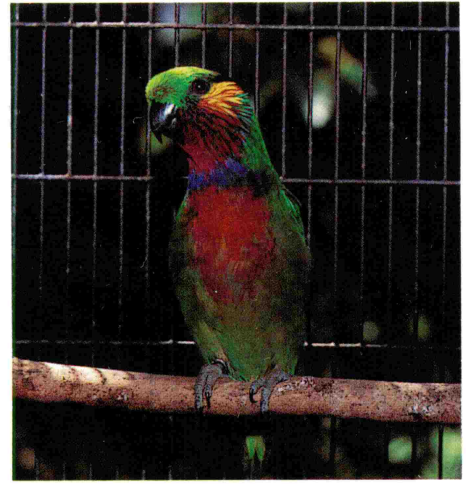




*Female Fig Parrots show a slightly wider strip of blue under the neck and no red crosses over the blue border. Their breasts are chartreuse green, in contrast to the male's ample showing of red below the blue strip.*



*Mature male Edward's Fig Parrot. These birds are found in the northeastern part of New Guinea and Irian. Author Mike Atkinson was awarded the U.S. 1st Breeding Auy Award, August 1990, for his work with this species.*

## Breeding the Edward's Fig Parrot

*(Psittaculitostris edwardsii)*

by Michael Atkinson  
Los Angeles, California

My introduction to the Edward's Fig Parrot came about when I purchased them from a quarantine station in September 1987. There is no need to surgically sex these birds as they are sexually dimorphic.

The birds were placed in single pairs in individual flight cages that measured 14" wide x 48" long x 48" high. The 14" area at the end of the aviary was used for viewing. The flights were built on a stilt-like framework that was three feet above the ground.

The cages were built of 3" x 1/2", 12 gauge welded wire purchased from Erect Easy Wire. A 1" x 2" wood frame was used for an access door on the 14" end. It was also used to support the nest box.

About one-half of the cage is covered with a quarter inch thick piece of slanted plexiglass. This allows rain to run off the portion of the cage that contains the nest box and feeding areas.

Initially, plants were used within the flight cages but the birds destroyed all planted material. At present, there is a heavy concentration of plants above, below and completely around the flights which provides the birds with a great deal of privacy.

The plants used are Chinese



*A heavy concentration of plants completely surrounds each flight bank of the author's Fig Parrot cages. This helps greatly with their feeling of security.*

Lantern, Scheffleria, Rubber Tree, Split-leaf Philodendron, and Deffenbachia (both of which are kept out of eating range), Fatsia japonica, fuchsias, various ferns, bromeliads and ivy ground cover.

The nest is a wooden box 12" wide x 12" long x 14" high with a 2-1/2" entrance hole. Inside, a piece of 1/2" x 1/2" hardware cloth is placed over a 1" x 1" frame to be used by the birds as an ascent/descent ladder. There is a pull out tray with a raised landing area directly below the descent ladder. This arrangement keeps the adult birds from accidentally landing on the eggs or chicks and keeps the payload area off to one side. Pine wood shavings are used as nesting material and the shavings are changed frequently. I use no chemicals for worming or parasite dusting. Now and then, I will use Eucalyptus buds in the nest boxes as an insect preventative, but I use nothing else. I make it a point to replace nest boxes two or three times a year, as needed. Pull trays are removed and replaced about once a week. Replacement trays are either new or thoroughly cleaned ones. I usually let the trays bake in the sun for a week or so before using them in the nest boxes.

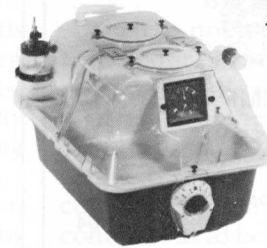
I use four perches of different diameters per cage. The perches are placed as far apart as possible. Fig Parrots tend to lean toward corpulence, so they need a lot of exercise. Perches are made of Manzanita, Brazilian Pepper and Eucalyptus wood. I also use one or two hanging toys made from the same sort of materials.

These parrots are quite playful. They hang from the toys, make war on them and chew off the bark. It must be remembered that these birds are highly intelligent, and they need added stimuli as their minds must be occupied. The toys provide the birds with something that is not stationary, from which they can hang, much like being on the swaying limb of a tree. These toys and perches are often replaced, for the birds tend to destroy them in short order.

Two 6" x 15" x 2" deep water dishes are used per cage. These dishes are positioned away from the perches and other overhangs to discourage them from being fouled. I hope, by using two dishes, that if fouling is done, it will result in but one dish being polluted, leaving a clean dish for the birds to use. These bathing/drinking dishes are cleaned at least once a day. The entire flight is washed

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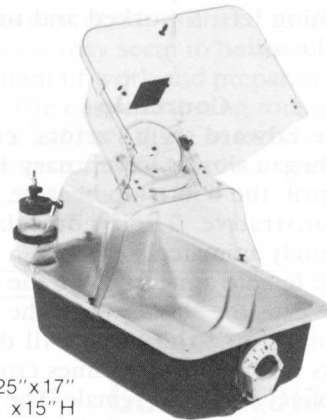
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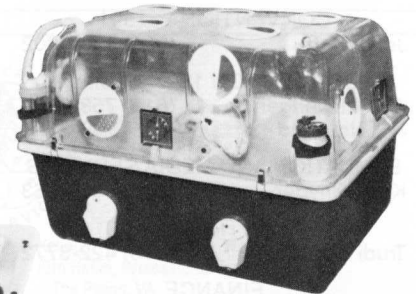
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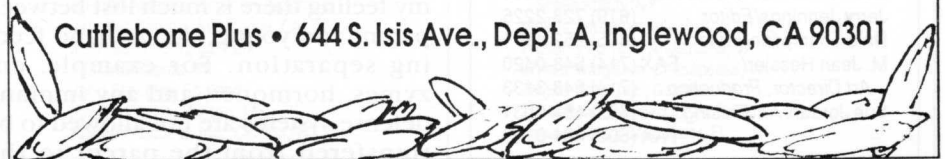
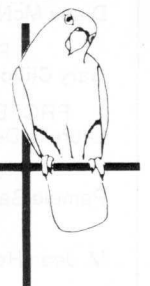
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out each morning and sometimes in the afternoon.

Since the cages are off the ground, fecal matter and uneaten food is washed through the wire bottom and onto the ground below. Uneaten food is used by wild sparrows and doves. Anything left is worked and turned into the soil.

### Courtship

The Edward's Fig Parrots' courtship began slowly in February 1988. By April, the courtship became quite demonstrative. Their courtship is extremely animated.

The female appears to be the boss, as she calls the shots. When she gives "permission," the male will dance across his perch, sometimes crossing completely over the female. The cock bird may hop up and down while perching directly beside her. There is much head bobbing and vocalizing.

The female often seems to encourage her mate, only to scold him when he follows through with his courtship dance. This behavior may go on for ten minutes or so before there is a rest period. When the rest period is over, the courtship activity is again resumed. There is much mutual preening. Up to and including the nesting period, the male will feed the female. The hen was seldom seen eating on her own during the courtship period. It was approximately two weeks after the babies had hatched before the hen came out and fed herself.

The pair under discussion went to nest in early May. Two eggs were laid, one on May 27th and the other on the 29th. The weather was very mild, interrupted by a period of light rain.

The female carried on all of the incubation of the eggs.

The male took up a position outside the entrance hole and looked smug. At night, both birds slept in the nest. Both eggs were fertile, but only one hatched, on June 19, 1988. The second egg appeared to have died about half way through the incubation period. The baby was parent reared and weaned on August 14, 1988.

I prefer to have the parents rear and wean their own chicks to independence. If the birds are hand reared, it is my feeling there is much lost between parent and young, due to hand feeding separation. For example, enzymes, hormones, and any immune defense systems are not allowed to be transferred from the parent to the

chick, unless reared from the egg by the parent bird. I consider such to be a great loss.

A second clutch was laid in late September. Both eggs hatched. Unfortunately, the babies died within four days. At this particular time, there was much carpentry work being done to the house next door. I believe the noise and high level of activity caused the parents unbearable stress, eventually resulting in the loss of the chicks.

### Diet

I have come to believe diet is the most important consideration in the successful keeping and breeding of Fig Parrots.

The birds are highly specialized in their dietary needs. Despite these specialized needs, feeding is not too much of a problem, considering what is available these days in our supermarkets.

I feed my birds twice a day, 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. The morning meal is their main meal.

I mix up fruits and vegetables using a food processor. I don't make a puree, but rather a combination of small chunks or pieces. The food provided may consist of a number of items, for I vary the mixtures as much as possible. Sometimes more one day, less the following day and, at other times, nothing of a particular item is added. I believe this helps keep the dietary interests of the birds at a high level. After all, in nature the birds do not eat the same things every day. If I am feeding an item the birds are particularly fond of, I put it at the bottom of the dish. By so doing, the bird will eat through the other food items. I believe by feeding in this manner the birds may take some foods not particularly enjoyed. When the mixture is complete, I put about one-half cup of the mixture into a four inch Pyrex bowl. A powdered vitamin supplement (Vionate) is sprinkled over the top of the food, as is powdered vitamin K. I soak one or two Zupreen monkey chow cubes in warm water for 20 minutes or so. These items are then added to the mixture. I then add two teaspoons full of Science Diet High Protein cat food that has been soaked overnight in apple juice.

Next, I pour about one half cup of Avico Lory and Softbill Nectar Mix (liquid) over the entire portion. About twice a week, I add one half of a hard boiled egg (yolk only) to this mixture.

Fresh figs probably play an important role in the diet of these birds. When fresh figs are available, I do provide them and the birds really enjoy them. I have raised youngsters when only dried or canned figs have been available. Use of these types of figs in the off season is greatly reduced and I have found the birds can and will do well without them. Experimentation with amounts given may be important. Different birds have different appetites and the idea is to get the birds to eat the *entire* contents of the feed dish. I've found feeding too much may result in the birds eating only the items particularly liked, leaving the rest in the dish. The last step in my diet preparation involves sprinkling a couple of teaspoons full of small hookbill mix over the mixture with a half dozen worms over all that.

Fig Parrots are much like lorries in their eating habits. Some days they will consume all of their food. Other days, the birds will eat such small amounts that, if I did not know better, I would have become concerned. One day they may eat all the worms, seeds or oranges. The next day none of that sort of food is eaten. While such behavior is frustrating, it appears to be normal.

Used food dishes are collected each afternoon. The dishes are soaked in a mixture of hot water, liquid soap and bleach, and then thoroughly rinsed. Cleanliness is an absolute must! Bowls of food mixture left too long with the birds may well become tainted or spoiled. This problem is particularly evident in the warmer months.

After the morning cleaning, the birds are offered half an apple or pear. Sometimes an ear of whole corn is the follow-up feed item. I suggest the breeder use imagination. Try different food items. Cuttlebone is always useful and available. Twice a week, I offer spray millet.

In making up my morning feeding mixture, I use any combination of the following: apples, oranges, lemons, limes, pears, grapes, pineapple, apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, bananas, figs, all berries, plantains (type of banana), tomato, corn, broccoli, peas, fresh carrots, jalapenos, cucumbers, tangerines, steamed white rice, green peppers, bell peppers, beets and canned fruit cocktail.

I also use dried fruits such as raisins, currents, apricots and figs. I soak the dried fruits overnight in plain tap water and offer them whole or

chopped up.

All of the canned type food goods are rinsed under running tap water. By so doing, I wash away any salts, sugars or other additives that may have been included in the packing juice.

As described, this feed preparation process may seem to be an enormous amount of work and preparation. Not so! The entire morning routine, outlined as I have done here, takes but 30 minutes and that involves preparation for 28 flights.

## Big Rewards

There is not much in written literature about these little beauties. My research indicates what has been written is somewhat negative and precautionary. The general opinion seems to suggest Fig Parrots are difficult to maintain. I have found such conclusions to be just NOT the case.

Attention to feeding, an important detail in the entire process, is mandatory when attempting to breed Fig Parrots. It will, however, produce magnificent results. ●

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