

*The Watchbird editorial staff is pleased to present to its readers significant information on an unusual parrot species — the Pesquet's Parrot (*Psittichas fulgidus*). This remarkable species, very un-parrotlike in appearance, has always been uncommon in captivity. The following two successful accounts are from two different continents using, in many ways, different management techniques. This species has seldom been reproduced in captivity, the first being in Europe in 1977. The Los Angeles Zoo in 1980 was the first in North America. Hopefully, aviculturists can use some of the following information with many of their own common species of parrots, gaining some insight into the dedication and often difficult complexities it takes to rear some of the unusual types.*

The Pesquet's Parrot

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The Pesquet's Parrot (*Psittichas fulgidus*), sometimes called the vulture-headed parrot, is a primitive and isolated form of psittacine. Its plumage is black with varying shades of brownish grey, except for the lower belly, wing coverts and underwing coverts which are bright scarlet. The facial area is bare (it is believed to facilitate cleaning after a messy meal). Males also have a small red patch behind the eye. Found in the mountain forests of New Guinea, it feeds on soft fruits, blossoms, nectar and possibly some insects. A far reaching, piercing call enables it to be heard for long distances in the thick jungle growth. Although not an endangered species, it is rare to collections in the United States.

The Los Angeles Zoo acquired two pairs of imported birds in 1977 and a third pair of imports from Cincinnati Zoo in 1980. The adults were fed a diet of grapes, apple, banana, cooked yam, raw ground horsemeat, lettuce and hard-boiled egg. The pairs were housed in hexagonal enclosures 18 feet across and 26 feet tall. Large palm logs were supplied as possible nesting sites.

By our observations, the female only chips away at the inside of the nest log, bringing wood pieces out trapped in her feathers which she then shakes off. The nest log is hollowed out up to a depth of eight

feet. Two eggs are laid and incubated by the female alone. The male is very protective and aggressive but does not assist in the work. After the eggs are laid, the female again begins to chip away at the interior of the nest. This time she leaves the chips in the nest. This behavior would allow for better drainage in case of some flooding and also a cleaner nest. By fledging time, the chicks are up fairly close to the nest hole.

After several infertile clutches and unsuccessful hatchings, a chick was successfully parent reared in January of 1980. Incubation appeared to be done entirely by the female, but the male was very protective and aggressive. The parents dramatically increased their intake of hard boiled eggs while rearing the chick. At 105 days of age, the chick left the nest. It was unable to fly, but did eat on its own. It never did appear to have full strength and died at 21 months of age of undetermined causes.

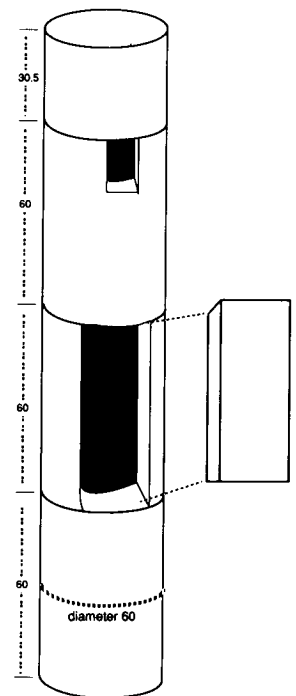
The Pesquet's had been successfully raised in Europe in 1977, but this was a first for the United States.

In May of 1980, a clutch of eggs was pulled for artificial incubation from another pair. One chick was subsequently hatched and hand-feeding was attempted. This chick died at eight days of age. In January of 1981, it became necessary to attempt hand-feeding again. A closer look at

the diet preferred by the parents produced a new hand-feeding formula. This new chick was successfully reared and was totally independent at the age of 75 days. The weaning period, unlike most psittacines, was non-existent. One day it was being fed and the next it was not. (A record of its weight gain and a feeding schedule is found elsewhere in this article.) Unlike its parent-reared counterpart, this chick was always strong and healthy.

1982 was a non-productive year plagued by infertile eggs, unhatched fertile eggs and dead chicks.

In 1983, a puree' mixture of soaked dog kibble, corn, celery, spinach, banana, broccoli, grapes, apple, raw yam, carrot, orange, honey and a vitamin-mineral supplement was added to the original diet at an equal ratio. When the birds are rearing chicks, they are fed two parts puree' to one part hard mixture. Nest logs that would make inspection easier



Nest Log

Diagram of nest log designed by Lynda Paul and Dennis Thurslund. Measurements are shown in centimeters. It was designed to allow easy observation and cleaning between uses. It can be plugged by placing a smaller log inside, giving the birds new material to excavate.

The top section is solid, as is the bottom section. The two center sections are hollowed out, leaving a 10 cm. thick wall. A nest hole was cut in the second piece from the top and an observation door cut in the third piece from the top. The bottom was left solid for the birds to dig out. This is the section that can be plugged as necessary.



The Pesquet's chicks at 39 days of age. Chicks, at hatching, are light pink with white down. At around one week of age, the down feathers are replaced with black ones.

and could be plugged were constructed by the keepers. These changes proved successful. In June of 1983, a chick was hatched and reared by the parents.

Chicks are light pink and covered with white down. The edges of both the upper and lower mandible, the very tip of the toes and all nails are

black. At about seven to ten days, the white down has been completely replaced by black down. Eyes open at about 21 to 25 days of age and the beak darkens progressively to black as the chicks mature. The hand-raised chick was totally independent at 75 days of age, but parent-raised birds appear to take about 25 days longer to

Observations of Parent Reared Chick

Age In Days	Development
12	Chick strong; begins to raise itself onto tarsometatarsi
13	Eyes begin to open
17	Pinfeathers begin to appear
20	Male spends more time at nest than female and is increasingly protective of chick
22	Eyes completely open
37	Chick acknowledges keeper's presence when nest is inspected by turning towards keeper and vocalizing; this reaction occurs until chick leaves nest
47	Chick well feathered
62	Chick weighs 562 grams
86	Chick seen at entrance hole; female remains close by
87	Chick seen out of nest, climbing on cage wire and flying to perch; during next two days spends much time on floor of cage and adults remain close also on floor; from this time adults become noticeably more vocal
100	Both adults take longer to react to begging; chick begins to feed itself
108	Chick feeds on its own but continues to beg
114	Chick feeds itself almost entirely
6.5 months	Chick separated from parents (parents were ready to nest again)

Photo by Sy Oskeroff, Los Angeles Zoo



Adult male Pesquet's Parrots

wean.

Only two of the three pairs at the Los Angeles Zoo have ever produced, raising three more chicks after the one in June of 1983 with fair regularity. In 1986, the pairs were moved to new facilities and have not nested successfully since that time.

Although several zoos have now raised the Pesquet's Parrot successfully, it is definitely a bird that needs the attention of private aviculturists and one that I'm sure you would find a pleasure to work with.

Hand Feeding Diet for Pesquet's Parrot

fresh cooked:

- carrots — 1/2 cup after blending
- yams — 1/2 cup after blending
- egg yolks — 1/2 cup after blending

fresh:

- apple — 1/2 cup after blending
- banana — 1/2 cup after blending
- grapes or melon — 1/2 cup after blending

soaked:

- Gaine's dog food — 1/2 cup after blending

to the above add:

- Geverol — 2 tablespoons
- powdered milk — 1/2 cup
- honey — 1 tablespoon

at day nine change to the following:

- all the same except:
- Gaine's dog food — change to 1 cup
- egg — change to whole egg boiled and increase to 1 cup

add:

- 75 grams lime powder for calcium

at day 25 change to the following:

- all same as day nine except:
- Gaine's dog food — 3 cups
- whole boiled eggs — 2 cups

Data on Hand Reared Chick

Age In Days	Weight In Grams	Average Amount Fed in CC	Number of Feedings Per Day
1	20.6	.6	10
2	23.9	1.8	10
3	29.3	2.0	10
5	38.8	2.5	10
8	62.5	3.5	9
12	108.0	6.2	9
16	169.4	12.2	8
22	253.5	18.0	8
28	359.8	28.0	7
34	432.5	30.0	7
40	522.0	48 - 60	7
57		3/4 to 1 cup approx.	6
72		1-1/2 cups	6

Significant Growth

- Day 5 — feather follicles visible as small black dots under skin (these were the black down coming in)
- Day 16 — feather follicles show under skin
- Day 24 — eyes open
- Day 74 — feed left in brooder between feedings (4 per day)
- Day 75 — chick eating completely on its own

The chick was brooded at 97°F until day 35 when we began a gradual drop of approximately 1 degree per day. ●

Observations were made by Dennis Thurslund and Lynda Paul.