

The Plight of Henry

by Sandee L. Molenda
Santa Cruz, California

As I sit listening to the melodic chatter of the parrotlets, I am struck by the song of one individual in particular. The louder sound, deeper tones and a wider range of notes leave me feeling both happy and sad at the same time. Happy, because I know that I am one of the few people in the world privileged enough to be listening to the calls of our male Yellow-faced Parrotlet *Forpus xanthops*, Henry. Sad, because his calls are in vain; there is no female to answer. In an aviary full of parrotlets, he is alone.

Believed to be the rarest species of *Forpus* parrotlets, they are found only in the remote Marañon Valley in northwestern Peru. Due to the inaccessibility of this area, very little is known of their habits in the wild. No records have been made of their numbers but the population is believed to be small due to its extremely limited range. No subspecies have been identified. They are listed in CITES on Appendix II.

At six inches in length and weighing more than 50 grams, Yellow-faced are also the largest species of *Forpus* parrotlets. As in male Pacifics, male Yellow-faced have both a streak of cobalt-blue feathers extending behind the eye as well as cobalt-blue on the rump and wings. Both males and females have horn-colored legs and beaks. The beak also has a black stripe that runs down the middle from the cere to the tip. As the name suggests, they have beautiful yellow feathers around the face from the crown of the head to the bottom of their necks. The females look similar to the males but their lower backs and rumps are pale blue rather than cobalt. They also have green feathers tinged with blue on their wings. Some female Pacifics also have blue feathers on the rump but no other *Forpus* hen has blue on the wings.

Sometime in the early 1980s, between 10 and 20 pairs of Yellow-faced were imported into the United States. At the time, everyone thought there was an inexhaustible supply of birds and it would never change. While captive breeding was beginning

to explode, it was because of the money that could be made selling babies rather than conservation efforts. After all, during this time it was possible to import Black Palm Cockatoos, so who cared about a tiny little parrot no one had ever heard about. As happened with tens of thousands of exotic birds in this country, no one kept track of the Yellow-faced and they literally faded into oblivion.

At this time, there are four birds in this country which have been confirmed as Yellow-faced Parrotlets. Unfortunately, they are all males. The last known female died with her mate in a fire in an aviary in Florida while on eggs. Our Henry is a *domestically-raised* Yellow-faced. While his history is sketchy at best, he is a proven male who lost his hen years ago. Although I have heard of Pacific males that have produced babies at 18 years of age, Henry is 12 and not getting any younger. Every day he sits in his cage alone is a day that has been wasted. The sad part is, it does not have to be.

Breeders in Europe, particularly in Belgium, Holland and Germany, have been successfully breeding Yellow-faced Parrotlets for many years. These breeders are also producing another rare species — Sclaters', as well as several subspecies of Green-rumped, Spectacled and Blue-winged, all of which are unavailable in this country. They have also established several beautiful color mutations in various species of *Forpus* parrotlets.

These European birds are healthy, genetically sound and completely *captive-raised*. With the passage of the 1992 Exotic Bird Conservation Act, however, they cannot be legally imported into the United States. It is ironic that a law designed to protect wild populations is also being used to restrict access to the real thing that can save them — captive-bred birds. This policy must be changed.

Through organizations such as the American Federation of Aviculture, we can have our voices heard. As responsible aviculturists, we must educate the general public as well as the government that we are doing

something important. Zoological parks are not equipped to deal with the volume of species and subspecies of animals that are becoming endangered. I read that a member of Congress recently said that since it was impossible to save all the animal species, it should be decided which ones should be saved and which ones should become extinct. Personally, I have no desire to see the government start playing God. I may not be able to save all the animals but I will do everything in my power to make sure *Forpus* parrotlets are still in the world for future generations. After all, I owe it to Henry. ●

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