

Breeding the Desmarest's Fig Parrot

(*Psittaculirostris desmarestii*)

by Bill Lasarzig
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This whole fig parrot project started in 1985 and '86 when a friend of mine told me he had acquired from quarantine some beautiful little birds called Desmarest's Fig Parrots. After seeing his pair, I immediately made arrangements to acquire a sexed pair. Upon receiving the pair, I had cultures done and treated them for *E. coli*. At the same time they were going through my 45-day quarantine of all newly acquired birds. I purchased two more pairs in 1986.

It is my understanding that there are basically three subspecies of the Desmarest's found in captivity: *P.d. desmarestii*, *P.d. intermedia*, and *P.d. occidentalis*. I feel it is almost impossible to differentiate between *P.d. intermedia* and *P.d. occidentalis*. We can, however, visually identify the difference between *P.d. desmarestii* and the other two subspecies. This difference shows up as a blue colored band approximately 1/8 to 1/4 inch wide across the back of the neck. Technically, this band runs across the mid-neck area between the nape and the hind neck and from shoulder to shoulder.

Not knowing too much about these birds and their habits, I contacted Dale Thompson and we decided that a relatively isolated spot, where the pair would be undisturbed, would be best. I constructed a 4 ft. by 4 ft. by 6 ft. flight of 1/2" x 3" 12 gauge galvanized wire. The flight is three feet off the ground and is supported by 2" PVC pipe legs at the corners. One half of this flight is sheltered with plywood on top, sides and back. Perches are at each end and are of 3/4" eucalyptus. A multi-angle branch is placed in the shelter area; this branch has many various sized perches at various angles and goes from floor to ceiling.

An accessible nest box area was added to the outside of the flight under a sheltered roof overhang. It is approximately 24" tall, 18" wide and 12" deep. This area is separated 12" from its top. This separation makes

two areas in the one enclosure. The top one is for the nest box and the bottom for the food and nectar dishes.

The flight is sheltered on all sides with bamboo and banana plants.

The nest box is a sloping shoe box design and is made of 3/8" plywood. It is basically a 5" x 5" tube in a sloping shoe box configuration with a 2-1/2" entrance hole. There is a flat plywood perch below the entrance hole. Along the slope to the bottom nesting area, 1/4" square strips of wood are glued to the slope to provide a ladder to the bottom. One inch of shavings is added for nesting material. An inspection door is on the side for interior access.

The daily diet of adults consists of a seed mix consisting of: 6 parts Vita-bird hookbill, 4 parts safflower, 4 parts sunflower, 4 parts chicken scratch, 1 part oat groats and 1 part wheat groats. This mix is fed 2/3 cup per day per pair. In addition, I serve 1/2 banana, 1/8 slice papaya (skinned and seeded), 1/4 apple, 3 diced figs, either dry or fresh. A vegetable mix is also fed at the rate of 1/4 cup per day. The vegetable mix consists of shredded carrot, chopped broccoli, red cabbage, Chinese cabbage and cut corn. Two ounces per day of Avico Lory Life nectar is also served. Cuttlebone and mineral block is available. All of the above foods are served in the early morning and picked up late afternoon.

Vitamin K is given three times a week and is lightly sprinkled on the fruit/vegetable mix. One time a week zinc is given in the same manner. The vitamin K and zinc are purchased from the health food store. I use Kal K-100 tabs for the K and Plus Brand chelated zinc tabs for the zinc source. I grind the tabs in a mortar and pestle, making a fine powder. The adult birds are supplied a large sandstone with which they keep their upper mandibles trimmed.

The three pairs I have are housed adjacent to each other, but sheltered

from each other by bamboo and banana plants. The pairs can see each other through the foliage and are about two feet apart.

In this climate of Santa Barbara, California, the fig parrots lay at all times of the year. The clutch is usually two eggs. My observation indicates only the female incubates the eggs, but the male does stay in the box at night. The incubation period has been 19 to 22 days. Their courtship behavior consists of head bobbing by the male, running and jumping along the perch and high pitched squeeking sounds.

All three pairs of my birds have hatched chicks, but I've had problems with the parents killing the chicks. One was killed at five weeks, another at ten days. Because of this, I have pulled the chicks at day one and day ten. When the baby is pulled, it is put in a brooder at 96 degrees with ample humidity. It is fed every two hours for the first four days, then every three hours with the exception of the period from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. when it is not fed. As the chick develops, the temperature and feedings are reduced. My babies were weaned at 70 and 85 days.

My two young Desmarest's are totally hand tame and very affectionate. They love to be handled by all members of my family. At this time I do not know if they can learn to talk.

Day 1 - 14 Hand Feeding Diet:

3/4 cup Scenic Red Apple Diet
(Marion Zoological)
1/2 cup Zupreem Monkey Chow
1/4 cup Trout Chow
1/8 tablespoon General Protein Powder

Liquify:

1/3 banana
1/4 papaya (skinned and seeded)
1 apple
1/8 carrot
1/8 teaspoon De-Ca-Fos calcium supplement
1/3 cup sugar
Add water as needed to liquify

Blend the above separately, then together. Add enough water to make soupy consistency.

Soak:

3 cups dried Mission figs, then liquify adding water. Sift all above through strainer. Combine all of the above.

This is the nectar part of the diet and 1/2 of the final diet.

*The breeding cage of the Desmarest's Fig Parrots (*Psittaculirostris desmarestii intermedia*) is completely surrounded by bamboo and banana plants. This greatly adds to a feeling of security for these birds.*



The *final* hand feeding diet consists of equal amounts of nectar and Santa Barbara Bird Farm handfeeding diet* plus water as needed to thin. Sift the S.B. Bird Farm diet before using.

Diet is fed at 106 - 110 degrees F. We use pipettes for the first few weeks.

At two weeks we reduce the protein content of the nectar mix by eliminating the Zupreem, trout chow, General and sugar from the nectar mix. Then feed as per above instructions.

Editor's Note: Bill Lasarzig has successfully bred both the P.d. desmarestii and P.d. intermedia. He has submitted a U.S. first breeding nomination for both subspecies. The hatch date for P.d. desmarestii is June 19, 1989 and for P.d. intermedia is April 15, 1989.

After Bill Lasarzig's successful breeding, I discovered Jim O'Neal, San Francisco, has successfully raised two clutches from his single pair of P.d. desmarestii. Jim's birds are indoor cage bred.

Any person knowing of a successful breeding of these birds prior to the above hatch dates should contact Dale R. Thompson, chairman of the Auy Award Committee through the home office of AFA, Phoenix, Arizona. ●

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This suspended cage and style of nestbox was used in successfully rearing Desmarest's Fig Parrots. Author recommends using wood slats to make the inside nest box ladder rather than wire. The feeding area and nestbox are accessible from the outside. All pairs were kept in secluded conditions.



Photos by Bill Lasarzig