



A cage full of juvenile Finsch's Conures coming to the wire to give the author a kiss. Note the Red-masked Conure at the bottom. She is the same age as the Finsch's Conures but at the young age of just 8 months displays lots of color.

the Finsch's Conure

Aratinga Finschi

by June DiCiocco, N. Augusta S.C.

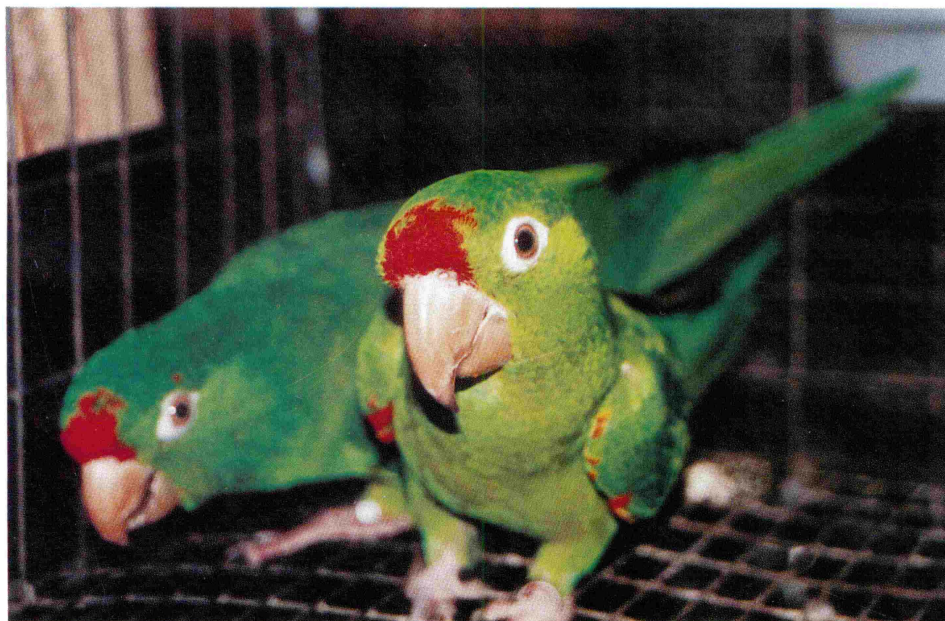
The Finsch's Conure is a 12-inch, mostly green *Aratinga* conure with a super personality. No known subspecies has been reported to date.

The tiny red triangle squarely on the front of its head can cause this species to be confused with the Red-fronted Conure. The size of the adult Red fronted is noticeably larger at 14 to 15 inches.

The underwing coloration is identical with that of the White-eyed Conure which can create further confusion in the juvenile birds. Juveniles are hard to identify and can be sold as other species as a result.

Unfortunately, there are very few aviculturists in the United States who keep the Finsch's Conure although breeding them is quite easy and they make great parents. I do not think they have appeal to the Pet Market because

they lack the brilliant coloration of some of the other *Aratinga* conures.



A breeding pair of Finsch's Conures. The male is in the rear. These birds are still friendly even though nesting.

Immature Finsch's usually have no red feather coloration at all. I have raised them to one year of age with only subtle color changes under the wing and a few tiny dots of red over the cere.

Finsch's Conures were imported into the United States until the early 1980s and have not been imported since. Their habitat at that time was considered to range from Southern Nicaragua to Panama, with the exception of western Costa Rica.

In the Field

According to Kevin Sharp who traveled to Costa Rica just this past year, as land is cleared, the Finsch's Conure is becoming more common in Costa Rica and is much more common on the Caribbean side and in the central plateau. They have even been observed on the Pacific side in the extreme south and occasionally in the Guanacaste region (in the northwest).

The Finsch's conure is listed in the *Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. One of the authors of this guide is Alexander Skutch, an American living in Costa Rica who is one of the foremost ornithologists working in Latin America. He is well known in his field for not collecting specimens (killing the birds) to find out what they've eaten. Instead, Mr. Skutch maintains that this information can be obtained by observing their behavior.

photos by June DiCiocco

Nesting season for this species in the wild is toward the end of the dry season/beginning of the wet season which occurs in April or May. The guide gives nesting sights as hollow trees and limbs, and the hollows in the broken off tops of palms. It also claims the birds have been known to burrow into the base of large epiphytes (bromeliads).

In the Aviary

In an aviary situation they can be raised as any other pair of conures. My specific cages are 2 x 2 x 4 feet long suspended cages with a feeding station and the nest box at the two-foot end. I separate each cage by one foot and the nestbox end is shielded from view by a two-foot square piece of metal.

The nest box I use is 12 x 12 x 24 inches deep. I use a combination of sterilized pine and aspen shavings for nesting material. I find Finsch's Conures do not chew up their nest boxes as do other conures. Nor will they dump their bedding out of the box.

Their diet consists mainly of a vitamin fortified sunflower mix and safflower with fruit and nuts, fresh corn, apples, and millet. I also use a protein egg product and I always have uncolored, medium sized avian biscuits in their cages – they all love it. I also use a calcium supplement because my Finsch's Conures are prolific birds and some pairs will lay continuously.

I use water bottles and a stainless steel bathing vessel that I fill when I am in the aviary servicing the cages and remove when I leave. Most will bathe on cue.

Handfed Breeders

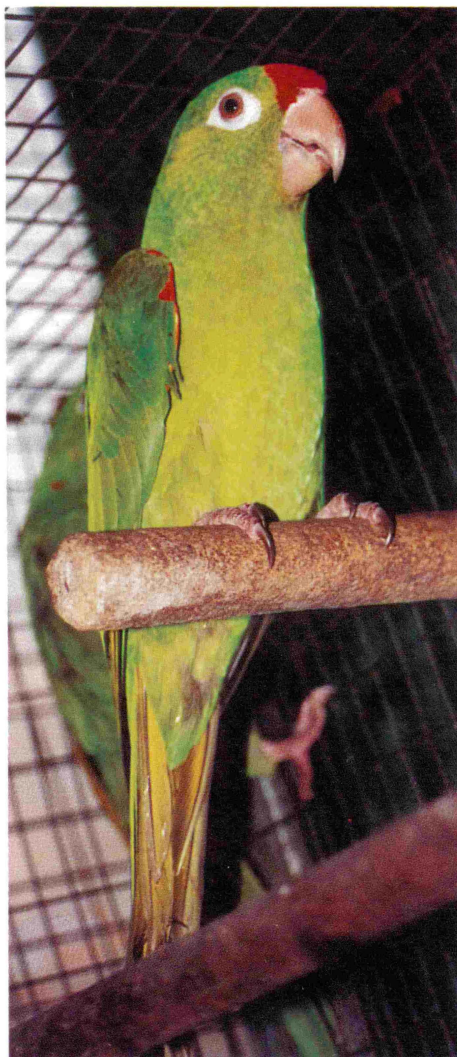
I handfeed most of the clutches but do occasionally allow parents to raise some of their young. I personally have no problems with hand-raised Finsch's Conures going to nest and rearing young. The only difference I have found between the domestic handfed adults and the parent-raised adults is the hand-raised birds will take a year or two longer to get the idea of what to do about breeding.

I have some pairs where one is an imported bird and one is a hand raised bird, again with no difficulty in pro-

duction or raising chicks.

In my setup I will put an experienced pair next to a younger pair. I start pairing my birds at two and let them bond for a season or two before they are ready. I have not had any problems with egg binding or aggressiveness with their chicks. The birds don't squabble with each other from cage to cage either.

The average clutch size is three to four chicks at a time and incubation is 21 to 23 days and they fledge at seven to eight weeks. Some pairs will have to



Coco, an imported male Finsch's Conure.

be shut down from breeding by removing the nest boxes or they will just lay all year long. I prefer not to allow that to take place.

Personalities

I find the Finsch's Conures the most people-oriented species among the variety of conures I raise which

include Suns, Jendays, Red-masked, White-eyed, and Dusky.

I have never been asked to stay away from a cage by a Finsch's Conure. They will all come to greet me and ask for a pet on the head except when the female is on eggs. Then the male will display and make gestures towards me but I never push the issue and they never get serious about attacking me.

Once the clutch is pulled or reared they go right back to their sweet mode. They stay cuddly as a pet and I have yet to be nipped seriously by one. I have imported males that will still come to me even though they have sired babies and have their mate with them.

The Finsch's Conure make a great pet for the average household. They are not fragile and they don't seem to hold a grudge. They are cuddly and loveable clowns and are capable of learning to talk. Most of my breeder birds will greet me with various words as I enter the aviary.

All of the Finsch's that are raised here or have come here from other places are AVID microchipped. The young are all closed banded and surgically sexed.

Keep Them Pure

I have serious concerns for the future of the Finsch's Conure since the species can be confused with some of the other red-headed conure species. They could easily be hybridized by inexperienced breeders who cannot properly identify them. In an effort to educate those who do not know the difference but would like to learn, comparison photos of a variety of red-headed conure species can be found on my web site: <http://www.hide-awayfarms.com/compare.htm>.

There are not many folks seriously breeding this species. There are probably fewer than 100 Finsch's Conures being bred in the U.S. Very few of the last group of imported birds (which according to Dr. Al Decoteau, numbered approximately 200 birds brought in during 1980) can be traced. I have eight of them. and I know two aviculturists who have a pair each.

I feel it is very important to do the best we can to secure the future of this wonderful bird in American aviculture.