

Conure Husbandry

by Tom Ireland & Bill Maynard
Lake Worth, Florida

Conures are from Central and South America. They are the most numerous genus with the widest distribution of all psittacine birds. There is a great range in color and size from 8'' characterized by the crimson bellied pyrrhura to the largest Patagonian conure which measures 20''. The conures are characterized by large heads and beaks, long slender bodies and long, tapering tails. Conures are similar to the macaws, which they are closely related to, the basic difference being the size of the bare eye ring—larger in the macaws. In addition, the 8'' to 11'' pyrrhura have a broad bill with a notch in the upper mandible, with a very prominent naked cere. Conures are long lived, hardy, and extremely intelligent birds.

The purchase of a conure for breeding rather than as a tame pet forces us to consider much more than the bird's health and tameness.

Starting with healthy stock should be uppermost in your mind. Check the bird's droppings and general appearance before you even approach the cage, then do the routine physical; not just looking but handling the bird. Check the weight, nostrils, eyes, legs, feet, and the entire body. There are four things to consider beyond the routine examination: 1) Know the age of the bird, 2) Is it a domestic or imported bird? 3) Is it a virgin or proven breeder? 4) How well does it do in your climate and aviary accommodations?

Let's go back and consider each question separately. 1) The age on imported birds is impossible to tell except in some extremely old birds you can tell by the feet and the general appearance of the bird. You want to try to avoid these specimens. 2) Which is better, a domestic bird or an imported bird? It is going to take approximately two years for an imported bird to settle into a

captive situation, and it will take two years for the majority of the captive-bred *Pyrrhuras* and *Aratingas* to mature to breeding age. There are advantages, however, to domestics. You do know the genetic background of the bird and you do automatically know the age of the bird. Plus, in a breeding situation, especially in checking the nest box, domestic conures are less stressed and will probably be less likely to destroy eggs or damage chicks as some imported nervous birds will do.

3) Virgin or proven breeders. I would rather start with a virgin bird because they have not developed bad habits. It is rare for a person to sell a proven breeder. Let's face it, if you had a bird that was proven and that was raising babies you are not going to sell it. Some of the reasons they are sold are, they kill their mates, or they are carriers of various viruses or diseases and several mates have died mysteriously. Or they are very bad parent birds, they kill their chicks or don't feed well. I am not saying that people are dishonest. Some people do get out of birds and sell their stock, but check very closely the history and breeding situation of the bird plus the reputation of the seller.

4) Check on whether the bird species is going to do well in your climate. I check with people before purchasing new conures. If it is a new species I am going to work with, I check with other local aviculturists to see if they have done well with it. If it is producing in good numbers then I will go with the species. If it is a bird that doesn't do well in the humidity of the tropics, I will try to avoid the species. For example, the scarlet chested and turquoise parakeets outside, in Florida, do not do well. My ego caused me to kill several pairs of these birds before I realized that the wet, tropical climate wasn't conducive to good production in this bird. I also believe that some of the conures, for example the Pearly conure (*Pyrrhura p. perlata*) and the Hoffmann's conure (*Pyrrhura h. hoffmanni*), would do much better in the tropical areas as opposed to the dry desert climate where some are kept.

Unfortunately, none of the conures are dimorphic. We have all been told "I can tell the sex of these," and my friend or my veterinarian says that by looking at the bird it is a female or a male. Some of the means used are: 1) The head or beak size. 2) The vent width, and 3) a group of birds where two are paired off. I do use these indicators when I



Suspended aviaries used for breeding conures. The shelter protects the birds and seed from the sun and rain but the birds can fly into the open part of their flights and get all the sun or rain they want.

Photo by Tom Ireland, Lake Worth, Florida

buy but then I have the birds surgically sexed. I firmly believe that you are wasting your time if you don't have your birds surgically sexed. My production increased at least 85% when I had them all surgically sexed by Dr. Susan Clubb. As one example, I once

had seven pairs of caiques. When Dr. Clubb surgically sexed the 14 birds, only two of them were females and I had the two hens caged as a pair. Surgically sexing monomorphic birds pays.

Now that you have done everything

right, you take the birds home, put them in the aviary or in the proper size cage, and your entire collection dies. This is a scenario that happens time and time again. We have repeatedly advised and been advised to quarantine our birds. I have seen it happen and I



Photo by Dan Martin, Wimauma, Florida

Jendaya conure Aratinga jandaya.

BANTA'S BIRD FARM

We Offer All Types Of Birds

Finch - Keets - Cockatiels -
Conures - Amazons - Macaws
Love Birds - Lorys

- IMPORTED BIRDS
- SURGICALLY SEXED BIRDS
- DOMESTIC HANDFED BABIES
- TAME & TALKING PET BIRDS

Write or Call for Price List

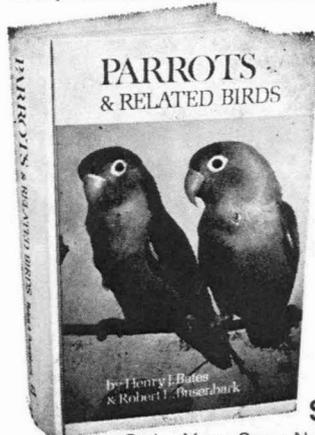
21712 Vivienda Ave.
Grand Terrace, CA 92324
(714) 824-3834

Never before has such a comprehensive encyclopedia been offered, both for the specialist and hobbyist.

YOUR LIBRARY IS NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT THIS BOOK

PARROTS and RELATED BIRDS (revised edition)

by Henry J. Bates and Robert L. Busenbark



\$19.99

Order Your Copy Now From

PALOS VERDES BIRD FARM INC.

P.O. Box 1305, Torrance, CA. 90505

Include \$1.50 postage and handling.

California residents add 6% sales tax.

Retail Store - 4146 West Pacific Coast Hwy.,

Torrance, CA 90505

(across the street from Sambo's)

cannot stress this point enough—you should quarantine your birds in a separate facility. You should respect your collection enough to do this. Lab work should be done, culture sensitivity, gram stains and at least 30 days observation. I also systematically worm all of my birds. It can't hurt them, done properly of course, and a lot of psittacines and conures do have worm problems.

At Tuwana, our birds are housed one pair to a cage with a few exceptions, dusky conures being one of them. The *Pyrrhuras* and smaller *Aratingas* are in 2' wide, 4' long, 3' high cages. Our larger conures are in basically 4' square cages excluding the Queen of Bavarias and Patagonians which are in a somewhat larger cage. Basically the cage should fit the bird, allowing it to exercise. Conures tend to be able to perch exercise but, surprisingly, do a considerable amount of flying in these smaller units. I have had better success in these units than I have had in 4' wide, by 12', 20' and 10' long aviaries. They tend to fly a lot but don't seriously settle down to breed in these larger units.

All of our units are structured off the ground and the birds are not exposed to bacterial, fungal, rodent or parasite problems. The units are built with 1/2" x 1" welded wire, galvanized after welding to retard rusting. I have seen many times where 1" x 2" or larger wire was used and birds have been pulled through the wire by opossums, raccoons, or other predators. All building materials consist of pressure-treated wood and metal roofing. We are careful not to allow birds access to chewing on pressure treated lumber as lead poisoning will occur. I have at least half of each unit open to the elements. The birds can get out in the open when it rains but food and nest boxes have to be protected. Properly sized and secure perches are placed away from the wire so as not to interfere with mating. We use 2" x 2" and 1" x 1" planks for perches mainly because we are replacing perches in large numbers.

The size and style of nest boxes depends on the bird. Most of our conures use a 10" x 10" x 18" box, grandfather style. Smaller conures, *Pyrrhuras*, Petz or halfmoons, use a 10" x 10" x 10" basic cockatiel box. Most of our boxes are of the grandfather style, with some exceptions. The slender bill which we thought for many years were eating eggs, really just

like to jump into the box. We put the box on a 45° slant so they cannot jump into the box and break the eggs. Our boxes are of wood construction. In Florida especially, we use wood construction because of the insulation effect, mainly to keep the temperature down. Metal boxes in direct sun can cook eggs and parent birds during the summer months. The boxes are mounted outside of the cages for easy access by rear entrance door and wire-lined to prevent escape or disasters, such as chewing through the bottom at the time of hatching. I remember years ago in larger flights having a pair of Amazons chewing through the whole incubation period. The day the eggs were to hatch they got through the bottom of the box and I found three dead chicks on the ground. So you should secure the box so these problems don't arise.

We use pine shavings, filling approximately 2/3rds of the box. We also use, on a regular basis, 5% Sevin dust mixed with the wood shavings to prevent insect problems, primarily mites. The nest box is probably the most important part of a breeding setup. You have to "listen" to your birds, then choose or change the box. There is really no set answer to this question. If the birds are not using a particular box then you will have to try some other type.

Conures should be offered a varied diet and feeding should be adjusted seasonally. Add high protein and bulk during breeding season. Variety and freshness in dry seeds is important. We use sunflower, canary, oats, millet, cracked corn, wheat and milo. This is fed all year, decreasing sunflower during the summer because of the heavy fat content. Other dry foods, used during the breeding season, start in the spring and run throughout the breeding season. A high protein turkey laying pellet, monkey biscuits and Dr. Lafeber's breeding pellets are added. Dr. Lafeber's diet is a highly balanced protein used as an additional supplement. In addition to dry foods, a variety of fruits and vegetables have to be offered for greater success in breeding. Each day corn on the cob and a mixture of whole wheat bread (put through a food processor), endive (chopped fine), and carrots (grated), is given. The amount is increased seasonally. We add apple, orange, beets, and other vegetables at different times. We use as a vitamin supplement, Clovite. Wheat germ oil is added during the spring months, pre-breeding season. It is given by oiling the corn for two

Continued on page 28



EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR OF TOPPER BIRD RANCH DIETS®
(LOS ANGELES, ORANGE & VENTURA COUNTIES)

The only total nutrient seed diets available in the U.S.

Small Hookbill • Large Hookbill • Canary Total Diet
 Finch • Budgie

*****DISCOUNT BIRD SUPPLIES*****

***DECORATIVE WOOD STANDS**

PRE-FAB AVIARIES

INDIVIDUAL BREEDING CAGES

***HEALTH PRODUCTS**

Vionate
 Scalex
 Kwik-Stop
 Bird Defenders
 Avivite
 Keet Life
 Bitter Apple

METAL FEEDERS

BIRD TOYS

***CAGES**

Steiner
 All Purpose
 Wrought Iron

***FEED**

Topper Bird Ranch Diet®
 Petamine & Budgimine
 Bulk Cuttle Bone
 Bulk Spray Millet
 Canary Song Food

***WOOD PRODUCTS**

Nest Boxes
 Feeders
 Carrying Cages
 Hospital Cages
 Ladders & Swings
 Playpens

***PLANT PLASTIC PRODUCTS**

METAL NEST BOXES
CROCKS & CROCK HOLDERS
AVIARY WIRE
BIRD BOOKS
SMALL NUMBERED OPEN BANDS & TOOLS

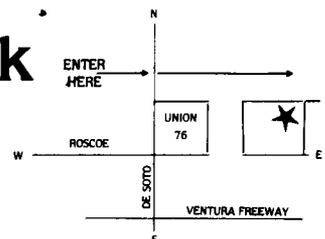
20833½ Roscoe Ave., Canoga Park

(Entrance on De Soto . . . Ample Parking)

OPEN WEEK-ENDS ONLY

Friday - 12:00—6:00 p.m.

Sat. & Sun. - 8:00—5:00 p.m.



(818) 340-6318

weeks. If necessary, we repeat the dose.

Remember that egg shells are made from calcium and the need is greater during the breeding season. You have to increase this very important element. We add it via our bread mix and

mineral blocks are always present. But some anti-calcium birds won't use them, which results in egg binding. The alternative solution that we have used in the past is neo-calglucon syrup which is a liquid calcium for humans. Now we are fortunate that Lambert

Kay has produced a liquid calcium that has saved many clutches. It is called avimin. Although such foods and additives are not essential all year round, while chicks are being produced it can make the difference between weak or strong chicks and/or multiple clutches.●



Peach-fronted conure *Aratinga aurea aurea*.



Gold-capped conure *Aratinga auricapilla*.