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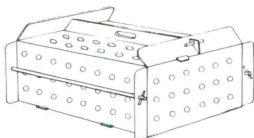
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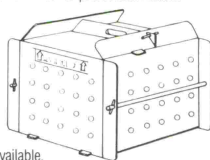


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Photos by Sandra Lee Underhill

*Breeding cage used.*



*Adult parrotlet pair. Male, top; female, below. Note light blue coloring behind female's eye.*

*Father, upper left; mother, lower left. Two of the four offspring produced, each plucked heavily by their parents. Note the cobalt coloring on the baby males as compared to their father.*



# PACIFIC PARROTLETS

## Breeding Experiences

by Sandra Lee Underhill  
San Diego, California

The best known of the parrotlet family, the Pacific parrotlet, *Forpus coelestis coelestis*, also called the celestial parrotlet, is from arid, tropical zones in Ecuador and Peru. This small, very quiet bird is about 4½" to 5" long, lives in the wild in flocks, eating grass seeds and berries.

Both sexes are green. Males are distinguished by blue behind their eyes, cobalt blue on their rump, wing and under-wing coverts. Females may or may not have blue behind their eyes; and may or may not have a blueish rump. It's easy to mistake females with light blue markings as immature males.

Parrotlets cannot be housed with other birds as they are superb trouble-makers. Even quail placed on aviary floor bottoms are pestered unmercifully and often have their legs amputated. Aviaries or cages are suitable housing.

We obtained freshly imported parrotlets and immediately found them to be hostile toward each other over their food dishes and exceptionally picky eaters. A number of large food dishes alleviated the first problem and a diet of millet, oat groats, rape, pumpkin seed, safflower, sunflower, fruit and greens satisfied them all.

After a precautionary quarantine period, we considered setting them up for breeding. We were able to find printed information which stated that in their natural habitat parrotlets nest in everything from hollow branches to hollow pipes with bare nest floors. We also found many references detailing the author's dismay at the adults' aggressive behavior toward each other and towards their fledglings.

We set up two separate breeding environments. We added Bird Health Grit, cuttlebone and mineral blocks to their diet.

The first environment was a 6 ft. x 3 ft. x 6 ft. aviary with four pair set up with both cockatiel- and parakeet-sized nestboxes offered. After one year, a total of eight young were produced from several clutches out of the cockatiel-sized nestboxes only. Youngsters fledged and joined the colony without event.

The second breeding environment was preferable for productivity, yet held certain disadvantages.

We placed one pair each in 18" x 18" x 18" cages with one parakeet nestbox, with an insert, inside each cage. Cages were side by side to achieve a "colony" effect. Seventy-five percent of these pairs had four to six eggs within two months, with four eggs being the most common clutch size. Each egg was laid about two days apart. Incubation was 17 days and seemed to be performed by both male and female in 100% of the clutches. Both parents moved and sat against a nest wall once their eggs hatched.

Both parents were observed leaving the nest, either together or singularly, for food. Only the female was observed feeding young.

The babies were covered with quill feathers by ten days and were fledging in a mere 20 days where they were often attacked by their parents immediately after leaving the nestboxes. Some were merely plucked and brutalized, others were murdered.

Any babies out of the nestbox were immediately pulled and placed in another cage.

Half of the pairs second-clutched a week after their first clutch fledged.

Nestboxes were left in place year round, yet no new clutches were started again for ten months.

We learned that newly placed pairs in cages would either appear to immediately "bond up," remain on opposite cage sides indefinitely, or sometimes the male would kill a female he didn't care for. To avoid this, we'd first observe a group in a holding cage and pull pairs out for cage breeding as we were able to note couples forming.

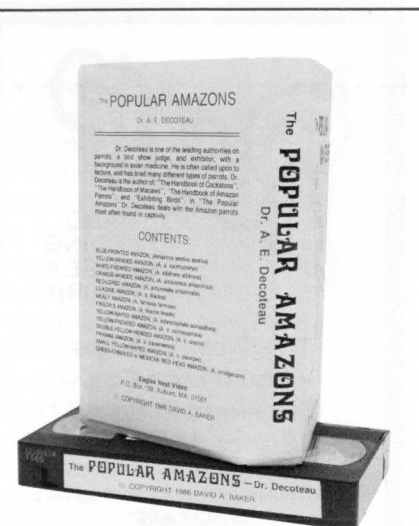
Each and every male that we've raised has had beautifully vibrant cobalt shades, such that the imported male's blue coloration paled by comparison.

This is contrary to information we've read. Another interesting note is that males hatched were outnumbered by females hatched by 3 to 1.

Parrotlets are dutiful parents; every egg hatches and each baby is fed well. We have hand-fed a few from two weeks and found them easily trainable and one said "hello" at three months. Babies placed in a colony quickly forget everything learned.

Juveniles can breed successfully at three months of age. Adults live for ten years and are capable of a forceful nip for their size.

It is interesting to note that during the first year of captivity, ten percent of the imported females rapidly developed abdominal fatty tumors, cause unknown.



## VIDEO The POPULAR AMAZONS

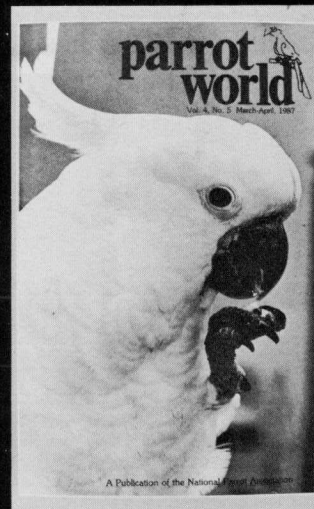
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