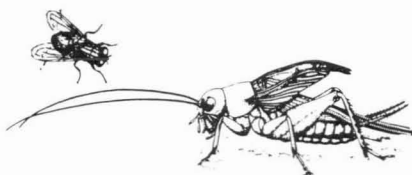




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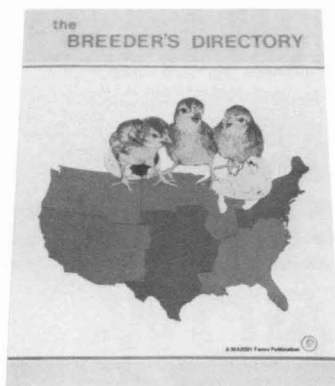
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Breeding the Cobalt-winged Parakeet

by
Robbie Harris
Sunland, California

The little cobalt-winged parakeet (*Brotogeris cyanopectera cyanopectera*) being native to South America is readily abundant and commonly seen in large flocks in parts of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil. In the past this bird had not been commonly found in private avian collections in the United States until just a few years ago when some were imported. In September of 1981, we were told of a newly released quarantine shipment of imported orange-chinned parakeets which differed in coloring and shape from those normally brought in under this name. A few bird dealers had noticed that these charming little birds resembled the common orange-chinned parakeets, but were in fact not the same species. Their coloring was different, having a yellow forehead and bright cobalt blue wings, which were just two of many differences.

At that time these extraordinary birds were being sold quite inexpensively straight from the quarantine station as orange-chinned parakeets to bird jobbers and pet stores. We were told that a local pet shop had some of these newly released odd parakeets. We immediately "flew" down to the shop to see these birds. As Fred and I gazed upon these feathered creatures we knew that these birds were not orange-chinned parakeets that many people mistook them for, but were in fact cobalt-winged parakeets. There were about twenty of them in a cage of which we bought four.

Fred very carefully went through all these birds in the cage, checking them by the pelvic bone sexing technique, till he picked out four healthy birds which he felt would be two actual pairs. Two birds were just slightly larger in the head and beak, and the other two had slightly more delicate faces.

These birds are somewhat similar to the orange-chinned parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*), after all they are

both *Brotogeris*. When comparing the cobalt-winged parakeet to the orange-chinned parakeet, one finds many different characteristics. The cobalt-winged parakeets appear to be slightly larger, while also having their protruding notched beak a little longer in appearance. These birds are not quite that bright apple-green color like the orange-chinned parakeet. Other color differences are a dull yellow coloring on the forehead just above the cere going between the eyes, and bright cobalt blue on the flight feathers (which gives them their common name). The orange-chinned parakeets have a distinct bronze colored shoulder patch on each wing, where the cobalt-winged parakeets do not.

The day after we purchased the four birds I took them to our veterinarian, Dr. Max E. Weiss, so he could surgically sex them for us. This way not only do we find out the sex but their physical status, also. The four birds were, indeed, two healthy pairs, with the slightly larger ones being the males. The birds were tattooed on the underside of the wing and marked in black ink on their feet, males right wing and foot, hens left wing and foot, for easy identification of sexes. I was so excited with our new birds that I went right home and set up each pair in their own breeding cage.

Fred went outside to check up on our new birds. He quickly came back inside the house to find out what new breeding technique I was trying. He said the birds had been set up in nice breeding cages but we may have much better luck in producing chicks if I were to pair up a male to a female instead of two males in one cage and two hens in the other. I immediately swapped the birds around in hopes of better breeding results.

The pairs were set up in these cages for well over a year with no sign of any attempts to breed. They had been on what we believe to be an excellent diet,

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Two orange-chinned chicks in front (note bronze patch on wings) and cobalt-winged chick in back.



Note the dark beak on this cobalt-winged chick.

Cobalt-winged chick, 5 weeks old.

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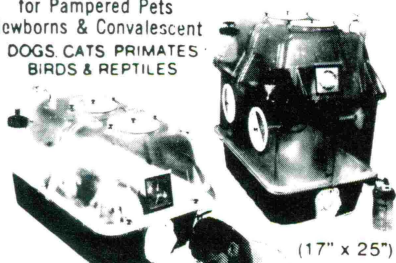
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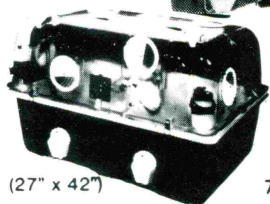
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Adult pair of cobalt-winged parakeets.

Photos by Fred Harris

as all our birds receive this diet and are in good feather as well as excellent health, with most producing chicks. The dry seed they were furnished with was sunflower seed, safflower seed and a high grade parakeet mix. Along with this seed diet they are provided with an assortment of fresh and well washed fruits and vegetables daily; apple, oranges, peas, corn, beets, carrots, spinach and various others which are in season at the time. We have found that the *Brotogetis* are large fruit and vegetable eaters. They also get a large assortment of fresh sprouted seeds daily which they seem to relish.

The pairs had been set up in a split cage (a long cage being divided in half by mesh wire). I noticed that during the day the four birds would hang on the middle dividing wire trying to preen each others mate right through this wire. As evening would come the pairs would retreat to their nest box for the night. We decided to try to house the two pairs together in a larger cage. Two parakeet nest boxes (being eight inches deep, six inches wide, and eight inches long), were hung on the outside of the large cage, one box per pair.

I had read and talked to many people about these birds, and found that most nested in their native habitat in termite mounds. We decided to try something different with their nest boxes, so I lined the entire inside of the box with dark colored wall paneling cork, using a non-toxic white glue to adhere it to the inside walls. A small amount of pine shavings was added to the bottom inside box. As soon as the two pairs were placed together in the same cage they instantly swapped mates. It was now evident that they had not been happy in the way we had previously paired them. Both pairs investigated the two nest boxes, but decided to set up housekeeping in the same nest box. Every evening, all four birds would climb together into the nest box. I peeked in there one day just as it was getting dark to see how they all did it. It was crowded, but they all seemed happy and content.

Within two weeks from the time we put all four birds together in the same cage, I noticed one of the hens starting to swell in the vent area. Soon the first egg was laid, with this being in the early spring season. Most of the cork had been left intact in the nest box; just a little had been chewed off and mixed in with the pine shavings. The hen had made a concave in one corner of the nest box in the shavings for the egg she had laid. The laying hen incubated her egg, with her mate periodically entering

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the nest box during the day, probably to feed her. At dusk the future father together with the other pair of cobalt-winged parakeets all climbed into the same nest box with the incubating hen, to sleep for the night.

I decided that four birds were two too many to sleep in one small nest box, especially with one pair nesting. The next day I tried to remove the other pair, but this only upset the nesting pair. The male would call to the other birds and the hen kept getting off her egg. Within an hour the other pair was returned to their original cage with the breeding pair. I was quite determined to raise a cobalt-winged parakeet so I decided to trade eggs with the hen. I gave her an infertile lineolated parakeet egg in exchange for her egg and placed it in our incubator. That night, like the following evening, all four birds proceeded to sleep inside the same nest box with the hen that was incubating her egg.

The next morning, upon my daily routine nest box inspections I found the infertile lineolated egg had been cracked. The cobalt-winged hen proceeded to lay her second egg, and soon she finished her clutch of five eggs. In this clutch an egg was laid every other day. Since I had one egg in the incubator, I decided to leave the remaining eggs with the hen till her clutch was completed. About a week after I pulled the first egg, I took in the remaining four eggs and gave her some more infertile eggs to incubate. I was just not comfortable about the idea of all four birds climbing each evening into the same nest box. I just kept imagining finding scrambled eggs one morning or if the chicks would hatch that they could end up being smothered.

Within a week we candled the eggs to discover that two were fertile and three were clear. The first egg that the hen laid was fertile and the second fertile egg was one of the remaining four eggs that had been taken in later. We have a very good egg candler, and we could see that the second fertile egg had a problem. The embryo in this egg was developing in a sideways position instead of being in the middle. I knew that if this chick developed all the way it would more than likely need assistance at hatching time. All five eggs appeared to be the same in size. The eggs were measured, just for my records and were all 30/32" x 24/32" with one being 30/32" x 25/32". These eggs were similar in size to peach-faced lovebird eggs.

The first chick hatched twenty-four

days after the egg was placed in the incubator. From the time of the first outward crack made by the chick, till it hatched out on its own was thirty-eight hours. The chick started the hatching process in our incubator, and just as the chick was ready to hatch out of the egg it was placed under our very reliable Bourke's parakeets. This pair had a few newly hatched chicks with one more egg soon to hatch. This pair of Bourke's have not only done a tremendous job rearing their own chicks, but they have fostered some lineolated parakeets and cactus conure chicks and did well with these.

Less than one hour after being placed in the Bourke's nest, the cobalt-winged chick hatched under its foster parents. When it hatched, it was the size of a three day old Bourke's parakeet chick with much less white down. The Bourke's immediately accepted their new arrival. As I had a very reliable pair of birds to foster the cobalt-winged chicks, I decided the chicks would be better off with the Bourke's. Just as soon as the first chick was fed by its foster parents, the infertile eggs were removed from the adult pair of cobalt-winged parakeets.

The next night on a Saturday, the second fertile cobalt-winged parakeet started to hatch. I had calculated that the chick was not due to hatch out for another two days. On Monday the chick was still working on hatching, so I placed this egg out under the Bourke's. Later in the early afternoon, it was obvious that the second chick was growing weaker in the egg and could not free itself from the shell. I had expected trouble, and that is why I kept a close eye on this egg. The egg was brought back into the house and placed in an incubator which was set up for hatching, being high in humidity. I decided to very carefully chip off some of the shell around the the chick's face so it could breathe. This chick developed badly in the egg and never returned to the correct position. After the face was cleared the egg was put back into the incubator. In a few hours the egg was checked to see how the chick was doing. I could see there was yellow and white fluid building up in the egg. This was secretions from the trapped chick. I felt it was now time to finally release the chick from the egg. With care I slowly chipped off the entire tip of the egg and gently pulled the chick free. The chick was immediately placed back in the incubator to warm up and dry off. In about three hours the chick was placed under the Bourke's. By that evening the

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second chick had been fed by the foster parents.

When the two chicks were eight and five days old they were brought into the house for hand rearing. The older chick weighed 15 grams and the younger one six grams. The Bourke's were doing a wonderful job at feeding the cobalt-winged chicks, but the second chick still appeared to be weak and very small. The older chick was more than twice the size of the younger chick. The younger chick ceased to grow and soon died at eight days old. The remaining chick grew rapidly. At twelve days old his eyes opened and he weighed 18 grams. Even at this very young age, he had a loud and powerful voice, very similar to his cousin the grey-cheeked parakeet. At fourteen days old he weighed 25 grams, dark quills could be seen developing under the skin. This chick never developed a thick secondary down, which is a usual characteristic of most other types of parrot chicks. At twenty-six days old and weighing about 40 grams his feathers started to "pop" through the quills on his tail and wings.

The cobalt-winged chick greatly resembled an Indian ringneck chick, having a longish neck and being "leggy" in appearance, but of course being miniature in size in comparison. The feet were very light grey. The upper mandible was a two-tone, dark grey color just below the cere turning to a pink towards the tip. The bottom half of the beak was pink. By six weeks of age the chick was just about completely feathered, and was placed in a cage. At seven weeks old he was eating soft foods and some seed, parakeet mix being his favorite. The chick looked very much like his parents, with the most noticeable difference in the chick being the immature beak color, which was almost black at the top half of the upper portion of the mandible. The chick's coloring was not as bright as the adults. This chick was just so sweet we decided to keep him as a house pet. We named him "Corky" and he is doing just great! He is now 61 grams and totally independent and spoiled rotten, but simply adorable!

Upon the time of finishing the typing of this article, we had what almost turned out to be a "swan song" catastrophe with Corky. It was in the late evening when my son Larry noticed that Corky was not being his perky self. Earlier that day he was fine and had been eating well. He all of a sudden became extremely weak, going off balance and very unsteady on his feet.

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As soon as I learned of the problem, Corky was placed in a hospital cage to keep him warm and quiet to hopefully prevent him from going into shock. Being late in the evening combined with a holiday weekend only made matters worse when it came to finding a good veterinarian available. Poor Corky started to have periodic seizures; once that evening I actually thought he died as he fell over on his side. Then he pulled himself up on his feet. Of course during this time he was no longer eating or drinking, so I started to gently force feed him. Remarkably enough, he remembered how it was when I used to hand feed him as a chick, and he took to the eyedropper which made force feeding easy.

For two days we went through the ordeal of keeping him alive just until we could get him to a vet. We took him to Dr. Hannis Stoddard who immediately ran all sorts of tests which only showed just how bad Corky's health condition was now. No bacteria or virus was detected on these tests and Corky was much too weak to withstand an X-ray. We all agreed that it must have been poisoning.

With Dr. Stoddard's quick work, Corky started to improve at least enough to take an X-ray. The X-ray showed that something (maybe paint) was in his system. There was such a small amount at that time, it was hard to identify, as the medication for a toxic substance was doing its job by working out the foreign matter.

For days we all tried to figure out what Corky could have eaten that was toxic. About a week later, we heard of a warning that some new "opaque outlining marker pens" that were being sold for children to write with were toxic, and should be used with care. It just so happens that I had bought some of these fancy marking pens for my son. Nowhere on the pens did it state anything about possible toxins. We now think that it was possible that Corky may have chewed some of this ink off of some paper or maybe even nibbled some off my son's hand.

Whatever the case may be, we found out one can never be too careful. Thanks to Dr. Stoddard's quick medical work, Corky recovered totally in about two weeks. I am happy to say he is fine and happy with no side effects from this ordeal. He is being watched like a hawk to be sure he doesn't get into anything else that could possibly hurt him. I mention this episode in hopes that it may warn some of you that one can never be "too careful".

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