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# First Psittacine Produced By Artificial Insemination

by  
Research Institute for Avian Medicine  
Nutrition and Reproduction  
Lake Worth, Florida

To everyone else, "Alpha" looks like any ordinary, slightly bald-headed white cockatiel, but his hatching may be a significant step in the advancement of avicultural practices.

Greg J. Harrison, D.V.M. of the Research Institute for Avian Medicine, Nutrition and Reproduction in Lake Worth, Florida, has produced what is believed to be the first psittacine bred by artificial insemination. According to Dr. George Gee, reproductive physiologist at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, a fertile egg was produced in an *Eclectus* by artificial insemination at their facility, but the egg did not hatch.

Dr. Harrison's interest in this reproductive method began when he and Dr. Gee went to Puerto Rico in the spring of 1981 to experiment with this procedure in the endangered Puerto Rican parrot and its surrogate species, the Hispaniolan. Although semen was collected from these species with a technique Dr. Gee had used on cranes at Patuxent, the trials were not successful as the quality and quantity of the sperm was not satisfactory.

Back in Lake Worth, Dr. Harrison continued to train tame and imprinted birds for semen collection. On 10-12-81, the attempts were successful with a male budgerigar and the semen was immediately transferred with a PCV tube to a female budgie who had been housed alone. After repeated collections and inseminations, the first fertile egg was laid on 12-5-81, hatched in 17 days in an incubator (Petersime Model 1) at 99°F, 85°F wet bulb. It was raised to two days of age by foster parents when it was lost from the nest.

In the meantime, two cinnamon cockatiel hens that had been housed together for three months began laying eggs. Since initial attempts at semen collection from cockatiels produced no

results, cross-species fertilization with a budgie was attempted. The eggs continued to be infertile.

On 2-8-82 and again on 2-12-82 an albino, slightly bald male cockatiel produced a sample that from color and microscopic evaluation appeared to be of high quality, even though the volume was only half that of the initial budgie sample (and only one-tenth that of subsequent samples from the trained budgie).

The semen was transferred to one of the cinnamon hens by inserting the PCV tube ¼" into the cloaca and depositing it toward the approximate location of the vaginal opening, as direct observation was not possible. The eggs laid by this female on 2-13-82, 2-15-82 and 2-17-82 were all fertile. Her eggs after 2-17-82 were all infertile, as were all of the eggs of the other cinnamon hen.

The first egg was cracked on 2-28-82, repaired with parafin wax, and hatched on 3-2-82 in the incubator at 98.75°F, 86°F wet bulb. This albino baby weighed 3 grams and was named "Alpha."

"Alpha" was placed with foster parent budgies for the first six days, brought into the Propagation Center and raised from that point by hand-feeding. The other two eggs hatched on 3-5-82 and 3-7-82, respectively.

In working with other species, only the pearly conure has produced a semen sample. Attempts with a Queen of Bavarian conure, Blue and Gold, Green wing and Scarlet macaw, and Caymen Island amazon have not yet been successful.

As the first baby produced with artificial insemination was with full strength, direct deposit of semen, further study is being planned for possible diluents and storage conditions. But this is definitely a first step! ●

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