



*A tiny Tabiti blue lory being hand-fed.*

# **Breeding Small Lorikeets**

*by Rosemary Low  
New Barnet, England*

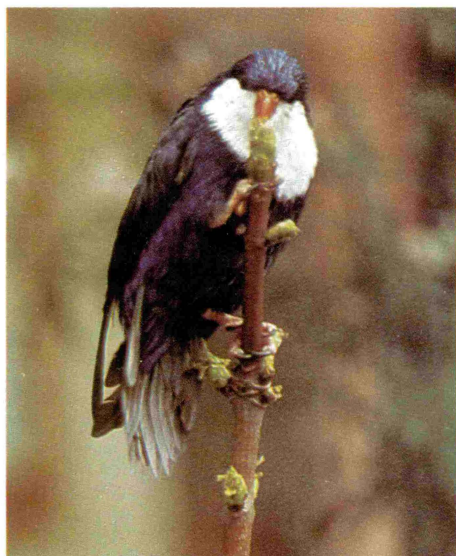
The small lorikeets are especially rewarding avicultural subjects. They are beautiful and fascinating. Lories and lorikeets are brush-tongued, nectar- and pollen-feeding parrots.



*Note the immature plumage on this Tabiti blue lory.*



*Hand-fed lorikeets.*



*A beautiful captive-reared Tabiti blue lory.*



*This small beated house off the author's kitchen contains Tabiti blue lorikeets that are a delight to watch.*

from Australia, New Guinea and Indonesia. About 20 of the 50 species are available, regularly or occasionally, to aviculturists. In this paper I shall describe the four species of small lorikeets being bred by my husband and me.

I strongly recommend the small lorikeets. They have several important advantages over the larger ones: they have pleasant voices, most are not destructive and all will breed in quite small enclosures. They are not aggressive towards their owner when breeding — and anyone who has been attacked by one of the larger lories will consider this point to be quite important!

The only one of the four species to be discussed which is readily available is Goldie's lorikeet (*Trichoglossus goldiei*) from New Guinea. It was almost unknown in aviculture until 1977 and has since proved so free breeding that it will almost certainly be the first lorikeet to become totally domesticated. It adapts well to captivity and is not easily stressed.

**SEXING.** The only disadvantage of this species is that it is difficult to sex. A number of theories have been put forward regarding sexing by plumage coloration — but none has proved to be consistently correct. In none of the species described here is the display as ritualized as in the larger lories; it is only marginally more pronounced in the male.

Many lorikeets are easier to sex at about the time they leave the nest, especially if the siblings are male and female. It is then evident in Goldie's lorikeet that the young male has the facial area more brightly coloured. Immature birds are much duller than adults: the crown is dark bluish, the scarlet on the forehead is replaced by a dull plum colour, also on the cheeks, which are indistinctly streaked with black. The streaking in all areas of the plumage is less distinct than in the adult. Another difference is the colour of the cere, which is lighter.

**DIET:** In captivity many Goldie's will take a variety of foods, but individuals differ. Of my two breeding pairs, one exists on a nectar mixture, with a small amount of fruit (apple, pear) and spray millet. The second pair, consisting of a hand-reared female (daughter of the first pair) and a wild-caught male, have a liking for soaked sunflower seed; the quantity offered is limited to about 30 g. daily. Sweet corn is offered to pairs with young. Soaked sunflower seed is the principal rearing

food of one very successful breeding pair of Goldie's lorikeets known to me.

**MEYER'S LORIKEET** (*Trichoglossus flavoviridis meyeri*). This species, from Celebes (Sularveri), Indonesia, is occasionally available. Less strikingly marked than Goldie's, it is nevertheless a very pleasing little bird. It was first exported commercially in 1973. We have bred it consistently since 1976.

**SEXING.** Sexual dimorphism is not pronounced but, on close examination, there are sufficient differences to be able to sex them with a degree of accuracy. Generally speaking the male differs from the female in the following respects: his yellow cheek patches are a denser, more solid yellow; the forehead is yellow or yellowish (not green or brownish as in some females); his upper mandible is broader. The female has a narrower upper mandible and the head looks finer with less rise over the eye. Both sexes display and dilate the pupil when excited, though males warble more.

The plumage of young in nest-feather can be misleading; coloration varies considerably. Young males show varying degrees of yellow on the forehead, and some have none at all. Recently a young bird fledged in full adult male plumage. Usually immature birds are much duller and have yellow flecks on the mantle. The beak is brownish, not orange as in the adult.

**DIET.** The diet and preferences of this lorikeet are similar to those of Goldie's, i.e., some birds will eat soaked sunflower, sweet corn and millet spray, while others exist principally on nectar.

**IRIS LORIKEET** (*Trichoglossus iris*) from Timor, Indonesia, is not common in aviculture. Of all the *Trichoglossus* species, this is my favourite. In personality it is much more boisterous than Goldie's and Meyer's, which are quiet and gentle. Unlike the former two, it is destructive to woodwork and to growing vegetation. Its beak is larger and stronger. Twigs for gnawing should be provided or overgrown beaks could result. I believe that the diet of this species in the wild is varied and includes more seed than that of most lorikeets.

**SEXING.** The difference in the sexes is not evident to the casual observer but close examination reveals two features which are significant. The male's violet ear coverts are more extensive, extending downwards; his breast barring is more pronounced.

Immature birds are very much duller throughout, most noticeably on the

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head. The ear coverts are bluish-green, not violet. The breast barring is almost absent. The beak is brown instead of orange.

**DIET.** The Iris accepts a wider range of foods than any lory with which I am familiar; it could not be maintained on nectar alone. Perhaps it is best to consider it as a parakeet which drinks nectar, rather than as a lorikeet which eats seed. The brushes of its tongue appear to be less well developed than in other lories.

This species eats a wide variety of seeds, plus vegetables such as carrot and celery, which most lories refuse. It is very fond of spray millet, also figs, the seeds of which are not unlike those of panicum millet. Dried figs are relished. The usual fruits, especially apple in abundance, and nectar, must also be available.

The TAHITI BLUE LORY (*Vini australis*) is extremely rare in aviculture. The only breeding groups are in San Diego Zoo and in my own collection. In character, appearance and voice, this species is quite unlike all other lories which are available. In my experience it is nervous and easily stressed; this even applies to tame, hand-reared birds. Its voice is reminiscent of some tits (genus *Parus*); indeed, it moves about with the ease of a softbill rather than with the more leisurely or jerky movements of a lory. I suspect that in the wild small insects form a significant part of the diet.

**SEXING.** The plumage is identical in male and female; however, males have the head and bill slightly larger, also the feet, which may be deeper orange than the female's.

Birds in nest-feather are very dull coloured. The feet and bill are black, the upper parts are dull bluish and the underparts are dark grey. There are a few grey or greyish white feathers at the sides of the beak. By about four months old (i.e., before the first moult at six months) the white feathers are more extensive and are found on the upper breast in some immature birds, as well as on the face.

**CHICKS.** Newly hatched chicks weigh 2 g. They are covered in longish white down — but not dense, as in some lories. At ten days the feather tracts appear as rows of tiny black dots. The eyes start to slit at about two weeks but may not be fully open until 18 to 21 days. At five weeks the wing feathers are erupting and, a few days later, the feathers on the top of the head. By eight weeks the chick is fully covered with contour feathers, except

those of the rump, which appear at about nine weeks. The whitish feathers on the cheeks are apparent at about eight weeks.

**DIET.** This consists of nectar, sponge cake and nectar, fruit and a little sweet corn and green food such as lettuce and spinach. Seed is ignored, as are mealworms. A wide variety of fruit is eaten; favourites are pomegranates and cherries. Grapes, pear and apple are given regularly. Tiny insects are eaten by birds in planted enclosures.

**ACCOMMODATION.** The enclosures used for the four species described here are small — not from choice but due to limited space available. They range from 3 ft. (91 cm.) square and 6 ft. (1.8 m.) high to 5 ft. (1.5 m.) x 3 ft. (91 cm.) x 6 ft. (1.8 m.) high. These are outdoor enclosures in which the birds are kept all year round. They are hardy and tolerate low temperatures well. The blue lories are an exception. They are kept permanently in indoor flights measuring 6 ft. x 2 ft. x 6 ft. high or, in the case of one pair, a small planted house measuring 4 ft. (1.2 m.) square and 6 ft. (1.8 m.) high. The latter is thermostatically controlled at 65° F (18°C). A sprinkler system is installed for the benefit of plants and birds. Lories housed in this way are a tremendous source of enjoyment as they climb and bathe in the plants and slide down the vertical stems. This is the ideal way of keeping them.

Tahiti blue lories are fairly destructive to vegetation, Goldie's not at all destructive and Iris too destructive for a planted environment.

Perching should consist of twigs from deciduous trees such as apple. In addition to horizontal perches, lorikeets greatly appreciate vertical perches suspended loosely from the aviary roof to form a swing.

Food and water is provided in white plastic containers which hook onto the wire. All lories are enthusiastic bathers and must have fresh water daily. Tahiti blue lories housed indoors where the light is left on until 11 p.m. will bathe at all hours up to that time, but especially late at night. Some lories can be seen to drink water as well as nectar.

**CANDIDA ALBICANS.** A not uncommon problem with small lories is the fungus *Candida albicans* which is usually seen in the mouth but can also infect the crop. After treating infected birds with Nystatin or with Fungillin suspension with varying degrees of success, I have recently found what appears to be the perfect treatment. It is no longer necessary to handle in-

*Continued on page 12*

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fectured birds. About 1/10 of a 50 mg. tablet of Kitoconazole (Crown Chemicals) is crushed and placed in the nectar daily until the bird is cured.

**BREEDING.** Courtship feeding occurs just prior to egg-laying. In Tahiti blue lorries it has not been observed at any other time and is accompanied by a high-pitched "Ee-eee" sound.

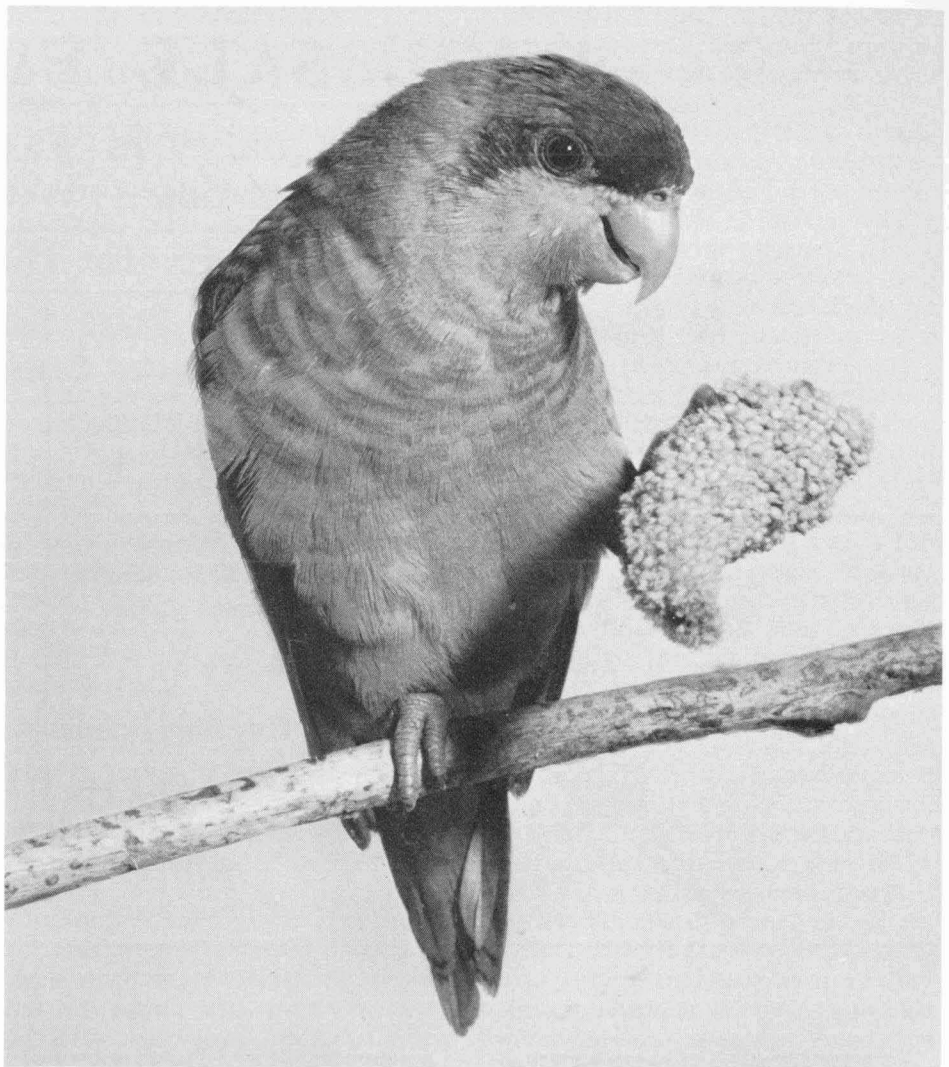
It would seem that this species is not sexually mature until two years old. The other species may breed earlier than this. Potential breeding span is unknown. Our oldest pair are 14 year old Iris lorikeets which produced young last year. It is my belief that males retain their fertility longer than females and that fertility in a female of a small species of this age is probably exceptional.

The breeding habits of the four species are basically similar, except that in the Tahiti blue lory incubation is shared by both sexes. (This habit is found only within the genera *Vini* and *Charmosyna*.)

The clutch consists of two eggs or, more rarely, one. The usual incubation period is 23 or 24 days, or 25 in the Tahiti blue lory. I know of two cases in Goldie's lorikeet (one in the U.S.A., one in the U.K.) where this period was extended to 28 days during cold weather.

Incubation may start with the laying of the first or the second egg, but usually the chicks hatch two days apart. On a single occasion Tahiti blue lory eggs hatched four days apart. I know of more than one instance in the Swainson's lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus*) in which incubation commenced several days — and up to ten days — after the laying of the second egg, but have never known this to occur in the four species reviewed here. The incubating bird sits very tightly and is joined by its mate for very long periods.

Nesting receptacles consist of Budgerigar nest-boxes measuring 8 in. (20 m.) x 5 in. (13 cm.) x 5 in. high, or upright boxes. Given a choice between a bark-covered nest-box and a small natural log, a pair of hand-reared Tahiti blue lorries chose the latter.



Photos by R. H. Grantham

A year-old Iris lorikeet male.

Nesting material consists of pet litter obtained in compressed packs. It is necessary to change this weekly while young are in the nest.

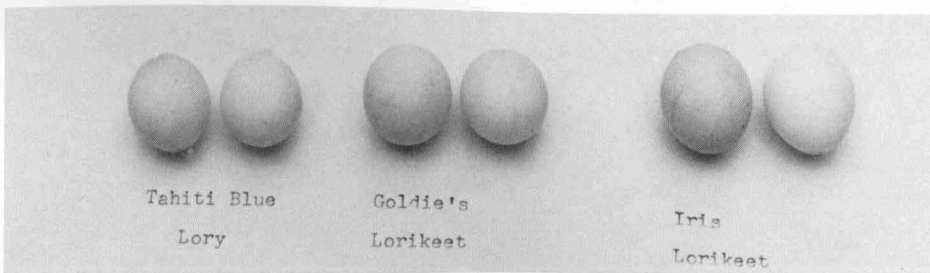
Nest-boxes should be left in position throughout the year as they are essential for roosting purposes. This results in lorries hatching young during every month of the year. Most small lorries are continuous breeders, i.e., they lay several clutches annually. Some, especially larger species, are seasonal breeders, and lay only between April and October.

As these birds cease to brood their chicks during the day when they are about three weeks old, young being reared during cold weather are re-

moved for hand-feeding. Lorries are probably the easiest of all parrots to hand-feed. The diet used throughout the rearing period is an extremely simple one. It consists of two types of Heinz tinned baby foods, in equal parts: pure fruit, and bone and beef broth with vegetables. A little bone flour is added, also occasionally a drop of Collo-Cal D (calcium and Vitamin D in liquid form from Vet Ltd., Minster House, Western Way, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk) to ensure that there is adequate calcium in the diet. This is not strictly necessary with small species and some are reared without it.

For Tahiti blue lorries only, Brand's essence of beef is added to the food for chicks up to the age of about three weeks. This additional protein is to replace the small insects which I believe these birds would feed to their young, were they available.

A spoon — no other implement — is used for feeding chicks of all ages, including newly hatched ones. A Tahiti blue lory of a few hours old, weighing only 2 g., will feed readily from a



spoon. I have never had a young parrot chick of any species which did not immediately accept spoon-feeding and I would attribute non-acceptance of the spoon to the food or both not being hot enough.

Chicks are fed at periods varying from every 1-1/2 hours (for the first two to three days), every two hours (up to about two weeks), then every two and a half hours. Feeding is carried out between 6:15 a.m. and 11:15 p.m. Chicks up to about eight days receive a 3 a.m. feed; this is extended to 4 a.m., 5 a.m., and 6 a.m. by the time they are ten or eleven days old.

Crops are never filled grossly and the crop is usually empty for a period of about half an hour between each feed. It is then quickly apparent if a chick's crop is not emptying normally — the first indication that something is wrong.

Newly hatched chicks are kept at a temperature of 92 to 95 degrees F. This is gradually reduced until by the time chicks are fully feathered at about seven weeks no heat is necessary.

Chicks will start to sample nectar and soft fruit, such as pear and grapes, at about seven weeks (eight and a half weeks in blue lorries), or earlier in some cases. The number of feeds is reduced gradually until they are independent at nine and a half to ten weeks.

The three principal reasons for hand-rearing are: 1) winter hatching; 2) inadequate feeding by parents (sometimes one chick is favoured and the other fed much less often); 3) feather plucking.

The chicks of pairs which have not bred previously should be checked twice daily to ensure that they are being fed adequately. Offering fresh, warm nectar several times daily acts as a stimulus to feed the young. Nectar is changed three times daily (or more often) for birds which have chicks in the nest; this is not a necessity, however.

Feather plucking can often be averted or cured by nailing pieces of bark or wood inside the nest-box to give the parents something to gnaw. This not only diverts attention from the chicks but allows the birds to manufacture their own nesting material to help to counteract the dampness which is inevitable when the nest contains chicks. Most small lorries tolerate nest inspection well and this should be carried out at least once daily.

Both parents feed the young. The female broods them during the day (also the male, in the case of the Tahiti

blue lory). The main hazard of parent-reared chicks in a temperate climate is that the female ceases to brood them at an early age, and they become chilled and die.

An interesting observation was made on a pair of hand-reared Tahiti blue lorries who were rearing a single chick in a nest log. When it was about six weeks old they ceased to brood it at night and roosted elsewhere, in a nest-box. The enclosure was the heated one previously mentioned.

The period which the young spend in the nest is about 52 to 54 days for Meyer's, Goldie's and Iris lorikeets and about 62 days for Tahiti blue lorries.

The young quickly learn to feed themselves and can, if necessary, be removed from their parents as soon as they are independent, two to three weeks after leaving the nest. The main danger in leaving them is that the male may attack his male offspring. A young male Meyer's was found dead after leaving the nest in circumstances which suggested that the male parent might have been responsible. In a pair of Goldie's lorikeets known to me the male kills the young males as soon as they leave the nest; they therefore have to be removed just before they are due to fledge.

In conclusion I would urge more aviculturists to concentrate on breeding the small lorries which can prove quite prolific despite their small clutch size. Unlike the larger lorries, finding space for several pairs of one species is not difficult. One is therefore in the position to sell unrelated pairs to breeders, thus ensuring that these delightful birds will be firmly established in aviculture.

#### Appendix I

Nectar mixture used:

One heaped dessertspoonful of malt extract dissolved in boiling water; add two dessertspoonfuls of honey; add a little cold water, then three dessertspoonfuls of a fruit-flavoured Milupa baby cereal, or similar cereal, then about half a dessertspoonful of Fussell's condensed milk. Add water to make 35 fluid oz. (1 litre) of mixture. The consistency is runny, not thick. The condensed milk can be omitted in hot weather as nectar containing it separates more quickly.

#### Appendix II

Egg sizes, approximate averages:

Goldie's lorikeet:	21 x 19 mm.
Meyer's lorikeet:	22 x 19 mm.
Iris lorikeet:	23 x 20 mm.
Tahiti blue lory:	17 x 15 mm. ●



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