



The young Fiery-shouldered Conure, even while in the hand fed stage, shows the reddish-orange markings on its shoulder.



This close-up of the Fiery-shouldered Conure (*Pyrrhura egregia*) shows the distinctive color markings on the bend of the wing for which it is named. The color on the shoulder markings is extended to cover the complete under wing coverts.



First captive breeding of the Fiery-shouldered Conure

(*Pyrrhura egregia*)

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Fiery-shouldered Conures (*Pyrrhura egregia*) were virtually unknown in American aviculture until the importation of a small group from Guyana in the fall of 1986. As in many members of the genus *Pyrrhura*, the Fiery-shoulder has predominately green plumage with distinctive splashes of color. In this species, the bend of the wing, carpal edge, and under wing coverts are yellow, extensively marked with orange. The bird also has a narrow brown frontal band, and reddish-brown ear coverts. Feathers of the sides of neck, throat and upper breast are green edged with yellowish white giving a barred appearance. The center of the abdomen is variably suffused with brownish red. The tail is dark reddish-brown above, basally marked with green and greyish below. The bill is horn colored, the eyes hazel, and the legs grey. Juveniles have less yellow and orange-red on bend of wing, and less pronounced barring on throat and breast.¹

Guyana, the third smallest country in South America (about the size of Idaho), is located on the northern coast, between Venezuela and Surinam. Despite its small size, it is

the second largest exporter of neotropical parrots. The country is divided into three geographic regions. The coastal plain, a 60-km wide strip between mountains and the Caribbean Sea, is the home of the majority of the population of approximately 800,000. The llanos is a savannah region of the southwestern part of the country bordering Brazil. The third region, the highland forests of the Guiana shield, is the home of the Fiery-shouldered Conure. This region, consisting of the middle and southeastern three-fourths of the country, is a remnant of an ancient plateau. Mountains in this region are usually called tepuis, an Amerindian word meaning flat-topped mountains. This region may be referred to as the pantepui region. It is accessible only by small plane. There are no roads and the rivers are not navigable due to numerous falls and rapids as the rivers descend from the Guiana shield. Mt. Roraima, which is found on the west-central border of Guyana at the border between Brazil and Venezuela, is in this region. It is the highest point in Guyana, reaching an elevation of 9,094 feet.^{2,4}

Forshaw reported that Fiery-shouldered Conures are found in southeast Venezuela and adjoining regions of western Guyana and extreme northwestern Roraima, Brazil. *P.e. egregia* is the subspecies found in Guyana. He reported that in Venezuela they inhabit isolated table top mountains but occur in tropical forests in Guyana. Ridgely reported it as a bird of the precipitous upper tropical and subtropical zones, in Venezuela being recorded at 700 to 1,800 meters. He also reported it from tropical altitudes in Guyana as well as the Mazuruni River and its tributaries. They are fairly common within their range and moderately gregarious occurring in flocks of four to six birds.^{1,2}

Kurt Herzog, a Swiss-born naturalized Guyanese citizen, trapped this breeding collection and, according to available information, all Fiery-shoulders that have been exported from Guyana. He reported that they are found around the upper Mazaruni River, a tributary of the Essequibo River which is the largest river in Guyana. They are also found around Mt. Roraima.^{3,4,5}

Herzog trapped the Fiery-shouldered Conures in the summer (July and August). At this time, they come to the villages of the Amerindians to feed on fruits. They were

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mist netted as they fed on ripe guavas. After capture, they would eat any fruit given. He captured them around the villages of Kako, Kamarang, Paruima, and Pipillipai. He reported that they usually fly in flocks of seven to 25 birds and are very noisy in flight. In the wild, they breed in March and April with chicks fledging usually in May or June.³

Trade records (TRAFFIC [USA]) indicate that, in 1986, 20 Fiery-shouldered Conures were exported from Guyana to the United States and an additional 30 to Switzerland. In 1987, Guyana began to export birds under a quota system (Guyana Forestry Service). The quota for 1987/1988 was 120 Fiery-shouldered, however, only six were actually exported to the U.S. No other birds were reported in trade during 1984 through 1988.^{4,5}

The original ten Fiery-shoulders at Last Chance Farm were imported from Guyana in the fall of 1986. All birds survived quarantine and were healthy upon release. The birds were surgically sexed, were found to be six males and four females and appeared to be mature at the time of sexing. Four pairs were set up as single pairs in outdoor suspended breeding cages, two feet by two feet by six feet. All four cages are side by side with no visual barriers. Cages are constructed of 1/2" by 1" welded wire, with wire lined wooden nest boxes, 12" by 12" by 20". A split roof is suspended above the cage with feeding in the front and the nest box suspended in the rear. Australian pine is used for perches.

Pair A-60 first laid four eggs in March 1988. They ate the first egg, then abandoned the nest on March 25 during a period of unusually cold weather. The weather in March is typically cool and dry.

Pair A-66 laid on May 9, 11, 13 and 15. The rainy season usually begins in April or May in Miami and the weather is quite hot. Since the first nest was destroyed, all eggs were pulled as they were laid. The first two eggs were fostered under Black-capped Conures (*Pyrrhura molinae*), the third under Sun Conures (*Aratinga solstitialis*) and the fourth under Nandays (*Nandayus nenday*). The first egg hatched May 29, a 21-day incubation period. No hatch dates are available for the other eggs. All four eggs hatched under the foster parents. The chick under the Sun Conures was abandoned at seven days of age and pulled for hand-feeding.

The rest of the chicks were pulled at approximately three weeks for hand-feeding. They weaned in mid-August. The chicks were three females and one male. Two females were paired with the remaining two wild-caught males. Neither pair A-60 or A-66 laid again in 1988. No courtship display was noted for either pair. Pair A-66 bred again in 1989. Two eggs were fostered under Black-capped Conures and the chicks were pulled at two weeks for hand-feeding.

The hand-feeding formula consisted of monkey chow, peanut butter and oatmeal. The babies were syringe fed. Hand-feeding and weaning were uneventful. The diet during breeding season is 1/2 soft food and 1/2 seed mix. Seed is 40% sunflower, 20% Purina high protein dog food, 20% whole corn, 20% scratch feed. Seed is given daily. Soft food is given fresh each morning and consists of seasonal fresh fruits, vegetables, and bread. Soft food is provided from January to October. Aviaries are kept private during breeding season. Nest boxes are examined twice a week to daily depending on the species. The entire collection is wormed once a year. It was also treated prophylactically with aureomycin in November of 1987.

While some members of the genus *Pyrrhura* are well established in aviculture, many are poorly represented and many do not exist in U.S. collections. Their size, vigor and gregarious, inquisitive nature make them attractive avicultural subjects. Species such as Fiery-shouldered Conures, however, will need careful genetic management in order to establish a stable captive population with such a limited gene pool.

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1. Forshaw, Joseph M., *Parrots of the World*, Doubleday & Co., Inc.; Garden City, NY, 1973.
2. Ridgely, Robert.
3. Kurt Herzog, Georgetown, Guyana, personal communication.
4. Jorgen Thomsen, TRAFFIC USA, personal communication.
5. Karen Pilgrim, D.V.M., Wildlife Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Georgetown, Guyana, personal communication. ●