

The Beautiful Brotogeris

Text and Photos by Leslie J. Gillis, Madera, California

My first exposure to this delightful species was in the late 1960s. My mother bought a lively little Orange-chinned Parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*) from a pet shop in Fresno, California. The bird was sold as a Bee Bee and is also known as the Tovi Parakeet. I hadn't had much interest in these small parakeets for many years.

In the Beginning

My interest in them peaked when four Canary-winged Parakeets (*Brotogeris versicolorus chiriri*) were offered for a mere \$200.00. Once these birds were in my flights I fell in love with the sheer and simple beauty of them. I quickly set out to find unrelated stock for these four clutchmates.

They were sexed and determined to be three females and one male. I turned to a couple of dear gentlemen friends, one is the curator for our local Chaffee Zoo, Dale Thompson, and the other was the president of our local bird club, Central California Avian Society, Gene Hall. After asking them many questions about the birds I found out I just bought myself a huge challenge.

Mr. Thompson said this would be a great bird for me to work with, as he knows I live for the challenge of breeding difficult birds. Mr. Thompson stated everything I needed to hear to motivate me, they are hard to breed, hard to find, and if we don't make them a priority in our aviaries we will lose the Canary-winged Parakeets and all the other species of *Brotogeris* in American Aviculture. So I went in search of these precious green jewels.

Canary-winged Parakeets

The Canary-winged Parakeets measure 22cm (9 inches) overall and are covered with tight apple green col-

ored feathers and sport a pointed tail with a light yellow tinge underneath. They have bright canary-yellow secondary coverts with some blue tinges on the primaries. Their legs are grayish/pink and they have beautiful round Bambi-like eyes that are very expressive with medium brown iris. Their bills are a medium horn color. These little birds possess very large voices and have very interesting alarm chatter. It isn't a high pitched chatter, but loud and sharp and they can be heard for blocks. Some find their noise offensive when in large numbers.

I have no personal problem with the noise as long as the flock lives in outdoor aviaries. They only sound off early morning, late afternoon, when I am feeding, and if a stranger is in the area, other than that, I find them very peaceful. If a number of them were in the house, it could become stressful. And if one has very close neighbors it would pay to have some sort of sound barriers to mute the little guys. This can be said for almost any member of the parrot family.

According to Forshaw's Parrots of the World, these birds come from the interior of eastern and southern Brazil from Ceara, Maranhao, and southern Para south



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to Rio de Janeiro, Western Sao Paulo and Mato Grosso, and in northern and eastern Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentina in Chaco, Formosa Misiones.

I have never been able to ascertain a true number on how many of these beauties were shipped to the USA over the years, but there was a time when they could be readily found in all the pet shops and were very inexpensive. Those days have indeed changed. Since the birds came in such great numbers and were never really expensive, breeders did not take much interest in setting them in breeding programs.

It wasn't until WCBA and CITES came into being and we were no longer able to bring the birds in from the wild, did people realize what a mistake it was to not have started trying to breed them while they were abundant.

One major hurdle I am finding is that people did not know about the different species and subspecies of *Brotogeris* and would often cross breed the Canary-winged Parakeet (*Brotogeris versicolorus chiriri*) with the White-winged Parakeet (*Brotogeris versicolorus versicolorus*) also known as and called a Canary-winged Parakeet. These two birds look nothing alike to the trained eye.

The Search is On

There was no luck finding Canary-winged parakeets with any of the large breeders I had come to know in the 26 years of breeding birds, so I turned to the internet and started asking for any information or if anyone had any for sale. I joined an online chat list for *Brotogeris* and posted my pleas for information and Canary-winged Parakeets for sale. Members of the list suggested there would likely be a waiting list of at least one year and then perhaps one would become available to



Samantha Gillis, age 11 when this photo was taken, holding the first clutch of Canary-winged Parakeets to be hatched at Secret Garden Aviaries.

me. I could not believe what I was being told. But it did validate what Dale Thompson had told me early on. It appeared one of the major challenges of breeding these birds would be first locating them!

Well anyone, who knows me, knows I would not accept that as a legitimate or final answer to my search. Thus began a major search across the USA. I contacted everyone I knew in the bird world by phone and the Internet and asked for help. And help I got. I was lucky enough to come into contact with a very nice lady in Florida and she shipped 12 stunning Canary-winged Parakeets in late October 2000 assuring me that my *Brotogeris* project would have enough birds/genetic material to work with during the coming breeding season.

The birds came and are still coming from all over the USA. The birds have come in from Florida, Ohio, Minnesota, Colorado, Illinois, South Carolina, and California. When all the birds finally arrived here I had 26 Canary-winged in my aviaries and was not ready to start a sound breeding program. Some of the birds are wild caught and there are some domestically bred birds. So the Canary-winged Parakeet Project was off and flying!

During my search for Canary-

winged I kept coming across Grey-cheeked Parakeets (*Brotogeris pyrrhopterus*). I passed on many pairs and singles and let people I knew who wanted them buy them. It then it was suggested to me I should work with the Grey-cheeked as well. As they are the true challenging *Brotogeris* to breed. Since then I have been able to locate 32 Grey-cheeked Parakeets. So a sub-project will begin with them. I have also located a couple successful and dedicated breeders of the Grey-cheeked

to hopefully trade stock with sometime in the near future.

So now after locating a good sound number of birds to start working with, I quickly started to plan out how to set these birds up to breed – with the Canary-winged first. I set up colonies in two flights. Many people told me the colonies would not work out and that the birds would fight and could kill each other however, I have not experienced any aggression and no bird has been injured or killed here in the colony flights. The flights are nestled under Aptos Blue Redwoods and have two solid walls and a corrugated plastic roof. They also have a nightlight and mister system. The one flight that housed 12 birds measured 8 feet long x 7 feet tall x 4 feet wide and the second held 7 birds and measured 6 feet long x 6 feet tall x 3 feet wide.

Setup For Breeding

I did not set the colonies up in even pairs; I was heavy on females. The Canary-winged wintered outdoors in the California Central Valley with no problems even with the low temperatures dropping into the teens some nights. I left the nest boxes up all winter and provided a heat lamp, but never saw any bird near it. I feed them well

and they acclimated with no problems. Their diet consisted of mixed fresh seeds, apples, figs, corn, cranberries, carrots, cheeses, wheat breads, and other varieties of fruits and vegetables, but absolutely no pellets in their diet. The one thing *Brotogeris* do well is eat, and they will eat almost anything offered. The birds love to bathe and did so all winter long. I pretty much left the birds to themselves, just being part of the flock for feeding and watering.

Breeding Success

It wasn't until I heard an unusual sound during the 1st of July in 2001 coming from the Canary-winged flight did I realize my setup and diet was to their satisfaction and I was successful at



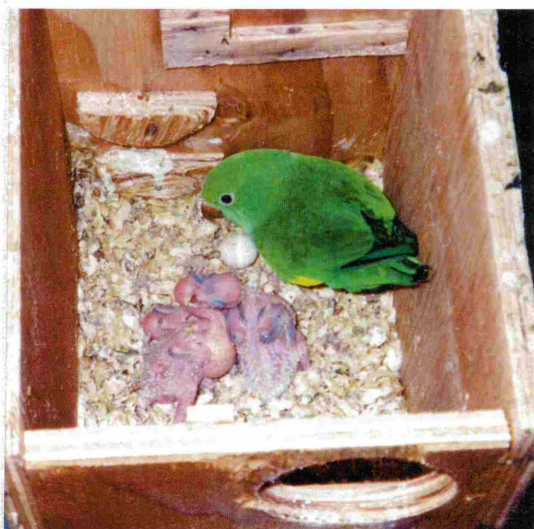
A small flock of Canary-winged Parakeets were pulled together from sundry sources across the United States and established in two colonies at Secret Garden Aviaries. The birds all got along well and there was no hostility or aggression. Gradually pairs formed up within the flock. One key to the successful breeding here may have been that the birds were free to choose their own mates.

but decided to allow them to do what they had been doing so well already. It was so exciting to watch the chicks finally fledge and venture out in the flight. The colony not only accepted the babies, but they protected them and were very vocal anytime I went into the flight. It took about six days before the babies were able to master flying and their parents continued to feed them for another 15 to 20 days.

The quick success at breeding *Brotogeris* can probably be attributed to

allowing them flight, a chance to choose their own mates, a natural live food diet, security in a colony setting, and being pretty much ignored.

I am hoping more people will set up and breed these beauties. I understand that they can make wonderful handfed pets. At this time the Secret Garden Aviaries advocates allowing the parents to raise their own chicks and I will not intervene unless forced to do so to preserve life. I believe the birds will make great next generation breeders. ❖



The first baby Canary-winged Parakeets hatched at Secret Garden Aviaries.

breeding them. I heard the begging cries of babies I had never heard before. My heart raced and I froze in my steps and listened. Something was up. I went into the flight of 12 and started looking into nest boxes. Everyone in the neighborhood heard my screams of delight. Here in this one box, sat my first three Canary-winged babies about two weeks old. They were clearly well fed and perfect. I figured the parents went to work in the nest boxes the first week of June 2001 and I found the babies early July 2001.

The Canary-winged Parakeets were great parents and tolerant of my daily nest inspections. I was warned that *Brotogeris* were not good parents,



The first clutch of baby Canary-winged Parakeets are about to fledge. They were hatched in July 2001 and are well and thriving now in 2003. With a little luck, these parent-reared birds will go on to become good breeders.