

Keeping and Breeding Salvadori's Fig Parrots

Psittaculirostris salvadorii

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Found in the lowland forests and forest edges of Irian Jaya, Indonesia, the Salvadori's Fig Parrot is listed on CITES II and is considered a BirdLife International "restricted-range" species, which means that, while the species is abundant in numbers, the range of the species is limited and could be easily threatened. It is vulnerable to

Salvadori's Fig Parrot *Psittaculirostris salvadorii*

Endemic to the lowland forests of northern Irian Jaya, Indonesia. Fairly common within its small range, but vulnerable due to habitat destruction and trapping.



extinction due to extensive logging and land clearing over its range as well as trapping for the cage bird market. The Salvadori's Fig Parrot is a green bird with elongated yellow facial feathers, blue feathers around the eyes and a broad red patch on the breast. The sexes are easily distinguishable as the female lacks the bright red breast. It is a stocky bird, only measuring 7 1/2 inches (19 cm) but weighing around 105-118 grams. Fig Parrots get their name because the majority of their natural diet consists of figs. They will occasionally consume flowers, pollen and nectar, some fruits and even insects.

In captivity they are delightful little birds. Their fascinating and vivacious nature make them a treat to watch in the aviary. The Salvadori's Fig Parrots' behavior is very similar to that of lorries and caiques. They are very energetic and playful. Once acclimated, even parent-reared birds become very trusting of people and will take food from keepers' hands. I personally have not hand-reared the Salvadori's Fig Parrots, but I have been told by people who have hand-reared them that they are similar to hand-reared lorries and would make good pets. Their soft twill-like call is very charming.

Since they are mostly frugivorous (fruit-eating), they can be a bit messy. They tend to throw their food around and their droppings are softer and stickier than other parrots', thus making regular cage cleaning very important in order to maintain proper hygiene.

Since Fig parrots are active birds, they require a much larger sized enclosure than most other species of similar sized parrots. My Salvadori's Fig Parrots are housed in suspended cages, measuring 24" wide x 36" tall x 72" deep, constructed of 1" x 1/2" galvanized wire, elevated so the bottom of the cage is 4 feet off the ground. I have found that this particular sized cage allows for plenty of flight space for a family of fig parrots. The cages are equipped with an all-wire basket-style feeding station attached to the bottom of the front of the flight, which contains three stainless steel dishes. I prefer to place the dishes at the bottom of the cages so that any discarded food will drop through the bottom of the flight instead of staying inside. Also, placing the feeding station on the outside of the cage allows me to easily access it for thorough cleaning. Plenty of natural branches are provided for perches. I have an abundance of oak and pecan trees available to me so I utilize these, but any non-toxic tree branch will also work. Fig parrots are voracious chewers and need a lot of material to chew on to keep their beaks in good condition.



Day old Salvadori's Fig Parrot chicks

Fresh eucalyptus branches are added about every week to the cage for the birds to chew on as well as for additional perching. The nest box, a boot style box measuring 16" wide x 20" tall x 8" deep,

is attached to the outside of the top back corner of the cage, opposite the food dishes. I find that the boot style box decreases the chance of eggs being broken as the pair enters the nest box. Nesting material consists of aspen/pine shavings and small twigs and leaves from fresh eucalyptus. Nest boxes are essential for fig parrots, as even non-breeding birds will sleep in their boxes at night.

Fig parrots are not picky eaters. They will sample most anything that is put in their bowl. All my birds are fed twice daily. The morning feeding consists of the same "parrot diet" that I feed to all my non-lory parrots. This includes cooked organic brown rice, cooked lentils, cooked split peas, chopped fruit (apple, grape and papaya), chopped vegetables (peas, corn, green beans, lima beans, red bell peppers, carrots, cooked yams and squash) and a good quality parrot pellet. 2-3 halved figs are added to the diet every day. Fresh figs are fed when available; however, when the fig season is over, dried figs are soaked overnight in water to reconstitute them before feeding. Additionally, since fig parrots need higher levels of vitamin K in their diet in order to thrive, Nekton Q (a vitamin K supplement) is added to the diet 5 days per week. For the afternoon feeding, the fig parrots receive a good quality sunflower-based seed mix. Seasonal food items, such as wild banana, loquat, prickly pear and palm fruit, are added to the seed mix when they are available.

After a short courtship and copulation, the hen will begin to spend a great deal of time in the nest box during the day. Two eggs, the normal clutch size for Salvadori's Fig Parrots, are laid soon after. Incubation lasts for 23 days. Fig parrots are particularly sensitive to nest box inspections and great care must be taken not to disturb the hen. I have found that Salvadori's Fig Parrot hens are wonderful mothers and will incubate very well if left undisturbed. Nest box inspections can be performed, but only when the hen has left the nest box voluntarily. Once the chicks hatch, the amount of food is increased. Additionally, fruit is added to the afternoon diet to ensure the chicks receive adequate fluids and nutrition. The chicks are very pink with long wispy yellow neonatal down covering their backs and head. Chicks grow remarkably quickly. Chicks are banded around 10 days of age with a 6 mm band (Cockatiel size). By day 11, the eyes are open, the beak and feet begin to darken, most of the neonatal down has fallen out, and feather tracks begin to appear. Pin feathers begin



Fig Parrot chick at 11 days of age

to emerge by day 17. Breast feathers are pulled right before fledging for DNA sexing. Chicks fledge between 52-55 days, but will continue to roost in the nest box with their parents.

Chicks can be left with their parents at least up to one year even after the adults have begun to raise subsequent clutches. Once settled in, Salvadori's Fig Parrots are generally very prolific and can raise up to 5 clutches per year. If left with their parents, young Salvadori's can and will assist their parents in raising subsequent clutches. I have personally witnessed a young hen feed her younger siblings while both adults were out of the nest at the food bowl.

Although they are quite prolific, Salvadori's Fig Parrots have not been established to any degree in the United States' captive population. I would like to hear from other people working with Salvadori's Fig Parrots with hopes to establish as many pairs as possible and increase the numbers in this country. I welcome your response via email at aves75@loriinae.com.

References:

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Same chick at 17 days of age



At 33 days the feathers are really beginning to come in.



A 41 day old Salvadori's Fig Parrot chick peeks out of the nest box.



A Fig Parrot Family Portrait - Two adults, one juvenile and two recently fledged chicks.