



White-capped parrot (*Pionus senilis*)

Breeding the White-capped parrot

by
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In the fall of 1975 I obtained from quarantine seven white-capped parrots (*Pionus senilis*). One died, one arrived injured and has been kept as a house pet, and one was incompatible with the remaining four and was given to a friend.

The four intended for breeding were sexed by the fecal steriod method and paired up for about one year with no results from either pair. As the birds were about six years old I felt they should get down to some serious breeding. Since the first pairing-up seemed unsatisfactory I swapped mates. The following results were produced by one of the newly created pairs. The other pair was sold.

The pair of white-capped parrots was housed alone in their aviary. During the late winter they began some nesting activities including enlarging the nest box hole, throwing out cedar shavings, and tearing the roof off their box. By spring the female seemed anxious to breed. She crouched on the perch, dropped her wings, and shivered. The male accepted her invitation and they mated. Prior to and during the actual mating the hen made a loud whining sound.

The weather at this time was typical of the mid-west with warm bright days followed by cold dark days and a lot of rain. It didn't seem to bother the birds and they remained intent upon nesting. Finally, during the last week of April the hen laid her clutch of eggs. When laying, the female's abdomen was so swollen that it touched the perch she was sitting on and she seemed very uncomfortable. I only saw her out of the box once in that condition.

Once she began laying, in fact, the hen sat so tightly that I could only approximate the following dates. The eggs were

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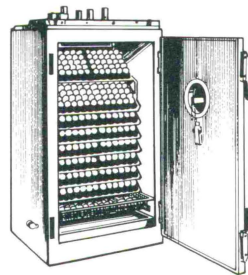
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laid the last week of April. The first egg hatched on May 24. The last baby to hatch was smaller than the first three. The babies left the nest on July 17, 22, 24, and 31. I was able to tell just about when the babies hatched by the harsh, raspy noise they made while being fed. The rare glimpse I got of the babies under the mother showed they were covered with wispy white down.

The male was not seen to enter the box until the young were feathered out. The job of feeding the young, as far as I could determine, was the sole responsibility of the female. She, of course, was fed by the male. When the young were feathered and the female no longer stayed in the box during the day, the male did most of the feeding. He still fed the hen occasionally, too. When the young left the nest box the male was the most active feeder. He would often go up to a baby as if asking if it wanted to be fed. The hen, on the other hand, seemed to ignore the babies. When the babies would beg to her she would sometimes feed them but she rarely, if ever, initiated the process. Indeed, she would often ignore the begging baby and fly away.

When the young first left the nest box they spent the daylight hours in the aviary and returned to the nestbox at night. The first two out returned to sleep in the box until the third baby left the nest. After that they would periodically return to the box and pile in two or three at a time. As these babies feathered out they had bronze colored wings, blue flight and tail feathers, a little red around the vent and the feathers of the white cap were tipped with dark green. The rest of the plumage was bright green except for blue ear-patches. The eye ring was grey. The parents raised the four babies to independence as I preferred not to pull them for hand feeding. I did handle the fledged young, though, and found them to be very tame—they didn't even bite.

This breeding success took place indoors. That is, in the shelter area of my aviaries. I have a bird house with indoor cages that measure three feet square by six and a half feet high. Attached to each indoor shelter is an outside flight sixteen feet long, three feet wide and six feet high. The birds have access to the flight through a small sliding window. In cold weather, of course, the birds are confined to the shelters where electrical heat is provided. Even in the winter, though, the birds have a good deal of light as the top two feet of each shelter is clear plexiglass. The flights are framed of steel tubing and covered with ½ inch hardware cloth. The floor is limestone gravel and no plants grow in the flights as the parrots

are very destructive of vegetation. They do not, however, touch weeds growing out of the gravel.

None of my *Pionus* seem to eat a great deal of seed although they have access to a bowl of sunflower seeds and another bowl containing a mixture of safflower seed, canary and parakeet mix, turkey mash pellets and cracked corn. Each pair of *Pionus* seems to differ in its preference regarding seed. And each individual pair is haphazard regarding eating seed. Days may pass with very little seed being consumed. Then the pair may go on a seed binge. The subject pair of white-capped *Pionus* ate sunflower only when the young were starting to feather. When the young left the nest the consumption of sunflower and safflower decreased. I check the seed and change the water every day.

In addition to seed and water, my birds are fed an assortment of extras daily. Their favorite is peas-in-the-pod but they also get corn-on-the-cob, raw peanuts, grapes, apples, cheddar cheese, and carrots. All fruits and vegetables are fresh, not frozen. I use a mixture of Plus Brand Super Yeast and Gevral Protein which is sprinkled over their fresh food. Three or four times a week I also sprinkle Headstart Poultry Vitamins over the same food. The same diet is fed all the year round although corn-on-the-cob seems to be the favorite rearing food and is increased during breeding.

My aviaries are very private and I alone care for the birds as they are very suspicious and afraid of strangers. I try to examine the nest boxes regularly but the subject white-capped hen sat so tightly that it was difficult to see what was going on. I only caught her off the nest twice, once after the first egg had been laid and again after the clutch was completed. After that she wouldn't budge from the box even when I opened the small viewing door. She puffed up and hissed until the door was closed.

As a general rule, all of my *Pionus* species tend to scream and attack through the wire when a new bird is put into the adjoining flight. In the case of the new fledglings, however, there was no screaming or attacking from either sides—the young were accepted routinely.

Members of the *Pionus* genus of parrots have all the best qualities for either aviary or pet birds. They are beautiful, especially in the sunlight, active, curious, not too noisy, and can make gentle, entertaining pets. It is my hope that more and more people will awaken to the beauties and virtues of the *Pionus* parrots and will cause them to flourish and increase in aviculture. ●



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