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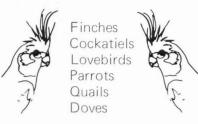
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Breeding the Aratinga Weddellii

or

Dusky Conure

by: Mel & Gay Fischer Gilded Cage Pet Center Mount Vernon, WA

About a year ago we purchased two Dusky conures along with other birds from our supplier in Seattle, with intentions of trying to sell them in our pet shop.

After having the Duskies for awhile, we purchased the last one our supplier had and put it with the other two. Within 24 hours we had to separate the new one, as the others were picking on it, and we were afraid they might try to kill it.

During the next couple of months, we observed the two birds and determined that there was a good chance of them being opposite sexes. They were also seen mating on two separate occasions. As we all know, the act of mating doesn't mean the two birds are a male and female, but it encouraged us anyway. We let a man, who is supposed to be good at pelvic testing, check the birds, and he thought they were both females. So much for encouragement.

In July, 1977, I finished our bird building at home and we had an extra flight in it, so we decided to take the two Duskies home, as we had another one to sell anyway.

The flight is $8' \times 4' \times 8'$ high. There are Alder branches for perches at each end, and a nest box about half way back on one 8' wall. It is about 6' from the floor. The box measures $9\frac{1}{2} \times 11 \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. They have slept in the box every night, since the first day they were put in the flight. I had filled the box about half full with wood shavings.

For the next several months, there was no encouragement from the birds at all. Through the winter, we didn't expect or want anything, as there is no heat in the building and the water bowls froze solid on occasion. We didn't need an egg-bound bird

In March, 1978, we attended the Bird Symposium in Seattle. During the five days of the Symposium, we decided to try to sell the two Duskies, as they didn't fit into our plans for what we wanted to try to have breed for us. (I often read about and hear people talk about how they breed their birds. For the record, our birds do the breeding, we just try to encourage them).

Baby Dusky Conure makes its camera debut July 16th.



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To our good fortune, we didn't get around to trying to sell them. On April 28th, while checking the birds in our building, I noticed one Dusky was missing. This was unusual in the middle of the day. Worried about it, I decided to check the nest box, expecting a find a sick or dead bird. As I went into the flight, it came out of the box. I decided to check the box anyway. To my delight, they had thrown all the shavings out, and on the wood bottom lay three eggs that were slightly larger than a cockatiel egg.

The next three weeks were anxious ones. On May 18th, we had a baby Dusky conure. On May 23rd, the parents had broken open a second egg and there was a fully developed baby, dead in the shell. The third egg was taken from the nest box on June 3. It was also fertile, but dead in the shell.

The baby was fed by the parents and grew rapidly. As of June 3rd, it's eyes were not open yet, but it definately had the black beak of the mother and father. It's legs and feet were pink, and it was covered with a white down.

On June 5th, the baby's feet were starting to show some of the grey color of the parents. It's body was about the size of an adult American Budgie (small) and the crop was well filled. It was somewhat steadier when trying to sit up.

By June 10th, a lot of pin feathers were starting to show and it's eyes were starting to open. It could hold it's head up without much effort.

On June 13th, the legs were dark grey like the parents and the body was covered with a g.ey down. It could sit up and hold it's balance well.

When observed on June 18th, the chick's eyes were fully open, and it had wing and tail feathers about ¼ inch long. For the first time, the baby sat up and hissed at me when I opened the nest box. The crop was once again well filled. The parents were very quiet and didn't leave the front perch while I checked the baby in the nest box.

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Through the next few weeks, the baby developed quickly and on July 16th, I handled the baby for the first time. I took the baby from the box so that my father could take pictures of it. It was identical to the parents except a little smaller. The baby's eyes were totally dark, while the parents have the grey iris.

On July 22nd, the baby came out of the nest box for the first time and stayed out all night. The parents would begin to scream any time they thought I was going to try to go near it.

On July 23rd, and every night after that, the baby went back into the nest box to sleep. It was out of the box every morning when I turned the big lights on.

The adult birds were fed a mixture of seed called 'Hookbill Diet' that we get from Silversong Northwest in Seattle. They were also given corn on the cob every day. In addition, we gave them apple, sunflower seed and a few peanuts. They got Avitron vitamins in their drinking water every day.

The lighting in the building consists of some natural daylight in conjunction with Vita-Lite 12 hours a day, and two 25 watt night lights at night.



Dusky Conure approximately 8 weeks old.

Since we first discovered the eggs, we have checked every book we could find for information on the Dusky conure, and can find nothing at all on their breeding. Joseph Forshaw states he could find no information, and there is nothing in Rosemary Low's 'Parrots of South America'.

It has been suggested to us that this might be a first breeding of the Aratinga

There is a sad ending to our experience with the baby Dusky. During the middle of October, we started losing birds in our building. Between Oct. 18, and Oct. 24th, we lost two Blue Front Amazons, three Orange Wing Amazona, a Senegal Parrot, one parent Dusky Conure, and on October 23rd, our 'Baby Dusky' died. Some of the birds were sent to the state for Autopsy and the results showed Pacheco's Disease was the cause of the deaths. We have no idea how the disease entered the building, as we had not brought in any new birds for a long while.

We are now trying to locate more Dusky Conures, as they are wonderful little birds and we would like to continue trying to raise them.

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