



Nine week old fig parrot in the middle between its parents.

# Rearing an Edward's Fig Parrot

by Elsa Aglow  
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

When I purchased my pair of Edward's fig parrots from Aves International in February 1987, I had absolutely no knowledge of the pitfalls that had already been encountered in both the keeping and rearing of their young. Perhaps, had I known, I would have been dissuaded. I had seen a picture of a male Edward's fig parrot on a Nekton calendar and was fascinated by his beauty and uniqueness. When I found the birds available in this country, I did not hesitate to purchase a pair. Since I could find little if any information about fig parrots, I contacted the San Diego Zoo where Wayne Schulenburg was kind enough to discuss their diet with me. I also learned that there was a tendency for them to hemorrhage and that I would have to supplement them with vitamin K to avoid this possibility.

They arrived healthy and in beautiful condition. I was delighted with them, but also apprehensive about my ability to keep them alive and thriving. I had acquired a good supply of dried Calamyrna figs and a large bottle of Nekton Q and decided to offer as wide a variety of fruits as I could find available. No expense was spared in this endeavor. The diet I fed and still feed them consists of soaked figs, soaked light and dark raisins, chopped kiwis, grapes, apples, vari-

Continued on page 30

## AFA is Conservation too!

**Name:** Bahama Amazon, *Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*

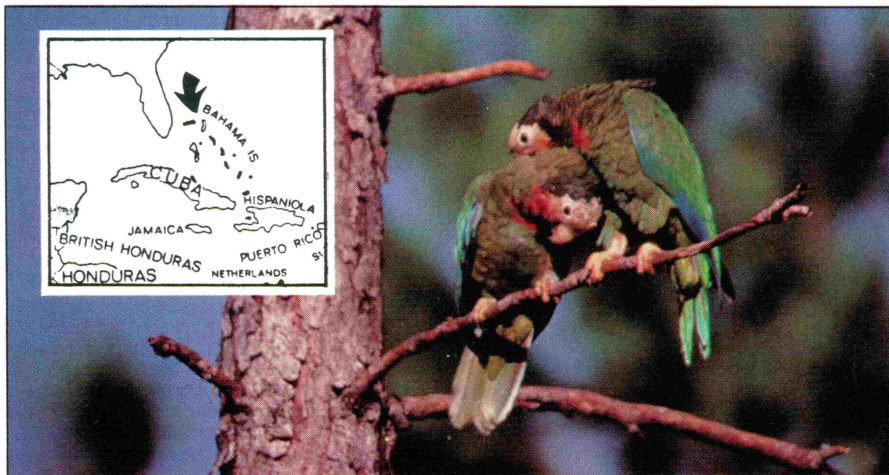
**Range:** Island of Abaco and Great Inagua, Bahamas

**Status in the Wild:** Endangered, possibly only 900 birds remain in the wild

**Conservation Action:** In 1984, 1986 and 1988 AFA has provided small grants (totalling nearly \$10,000) to Rosemarie Gnam for a comprehensive field/conservation study. See *Watchbird* August/September '86, p. 58.

### Support the AFA Conservation Fund!

Send your tax deductible contributions to: **AFA Conservation Fund**, American Federation of Aviculture, P.O. Box 1568, Redondo Beach, California 90278 U.S.A.



# —THE A TEAM



TEAM UP  
AVITRON® AND  
AVIMIN® IN  
YOUR BIRD'S  
DRINKING  
WATER AND  
HELP ASSURE  
COMPLETE,  
VITAMIN/  
MINERAL  
INTAKE.



## **A**vitron Delivers Eight Essential Vitamins Plus Other Vital Nutrients.

These can be critical. Because birds use vitamins rapidly. But can't always rely on seed to supply their needs.

Important B Complex vitamins, for example, are found in seed hulls. Unfortunately, the hulls usually end up on the bottom of the cage. . . along with the B Complex vitamins. A lack of B vitamins may result in nervous and digestive disorders, curly toe paralysis and weakness.


Some seed mixes, on the other hand, are just vitamin poor. They lack quality and proper seed variety. And even the very best can lose their potency during storage. AVITRON helps make up for this. And aids in preventing problems such as impaired vision, poor muscle development, unhealthy skin, soft eggshells, rickets and excessive bleeding due to vitamin shortages.

## **A**vimin Supplies Six Essential Minerals In Water Soluble Form.

That makes AVIMIN more effective and convenient than most other mineral supplements such as cuttlebone, blocks and powders. Because the bird gets a balanced variety of minerals every time it drinks.

AVIMIN helps promote strong bones, sturdy eggshells, healthy skin, balanced body fluid and muscle tone. And aids in reducing the possibility of anemia, rickets, goiters and slipped tendons due to muscle deficiency.

So why let your birds nutrition be in doubt. Team up AVITRON and AVIMIN in its drinking water. And be assured that your bird is getting the VITAMINS AND MINERALS it needs for good health and vitality.

 **Lambert Kay™**  
Division of Carter-Wallace, Inc.  
Cranbury, New Jersey 08512  
© Carter-Wallace, Inc., 1985

ous green, leafy vegetables, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, frozen and thawed corn, peas, string beans, cooked lentils, split peas and soybeans, pear, raspberries (fresh if possible or frozen), Zupreem soaked in water from the figs, and pulverized Ziegler Frugivore pellets sprinkled over the fruit.

Also sprinkled over the fruit is a vitamin-mineral mix consisting of three parts Nekton Q, two parts calcium carbonate, one part Nekton BSA and a little kelp. A general parrot mix is offered but rarely eaten. They do like peanuts, hazel nuts, pecans, hot peppers and spray millet. This whole operation is rather labor intensive, but the birds have fared quite well with it.

My husband fashioned an extremely elegant nest box for them from Philippine mahogany. It looks like a log and spans the width of their cage, extending just beyond the side of the cage where there is a peep hole in a hinged door. They took to the box immediately, though they used it only for sleeping. I use natural branches, mostly mulberry, in their cage. They enjoy stripping and chewing the bark, but the branches must be changed weekly because they become sticky from figs and fruit.

In April of 1988 I noticed a lot of mutual preening. I added extra wood chips to their nest box but they cleaned them out immediately. On April 25 the hen, Edwina, laid her first egg followed by another three days later. She sat very tightly on the eggs and I rarely saw her. Figaro, the male, guarded the box but never became threatening. On May 22 one egg hatched. I had no reason to suspect that this chick would live, though hope does spring eternal. The second egg did not hatch. Edwina kept the chick fed, however the chick did not seem to thrive. I had no idea how rapidly fig parrot chicks should grow, so I was encouraged as the days went by and the chick continued to live.

I continued with the same diet but added mealworms. These were violently refused. Dishes were overturned and the cage trashed until I finally got the message that the mealworms were definitely unwanted and unwelcome. This behavior stopped as soon as the mealworms stopped. At 13 days the chick started to weaken and on the 14th day it died. Necropsy revealed a fatty liver, an indication of some nutritional deficiency.

Photos courtesy of Elsa Aglow



Young fig parrot four weeks old.



Young fig parrot at six weeks and a day.

Two more eggs were laid on June 29 and July 2 and, although fertile, they failed to hatch. It was at this point I took a serious look at the situation. My feeling was that something was lacking in the diet that I was providing and, in fact, in the diets that everyone who has fig parrots was providing, varied though the diets were. It occurred to me that fig parrots just might have something in common with the pigmy parrot (*Micropsitta*) of New Guinea, since their habitats coincide. Pigmy parrots have failed to live in captivity at all. It has been noted that the feet of these birds seem to be adapted for walking on the trunks of trees since their feet are large with curling toenails. Curling toenails are certainly a characteristic of my fig parrots; we must keep their nails well trimmed or the birds get caught on the cage wire. In as much as it is known that pigmy parrots eat lichens growing on tree trunks, I wondered if fig parrots also partake of them in the wild. I knew almost nothing about lichens and it took a few trips to different libraries to find some useful information. Lichens are a rather arcane form of plant life that have not generated a tremendous amount of interest. I did learn that they have an amazing ability to absorb and concentrate minerals from the substrate on which they are growing.<sup>1</sup>

I could find no information on the lichens of New Guinea, but studies from several other countries reported finding large amounts of zinc in them. Zinc in the diet is an important growth factor, particularly for developing young, so I decided to incorporate more zinc into the fig parrots' daily food.

After consulting with Dr. David Klurfeld, a nutritionist on the staff where I work, it was decided that 1/4 of a 10 mg zinc gluconate tablet should be ground up and sprinkled over the figs (anything will be consumed if it can be attached to a fig). This was done for three days in a row and on the fourth day stopped. Two weeks thereafter, Edwina went back to nest and laid two more eggs. I was really upset by this as I felt that six eggs in less than four months was too much, but all went well. Once again she sat very diligently, but along about day 22 I found her off the eggs more often than she was on. I was

1. *The Biology of Lichens*, Hale, Mason E. (Edward Arnold Ltd., London)

sure at that point that nothing would hatch out. I candled the eggs and they were both fertile, but I still wasn't sure whether the embryos were alive. Given how often I found her off the eggs by day 25 I was shocked to peep in and see a newly hatched chick. This was Sept. 21. The following morning I peeped in and the second egg had hatched. This chick appeared smaller and weaker than the first one, and within 24 hours I found it dead. I put it in ice and rushed it into work where we carefully necropsied it. It had not completely absorbed its yolk sac though we did find food (fig) in its crop, so it was apparent that Edwina had fed it. We carefully removed the bursa and processed it separately, but no definite pathology was noted in it, or any other organ. At this point I expected the other chick to die at any time. I continued feeding the same diet just upping the amounts of food a little and eventually I was offering nine figs a day.

I began giving the zinc on a daily basis. By day five the chick was stronger and larger than the first chick had been when it died at 14 days. I know this to be more than imagination. Since I had the first chick in a jar in formalin at work, it was easy to compare them. The chick continued to thrive. At day nine the eyes began to open and growth was steady. A dark gray down covered the back by three weeks and the wings had feathered in by four weeks with the facial feathers beginning to show. At three weeks the chick weighed 2-1/2 oz. By the end of the seventh week the chick was almost totally feathered, the baby feathers appearing more of an olive green than the bright green of the adults. I intend to continue supplementing the zinc, though I will not proceed on a daily basis until there are more chicks.

The amount of zinc given was roughly 12 parts per million and while no adverse effects have been noted I plan to reduce this slightly in the future. I am not sure of the long term ramifications and I would rather play it safe. I cannot be sure that the zinc supplementation was the reason for my success, but since it was the only dietary change made, I must assume that is what made the difference. In any case, the chick fledged at nine weeks of age and was very active and healthy. He also has proved to be an accomplished escape artist in a very short time. At this writing the chick is still living with the parents. ●

## Santa Barbara Bird Farm



# NOW OFFERING

Outstanding  
Nutrition and  
Acceptance

The Preferred Psittacine Diet of  
Many Zoos, Institutions and Breeders

Offered in Corn, Cheese and Apple Flavors  
Available in Two Sizes



## SCENIC BIRD FOOD

by

## Marion Zoological

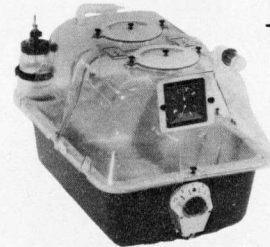
In California and Hawaii, for information call:  
(805) 969-1895

or write:

P.O. Box 5123, Santa Barbara, CA 93150  
DEALER / DISTRIBUTION INQUIRIES INVITED

**THERMOCARE, INC.**  
offers Water Heated Warmers  
for Portable Intensive Care

for Aviary, Cattery or Kennel

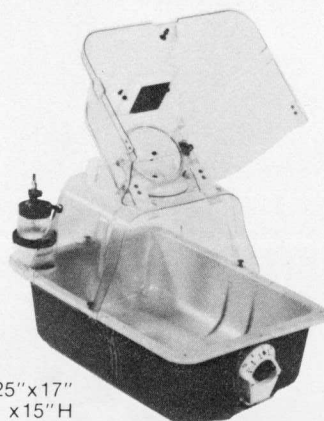


**TEN/CARE UNITS**

For treatment of  
Hypothermia in New-  
borns, Shock, Con-  
valescing and Post-  
operative Patients.

With clear plastic DOME cover, SAFE HEAT-is provided, and the means to add HUMIDITY and OXYGEN to the internal atmosphere — an ideal environment for NEW-BORNS, or for treatment of respiratory stress.

New MEDICATION NEBULIZER included  
with all TEN/CARE units

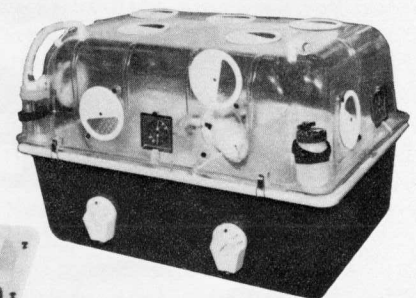
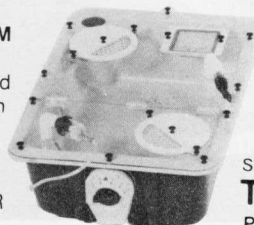


25" x 17"  
x 15" H

Economical 90W Heater

**CONTROLLED UNIFORM  
HEAT (75° - 100°F)**  
Conducted thru Water and  
Circulated by Convection

Also Available:  
New  
**BROODER INCUBATOR**  
for young chicks



33" x 27" x 25" H or 42" x 27" x 25" H

Send for free Brochure  
**Thermocare**

P.O. Drawer YY  
Incline Village, NV 89450 (702) 831-1201

**SAFE HEAT  
SAVES LIVES**