

Breeding Yellow-faced Parrotlets

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Although imported into the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s, Yellow-faced Parrotlets *Forpus xanthops* had all but disappeared by the 1990s. In spring of 1994, I was fortunate enough to obtain five pair of Yellow-faced Parrotlets and have had much success in breeding them.

Description

Yellow-faced Parrotlets are the largest of the *Forpus* genus. Approximately six inches in length, they can weigh up to 45 grams. Yellow "Faced" is a misnomer as the entire forehead, cheeks, chin, chest and belly are bright lemon yellow. Males have deep cobalt on the wings, back, rump and eyes streaks, very similar to male Pacific Parrotlets *Forpus coelestis*. Females have light blue backs, wings, rumps and eye streaks, which is the same as female *Forpus coelestis lucida*. A feature unique to the Yellow-faced is a black streak that runs down the middle of the top mandible.

Status and Range

Yellow-faced Parrotlets are often considered to be one of the rarest species of *Forpus* both in captivity and in the wild. There are believed to be less than 50 birds in the United States. Europe reportedly has a number of breeders but even so, their availability is very limited. In the wild, they are found in the upper Rio Marañon Valley in Northern Peru. Fortunately, they are prolific breeders in captivity so that makes it much easier on aviculturists working with this species. The International Parrotlet Society is one organization

dedicated to conserving the Yellow-faced Parrotlet and has set up a breeding program for it.

In Aviculture

Housing

Yellow-faced Parrotlets do well in large cages that are 2' tall, 2' wide and 3' long. The pairs should be visually separated so they can hear but not see each other. This helps prevent aggression and keeps the pairs focused on breeding rather than fighting.

Each pair is given a variety of natural wood perches and given a lovebird-style (7" w x 10" t x 7" d) nest box attached to the outside front of the cage. The pair will see only the inside of their cage while in the box, thereby making the pair feel more secure. Boxes are filled with untreated pine shavings to within 2" of the nest hole.

Unlike other species of *Forpus* that are mature at one year, Yellow-faced have much better breeding success at two years of age. Youngsters of the same sex can be housed in large flights until they are breeding age then paired into individual cages with nest boxes. Yellow-faced Parrotlets seem to be much less aggressive than other species of *Forpus* which is especially good since there are so few of them available.

Feeding

Yellow-faced Parrotlets are delightful birds to feed as they eat just about everything given to them. Most parrotlets eat large quantities of food for their size, but Yellow-faced consume a huge amount even for a parrotlet. We feed a safflower based hookbill mix that contains peanuts,

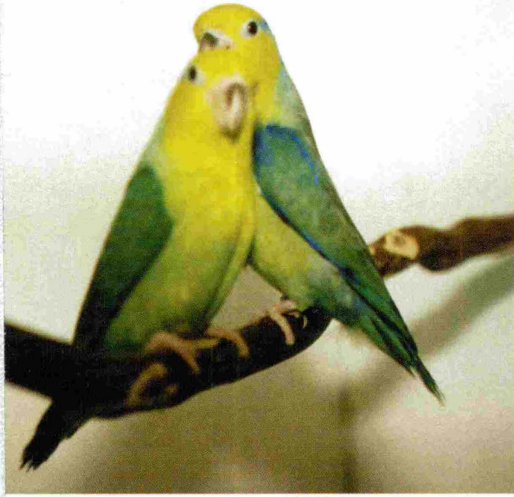
sunflower, and hemp as they need the extra fat and protein. We also feed Tropicana™ pellets and Petamine™, which, along with cuttlebone, mineral block, and clean water, are always available.

The bulk of our diet is fresh foods that include two or three different fruits and up to 10 different vegetables plus cooked rice or pasta and dried beans daily. They also receive chopped greens and whole wheat or multigrain bread as well as sprouted seed and egg food. Vitamins and powdered calcium supplement are sprinkled on the soft foods several times a week. They are also given bee pollen, Spirulina™ and wheat grass powder weekly.

Nesting and Breeding

Nesting behavior is much the same as other species of *Forpus*. The male usually investigates the box first and once he deems it safe, is followed by the hen. They do not build nests but chew and rearrange the shavings into shallow depressions. Females pluck their breasts to make a brood patch and leave the feathers in the nest. Before she lays the first egg, she will consume huge quantities of cuttlebone – often as much as a 6" cuttlebone everyday for several weeks prior to laying. Hens will lay one egg every other day and have an average clutch of four to six. She will sit on those eggs, leaving only to defecate, until the last chick has left the nest. The incubation period is slightly longer in this species with chicks hatching at 24 days instead of the usual 21. Interestingly, the Mexican Parrotlet *Forpus cyanopygius* also hatches at 24 days.

Yellow-faced Parrotlets will feed and fledge their own young if allowed. As with other species, the adult male ought to be removed from the cage when the young start to fledge. This will prevent aggression between parent and offspring. Adult males have been known to maim or even kill their male chicks upon fledging. The female will continue to feed the young and teach them to eat on their own. The male can return once the chicks are weaned and are



Male and female Yellow-faced Parrotlet, female in front.

placed in another flight.

We handfeed our chicks. This is done even though they aren't to be sold as pets. Often, handfed parrotlets that are not socialized to be pets, make steady, reliable parents that are not overly sensitive to human intervention. They are used to but not bonded to people, therefore they raise healthy chicks without causing havoc when humans are in the aviary.

Handfeeding, Banding, Brooding

Most breeders pull chicks for hand-feeding at 10 days of age. They should be banded with a closed, love-




Young Yellow-faced Parrotlets five weeks old. Male on left, female on right.

bird size band. Each chick's weight, parentage, date of hatch and band number should be recorded in the breeder's records. Chicks need to be fed every four hours, five times daily. Chicks do not need to be fed through the night unless they are less than seven days old. There are many commercial hand-feeding formulas available these days. Food should be fed at 102°F. and syringes need to be kept in disinfecting solution such as Benadine™ or Wavecide™.

Chicks need to be kept in a brooder at 89°F. Chicks should be placed on pine shavings in small containers. Parrotlets will not eat pine shavings and they are absorbent, sanitary and inexpensive. Also, they will provide good footing for the babies, preventing leg and joint problems. Chicks should be weighed daily prior to the first feeding. They should gain between .5-1.5 grams per day. Should they lose weight, unless they are weaning, that may be a clue to something being wrong. If chicks lose weight two or more days in a row, they need to be seen by a veterinarian specializing in avian medicine.

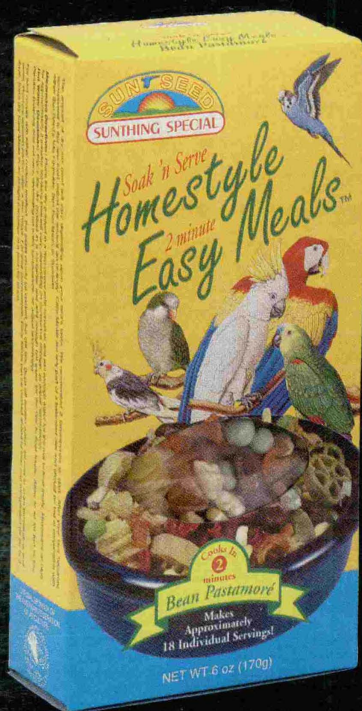
When chicks are approximately four weeks old and are covered with feathers, they can be placed in a container with seed, pellets, and millet spray to begin weaning. They can also be removed from the brooder at this time. Be sure and continue to feed chicks every four hours. Gradually, they will take less formula and eat more solid food. At about six weeks of age, they can be moved into a cage with a small dish of water. Continue to diminish the number of feedings. They should be completely weaned by eight weeks of age.

It is important that aviculturists with these rare birds, work together to ensure their future survival. The International Parrotlet Society understands that and has started breeding cooperatives and studbooks. Although it is almost impossible to trade birds to diversify the bloodlines, we can still share information and knowledge to help one another and the future of these magnificent parrotlets. 



A 15 year old male Yellow-faced Parrotlet.

From This...

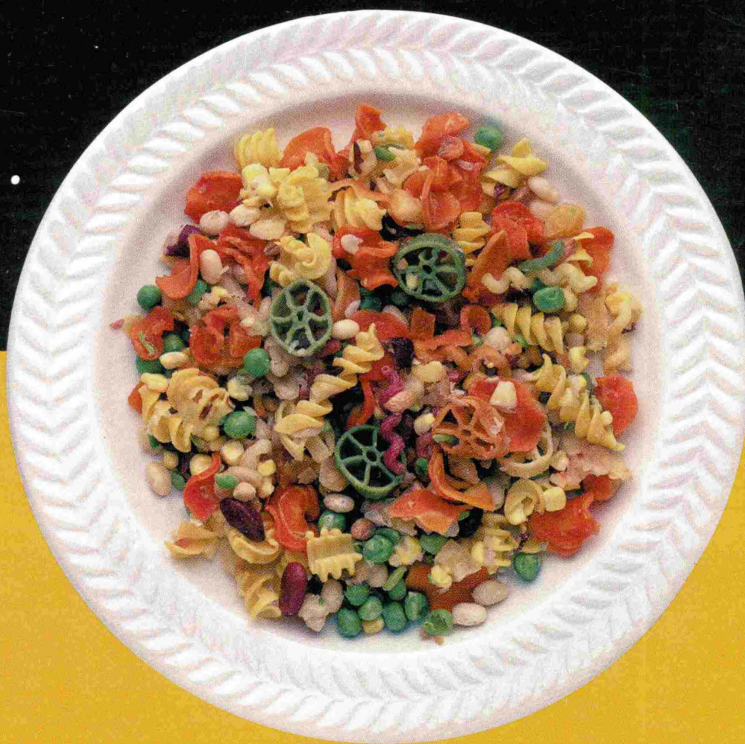


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