

First Successful Breeding of Blue-rumped Parrots at Loro Parque

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The Blue-rumped Parrot (*Psittinus cyanurus*) inhabits its own mono-typic genus, with its closest relatives being the Philippine Guaiabero Parrot (*Bolbopsittacus lunulatus*) and the genus of *Psittacella* parrots which are unknown in European aviculture. In size, the Blue-rumped Parrot measures just 18cm (7 in.) in overall length and seldom exceeds 85 grams in body weight, making this one of the smaller species of Asian psittacines.

Dimorphic

Sexual dimorphism is clearly apparent in adult birds and in newly fledged birds there is slight dimorphism while they are still in their immature plumage. The male bird has a grayish-blue head with a red upper mandible, brownish-red lower mandible. The female bird, by comparison, has a brown head with greyish-brown mandibles. Young birds still in immature plumage have green heads and generally green body plumage; in most juvenile male birds, a slight blue wash can be seen in the green head feathers at this age giving an early indication of their gender.

Range

The natural range of this species covers mainland south eastern Asia from Thailand though Malaysia and also on Borneo and Sumatra, Indonesia. It is most commonly reported that pairs or small groups of adult birds are seen in their favored habitat of lowland forest and woodlands, sometimes also being found in orchards and plantations. At the end of the breeding season young birds are generally more gregarious than the adults and can be seen flying in larger groups and often feeding communally on Oil Palm plantations which are in



An adult pair of Blue-rumped Parrots in their aviary.

Photos by Roger Sweeney

fruit soon after these birds have fledged. Three regional sub-species have been described (Forshaw, 1989) but visible differences appear to be marginal.

The small size and quiet nature of these birds make them suitable for keeping indoors in countries which have a temperate climate. At Loro Parque the sub-tropical climate of the Canary Islands means that our birds remain outside throughout the year, one pair on exhibition and two pairs located in our off-exhibit breeding centers.

Breeding Pairs at Loro Parque

The pairs which are housed in the breeding areas are accommodated in suspended cages which measure approx. 3m x 1m x 1m, (10 x 3¼ x 3¼ ft.) while the pair on exhibition have a large conventional aviary which allows the birds access to the floor. The Blue-rumped Parrot is, however, very rarely found at a low height in the aviary. Rather it prefers to spend practically all of the time on the highest perches available.

Diet

The diet of these birds is as follows:
Morning feed at 7 A.M.: Salad feed which contains diced items such as apple, pear, papaya, tomato, orange, kiwi fruit, prickly-pear, alfalfa, beetroot, lettuce, carrot, pepper and other seasonally available fruits and vegetables. A second smaller dish contains a



Blue-rumped Parrot at 41 days of age.

commercial dietary pellet. During the breeding season a special supplement cake is baked at Loro Parque fresh each day and a few pieces of this are added to the food dish which contains the dietary pellet.

Afternoon feed at 7 P.M.: The afternoon feed provides these birds with seeds such as millet, hemp, niger, sunflower (small amount), safflower etc. and some cooked beans such as Mung beans and black-eyed beans. Lentils and cereal grains are added along with pine nuts and peanuts.

All drinking water provided is puri-

fied by first being chlorinated then passed through a reverse osmosis machine which is equipped with an ultra-violet light sterilization unit. Bathing water is provided for the birds by daily showers which are built into the design of every aviary in the park.

Success After many Years

Despite having been in the collection at Loro Parque for many years, successful breeding was not recorded until the current 1996 breeding season. Towards the end of May we noticed that copulation was taking place much more frequently between the two birds on exhibition and that the female was starting to spend much time working inside the nest to prepare a scrape in the wood shavings. The nest box provided measures 45cm x 21cm x 21cm (18 x 8 x 8 in.) with an 8cm (3 in.) diameter entrance hole. Wood shavings are used exclusively as a nesting medium inside the nest box.

Once the female began to spend extended periods of time in the nest box, more regular nest inspections were carried out and it became clear that she was in the process of preparing a scrape area in the nesting medium. When the nest box was inspected on the 10th of June we found that one egg had been laid and a week later the clutch had increased to four eggs. Of these four eggs only one hatched which took place on 6 July.

Newly Hatched Chick

On first viewing the chick in the nest box, it was instantly reminiscent of the newly-hatched chicks of the Guaiabero Parrot (*Bolbopsittacus lunulatus*) the progress of which I had carefully followed when breeding this species three years earlier.

The newly-hatched Blue-rumped Parrot had pink skin and was without natal down. Some reports have stated that Blue-rumped parrot chicks do have a few strands of natal down on their back which are often lost during the first few days after hatching. The chick described here was already dry and active after hatching and at this time had no natal down present. The chick seemed well cared for by the hen, which seldom left the nest box even when it was being inspected and



Photo by Roger Sweeney

The Blue-rumped Parrot baby bred at Loro Parque in 1996 for the first time.

so it was left to be parent reared. On all subsequent occasions when the chick was observed in the nest it had a full crop and seemed to be developing well.

However, on 30 July I observed the hen bird outside the nest box and was concerned about her stance and movement. The bird was briefly captured and examined by one of the Loro Parque veterinarians and returned to the aviary for further observation. By the afternoon our concern had grown and so with regret the hen was captured and taken to our clinic facility while the chick was removed to our nursery department for hand rearing. At this time the chick weighed 66.8 grams.

Chick Weans and Fledges

The chick continued its development without problems in the nursery where it was fed with Pretty Bird hand rearing formula (18% protein and 12% fat). By 23 August the chick was fully feathered and close to being weaned.

The natural fledging age of this species has been reported as being six weeks (42 days) and the adult weight as 85 grams (Low, 1992). Adult birds measured at Loro Parque have weighed between 75-83 grams (average 78 grams). It is not known what degree of natural variance in body weight is present in wild birds from different regions of the wild range of this species. The chick's growth rate while in the nursery was comparative-

ly slow when compared to other psittacines but when considering that it had already achieved in the region of 85% of its expected adult weight (when compared to the average of adult weight records) by the age of 24 days, then the slower development in the second half of its growth is not surprising and reflects the initiation to weaning. The chick began weaning at an age that would have been expected had it remained with the parents. And after weaning, its weight settled to being the same as adult birds weighed at Loro Parque.

Blue-rumped Parrots in Aviculture

The Blue-rumped Parrot has been imported into western aviculture on several occasions during recent decades and on each occasion the birds generally adjusted well to captivity, living for many years, but this was not followed by consistent breeding success. Indeed the opposite has been the case, with very few breeding successes ever being documented for this species. If such species are to remain in aviculture for future generations of birdkeepers to enjoy, a much better understanding of their needs is required and consistent breeding must be more widely achieved if the captive population is to remain in aviculture.

References:

- Forshaw J. (1989) *Parrots of the World* (3rd Edition), Lansdown Editions, Willoughby, NSW
- Low R. (1992) *Parrots in Aviculture*, Blandford Press, Dorset, U.K. 