will come back up thru the mouth. I usually push in about a 0.05 ml or less at a time. Then pause for about two seconds and push another 0.05 ml. I have found that this method of pushing a tiny amount at a time, then pausing allows me to give overall a greater amount of fluid at a time. It gives time for the fluid to settle at the bottom of the crop and make a pocket. Note the tear drop shape outline of the pink fluid in this photo. If the same amount is given rapidly, the crop tends to fill with an even columnar shape and doesn't expand at the bottom, thereby holding a smaller volume of fluid. In addition much is usually forced back up to the mouth during a rapid delivery.



Here the crop is full, compare it to the photo on the right. I have found that 0.5 (1/2) ml is about the maximum amount that can be delivered at a time.

Remove the crop needle very slowly, if you pull it out rapidly you will also pull up fluid with it. If you begin to overfill or deliver too rapidly and fluid comes up thru the mouth, just stop delivering but do not pull the crop needle out in haste. Again just pull it out very slowly. The crop needle and syringe should be flushed thoroughly with water to clean it. You should then boil them both for ten minutes to sterilize before the next use.