

breeding of the Green Cheeked, and Cactus Conures

by Fred and Robbie Harris
Sunland, California

Editor's Note: The following article describes what may be a first American breeding. If you have any knowledge of prior breeding of these birds, please contact Mr. Dale Thompson, Chairman, A.F.A. Avy Awards Committee via the Home Office.

We have been breeding and raising a variety of birds for eight years now but only about a year ago began breeding conures. When we decided to begin raising conures we started doing research in books and talking to people. After putting everything together (including common sense) we went gungho into conures. We started collecting all the conures that we could find (well, maybe not all).

It began when someone once brought me a little conure with no feathers and asked if I would take it and try to help it. We immediately put the poor thing on a good diet and waited to see what would happen. Within two months all the bird's feathers grew back and it was easy to identify as a green cheeked conure (*Pyrrhura molinae molinae*). We had it surgically sexed to find that it was a hen. After searching all over the "U.S.A. Bird Jungle" we found another green cheeked conure (this time with feathers that cost alot) and had it surgically sexed to find it to be a male, talk about luck! They were put together and it was love at first sight (boy, if he only saw her three months earlier).

The pair spent much time in the nest box and on January 14, 1981, we discovered the first egg. Both birds spent just about all day in the nest box, only coming out to eat or bathe or when I went in to check the eggs. A total of four large white fertile eggs were laid and on February 7 the first chick hatched, and soon the remaining three eggs hatched. Both parents tended to their babies, but when they were about three weeks old I decided it was time to start hand feeding. I hand feed all my baby birds because I feel they make better pets and also excellent breeders since they are not afraid of humans. All four green cheeked conures did fine and by the time



Green cheeked conure

they were about three months old they were on their own. We have done research and have been told that we possibly have a first U.S. breeding on the green cheeked conures.

Also during our hunt for conures we came across four cactus conures (*Aratinga cactorum cactorum*). We had all four surgically sexed to find we had three males and one female. We let the hen choose her mate and then set them up for breeding. They never seemed to go into the nest box, but after about three months the hen disappeared. Upon inspection in the nest box we discovered the hen sitting on an

egg. She laid a total of six small white eggs by April 25, 1981. Five of the eggs were fertile. On May 11 the first baby hatched and soon after all five had come out to see the world. The hen fed and took care of the chicks, while the male only went in the nest box at night. By the time the youngest baby was one week old, the box looked pretty crowded with five babies and the parents. The youngest was also very small and it was only a matter of time before his family would trample and kill him.

I decided it was now time for all five to go into the bird nursery for hand feeding. The nursery was full as usual. There were



Young
cactus conures

Photo by Fred Harris

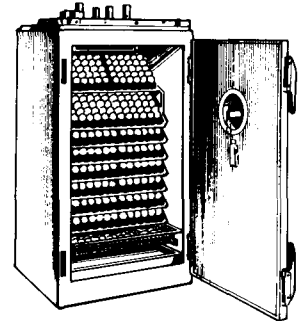
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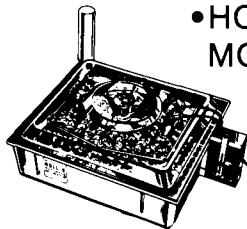


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four maroon bellie conures, two sun conures, two golden mantle rosellas, two Jenday conures, six lineolated parakeets, one green Indian ringneck parakeet, one Sunday conure (sun x Jenday), three nancapped conures (nanday x golden-capped), several types of cockatiels and peachface love birds of all colors. The five cactus were doing well and by the time they were about three months old, they were on their own. The littlest one was now just as big as the others. We had all five surgically sexed and found there were three hens and two males. We hope to breed second generation of cactus conures by next year. We also did research on the cactus and found we might have a first U.S. breeding on them, too. We have been told that it might be a first world breeding for the *Aratinga cactorum cactorum*. Well, we will wait and see.

All our conures are bred in cages of various dimensions, depending on the size of the conures. For an example, the cages the green cheeked conure and the cactus were bred in measured 16" x 16" x 48" long. Both pairs used standard cockatiel nest boxes with pine shavings inside. Most of our other conures, Suns, Jendays, golden-capped, nanday, maroon bellie and even our Senegal parrots use cockatiel nest boxes also.

The diet for all our conures is the same. They all have three feeders with sunflower seed, safflower seed and parakeet mix. They receive every morning a bowl of special food with consists of apples, oranges, peas, corn carrots, beets, and spinach. They are also given sprouted seed (sunflower, safflower, millet and canary seed) with cod liver oil, wheat germ oil and vitamins mixed in. We feel that a good diet is the key to successful breeding. Of course it goes without saying they get fresh water everyday in crock pots for drinking and bathing.

All my babies are hand fed on a baby formula very similar to Velma Hart's from "Parrots and Related Birds".

I hope in the future to breed many different types of conures! ●

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