

# Jardine's Parrots

## *Poicephalus gulielmi* *Breeding and Behavior*

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### **Versatile Jardine's Parrot**

Jardine's are one of my favorite parrots. I have chosen to focus most of my energy and interest on this species because I feel they are more likely to remain with one family for their lifetime. They have joyous personalities and can fit comfortably in almost any home or apartment.

Rita Shimniok, Jean Patison, and others have provided expert information on Jardine's Parrots over the past few years. People are asking for more, so I hope this will fill in some empty spaces and contribute some added perspective.

### **Breeding**

Jardine's parrots are easy breeders. They seem to show an interest between two and three years of age. My pairs lay one to three eggs per clutch, and some would lay clutch after clutch year round if I allowed them to. Some pairs lay the next clutch by the time I have their previous babies just about weaned. After two or three clutches, I remove the box to give them a rest. I love and value my birds too much to wear them out with overproduction.

Some pairs will breed in a small parrot box, 10 inches square by 18 inches deep. Most, though, prefer a deep, dark, 8 X 10 inch square by 28 inch deep L-shaped box because it provides the security that they seek. If the inspection door is placed on the darkest side of the L (that is where the eggs will be laid, incubated, and hatched), the human caretaker will

have easy access to the babies when pulling them from the box.

A deep box requires a ladder so they can get out. The ladders are necessary but can be dangerous. One pair of Jardine's unhooked their ladder from the entrance hole and pulled it inside the box. Since they couldn't get out, they became trapped inside. When they didn't consume their favorite soft food, I investigated and noticed the missing ladder. Now I wire the ladders to the boxes so they can't be detached. Another hen, belonging to a friend, got her open leg-band caught on the ladder. She died there.

### **Management**

The diet I feed my Jardine's is a standard healthy parrot diet. It consists of pellets that are always available, fresh fruits and veggies, and occasional bean and rice-based soak and cook. My birds also love sprouts. Fresh, clean water is supplied daily.

Eventually I plan to feed my birds the natural diet outlined by Alicia McWatters in her book: *A Guide To A Naturally Healthy Bird*. Depending on time constraints, it can be a difficult diet to feed. If, however, you are able to do a twice-daily feeding, it is one of the healthiest diets that I have investigated.

Even though my Jardine's are not crazy about being misted, they do get a light misting a couple of times a week. What they prefer is to get quite wet on their own, in their water dishes. They do not like to bathe in old water though. They wait until I place

fresh water in the cage and then they jump right in.

Full spectrum fluorescent lights are timed to natural outside light to give them a natural cycle. Regardless of this, they breed throughout the year.

### **Feeding and Weaning Babies**

Jardine's are a pleasure to raise. I enjoy the fact that they eat like pigs. I find them easy to handfeed, but some people seem to have trouble keeping weight on them. I remember one incident where a friend was feeding two of my babies and they would drop weight over a few days. I would bring them back home and get the weight back on them, return them to her and their breastbones would start to protrude again. The scales would say they were gaining growth weight, but still they were losing flesh on their bones. She fed thinner formula than I fed and I think that was the problem. Jardine's require a higher solid-to-liquid ratio than some of the other birds that I feed, so people having problems keeping weight on Jardine's should try thickening the formula.

Weaning Jardine's is fairly easy. They usually nibble on fruits, vegetables, and softer pellets while still living in the brooder. They love to eat and will gladly sample warm soak & cook, sprouts, whole wheat bread, and anything you care to feed them. One thing that I've noticed about Jardine's is their hearty appetite. They consume more food for their size than any of my other parrots. They especially love squash, pumpkin, broccoli, peaches, carrots — veggies with a high beta-carotene content.

One reason for this may be a requirement for more vitamin A to help them fight off aspergillus. Lately I've been hearing speculation that Jardine's are prone to contracting this fungal infection. More research needs to be done to determine whether they are actually predisposed to the disease or whether other factors are involved. Since there is a possibility,

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Sheldon Dingle, Managing Editor.

always ensure that nestbox and brooder bedding is maintained clean and dry. Also, avoid corn cob bedding, which has been analyzed with higher levels of aspergillus spores than other bedding.

I find Jardine's to be fairly agile before they are fully feathered. In the brooder they will already perch on their food crock. They start doing this when they have green feathers on their wings and head but their body is still covered with down.

After they have been moved to a cage and no longer fear their strange new environment, they climb all over the bars like pros. It's almost impossible to keep these little darlings in the cage whenever the cage door is opened. Warm little Jardine's bodies will rush out the door and climb up the front of mama's shirt. They love to be held, hugged, kissed....and fed!

#### Four Emotional Stages and Behavior

Basically, I have defined four major noticeable stages of emotional growth in Jardine's Parrots

##### Helpless / Fear

First is the unweaned fear stage when their eyes and ears have developed. They have a tendency to crowd into a corner of the brooder trying to dig their way out of sight when something new is occurring outside of the brooder.

##### Affection / Solicitation

Second is the later handfeeding stage extending to shortly after weaning. In this stage they are very affectionate and outgoing. They fluff their feathers, slightly spread their wings, and make endearing baby sounds as they waddle toward you. Affection regurgitation is frequent. They cling like burrs. They are *cute*.

##### Post Weaning

The third stage is when they would be establishing their place in the natural flock. They test and bite. Now they must learn to survive and depend on themselves to watch for predators. They startle easily. They become suspicious and fearful. They are super-sensitive to changes in their environ-

ment. Every event becomes exaggerated in their minds. Anything could be perceived as a threat:

1.To their place in the flock.

2.To their very lives.

Once they have weaned, Jardine's can't seem to be peacefully housed more than two per cage. They will "hole" each other's beaks while fighting. Two will gang-up on a third, and females pick on males. During the post-weaning biting stage, females seem to get along best with females and males with males. I have only once been able to keep three of them in a cage together and all three were females. Neither was more aggressive than any of the others.

During this period, young Jardine's might instinctively leave parents and siblings. Such an instinct would naturally prevent incestuous bonding.

Most people purchase their Jardine's when they are at this stage or just prior to this, when they are still in the affection/solicitation stage evolving into the post-weaning/biting stage.

This post-weaning stage is the period when many people encounter biting problems with their pets. Of course, each bird is different. The same clutch of birds might contain individuals that bite a lot and others that don't bite at all. Many "feisty" biters go on to develop captivating personalities as they mature.

The reason people want to purchase a just-weaned Jardine's is so that they will be able to bond with it while young. For Jardine's, though, this is a very critical stage of development and can be the worst time for them to leave the security of the place where they were raised and go to an unknown environment where they often are misunderstood.

Taking home an insecure Jardine's Parrot can be a serious mistake for an inexperienced bird person. They have no idea how to deal with the biting and end up creating a behavior problem from what was a normal juvenile phase. One frustrating conflict after another will cause the relationship to deteriorate until the bird is sold or given away.

Part of the problem is that people still are following old misguided ideas developed for dealing with Amazons,

conures, and macaws. New World parrots have different personalities than Old World birds, especially those originating from Africa and the Pacific Island groups.

Trust building is the most critical aspect of developing a relationship with Jardine's. Positive reinforcement for good behaviors is a close second. Aversive and dominance behavior modification techniques or repetitive disciplinary exercises is one of the fastest ways to irritate, anger, and lose the trust and friendship of a Jardine's Parrot.

If dealt with in a positive fashion, the biting stage *will* pass and evolve into a lasting, affectionate relationship. Consequently, the behavior modification I am most fond of is changing the behavior of the owners. Birds themselves are seldom the real problem.

If treated in a manner that they regard as betrayal or aggression, it will take Jardine's a long time to regain lost trust. Why? Because they are prey animals and anything that behaves like a predator is not to be trusted. This is a survival characteristic.

Post-weaning biting should not be confused with challenging for dominance, which is not seen in Jardine's until they are closer to breeding age. Dominance issues require a slightly stronger approach and do include limited discipline exercises like step-up commands along with positive reinforcement for good behavior. I think that those who mistakenly apply harsh discipline will end up selling emotionally damaged birds as uncontrollable, and in the process, give Jardine's a bad name that they do not deserve. People without the experience or patience to work through this stage should look for a breeder who keeps babies until the biting stage has been resolved at eight months to a year of age. Jardine's are well worth the wait.

#### **Secure/Mature**

Once past that insecure juvenile stage Jardine's are far less moody than some Greys. Even at sexual maturity they are far less aggressive than some Amazons. None of my Jardine's has had a mysterious bout of "bad mood for no reason" as my Congo, Digger, does. If they are mad, there is a reason.



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Mature pair of the Jardine's Parrot.

## Weight Progress Chart

Comparing weights of Jardine's subspecies *P. g. fantiensis* babies, the following are average clutch weights on pull day and again at eight weeks. Clutch size was 1-3 babies.

<u>Parent birds</u>	<u>Date hatched</u>	<u>Weight at pulling</u>	<u>Weight at 7/8 wks</u>
<b>Jules/Jem</b>	hatching: 3/15	pull: 4/1- 109 gms	8 wks: 213 gms
<b>Jester/Jet</b>	hatching 4/12	pull 5/10 - 142 gms	8 wks: 232gms
<b>Java/Jive</b>	hatching 5/21	pull 6/11 - 133 gms	8 wks: 220 gms
<b>Java/Jive</b>	hatching 9/1	pull 9/22 - 138 gms	8 wks: 210 gms
<b>Jules/Jem</b>	hatching 3/4	pull 3/31 (not weighed, fed by friends while I was out of town. 5/27 I got them back, weight 189gms. Thin, Sick.)	
<b>Java/Jive</b>	hatching 6/10	pull 6/30 - 126 gms	8 wks: 210 gms
<b>Jester/Jet</b>	hatching 6/25	pull 7/26 - 160 gms	8 wks: 214 gms
<b>Jester/Jet</b>	hatching 5/25	pull 6/22 - 134 gms	8 wks: 223 gms
<b>Jules/Jem</b>	hatching 7/1	pull 7/23 - 102 gms	8 wks: 221 gms
<b>Jules/Jem</b>	hatching 1/21	pull 2/16 - 124 gms	8 wks: 209 gms
<b>Peyton/Kimi</b>	hatching 7/18	pull 8/13 - 138 gms	7 wks: 251 gms

Usually it is when I have handled another bird in front of them. Once they have "punished" me, they bounce back and are happy to be on good terms again.

I would describe the mature Jardine's as being emotionally consistent and honest. For example, I have seen both Greys and Amazons put their head down and ruffle their neck feathers, inviting a head scratch. Then, when your finger is in reach, they whip their head around to bite you. Jardine's do not do that. I consider this behavior "dishonest and sneaky" – not a Jardine's characteristic. Jardine's are honest and direct when they are going to bite you. If you are at all observant of body language, you will know when a bite is coming and thus avoid it.

Four of my Jardine's express their anger in the same way. They usually thump their beak repeatedly on some object while looking intently at my face as if to display their anger. If I present apologetic and placating behavior, their anger seems to disappear.

During this stage it would be safe to apply some discipline to birds that are willful and misbehaving. Step-up exercises to establish nurturing guidance or a strong wobble of the hand to prevent getting bitten would not be out of place here. The mature Jardine's would not regress to utter paranoia with moderate and well-placed correction at this point. However, if you have done your job of building trust at the earlier stages, correction will not likely be necessary.

Jardine's make great companions. I consider them to be an ideal addition to any family, once they have passed the biting stage. Their sheer joy of life is contagious and makes you smile to watch them. They love to swing, pumping higher and higher as they play.

Larger than Cockatiels or Senegals and smaller than Amazons, they are the perfect size for handling. Being held, stroked, lightly squeezed, kissed, and protected in your hands is their fondest desire.

Neither personality nor plumage of Jardine's can be described as dull. Black onyx and iridescent jade transform them into feathered jewels. As they mature, blazing orange sets off crown





Immature Jardine's Parrot (left) with an immature Senegal Parrot.

and shoulders for a final stunning effect. When such jewel hues are worn by birds possessing the over-large beak and stocky body of Jardine's, the colors become as light hearted and comical as a circus clown. What perfect garb for this playful parrot.

More than any other parrot I've met, Jardine's carry about them the aura of darling, delightful, descendants of dinosaurs. Would you like to have one become your friend? Here's how.

### Love Your Bird with CBC (Close Body Contact)

It is hard to love something that is biting you, but it can be done. I spent several years making painful mistakes with Jardine's and other members of the *Poicephalus* family of parrots by forcing dominance exercises on them. They hated and feared me and could not be sold as pets. It took a while for me to find a better way because I was reading the articles and following advice inappropriate for the species. When I started thinking for myself based on what I observed in the birds it started working.

One of the best ways I have found to soothe an angry Jardine's or reassure a frightened one is Close Body Contact.

Once I discovered this technique about five years ago, the worst biting problems seemed to just disappear.

This is how it works. Hold the bird gently to your chest near your heart. Your hands are surrounding the bird's back and sides, and the bird's chest is resting on your chest. Now start to croon and talk quietly to your bird. Continue the gentle, quiet murmuring until the bird relaxes.

If this embarrasses you, do it privately with your bird; he won't tell. (If you are afraid of getting your hands bitten, use a towel to protect your hands. I have never had a bird bite my chest while doing this. You can try this with a fighting, screaming bird but if it fights too much then just put it back into the cage until it calms down.

### Comparing to Other Species

From several years of observations I've concluded that:

1. Juvenile Jardine's are similar emotionally to the sensitive African Grey but without the occasional intense moodiness.


2. Mature Jardine's could be compared to the self-assured, outgoing Amazon without the insane breeding season aggressiveness or the screaming.

3. Jardine's are cuddly – somewhat like cockatoos – without the clinging-vine dependence, the volume of noise, or the dust.

4. Their clown-like playfulness and congeniality is like that of a Conure, but much quieter.

Jardine's are great, relatively quiet birds. This does not mean that they do not make noise. They do. Compared to several other species, however, they are quieter.


Jardine's are, in my opinion, as close as you can come to a perfect parrot. That is not to say that Jardine's are perfect. Nothing is perfect. If, however, you judge the different species by characteristics of noise, dust, emotional balance and honesty, size, self-entertainment, charisma, personality, destructiveness, bite damage, and talking ability, Jardine's compare well to other parrot species.

I breed Amazons, Greys, Senegals, Meyer's, Eclectus, and Jardine's. By far, my favorites are the Jardine's. If I could have only one bird as a pet, it would be a Jardine's Parrot. My second choice would be an Eclectus, but that is another story. 

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"Never thought that I'd own a bird. Dogs are more my style, but then my girlfriend Sylvia and I saw this yellow bird in the pet store in the mall. It was kinda fun to watch. It climbed all around the cage and every time I came near, it stretched out it's neck and made this funny "Rrrrrroow,, Rrrrrroow" sound and made it's eyes real small. I must have stood there watching that bird for an hour before they finally kicked us out of the store at closing time.

Two weeks later Sylvia gave me that bird for my birthday. I named her Sunshine and we've been best friends ever since...well, second to Sylvia of course. Just like my girlfriend, Sunshine listens when I need to talk and she makes me laugh, however, she doesn't expect me to buy her a ring.

I do what I can to be sure Sunshine is happy and healthy. That's why I feed her Sun Seed Vita Hookbill Fruit & Veggie Formula. As my next best friend she deserves nothing but the best...

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