

# Breeding the White-eyed Conure

(*Aratinga leucophthalmus callogenys*)

by Robbie Harris,  
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Many years ago, (almost too far to remember, about 15 years or so) I purchased a beautiful, slightly unusually colored White-eyed Conure. When I first examined this bird I knew it was far different from the "normal" species of White-eyed Conures I was so used to seeing. The ones that are imported here to the U.S. are usually all green with just bits of scattered red feathers on their head and neck. Red is found on the carpal edge of the wings, with yellow on the greater under-wing coverts (which can only be seen if the wing is extended). The beak is a horn color, feet greyish and eye ring white. The length of this bird is about 14 inches. What made this particular conure so different was the facial cheek area was solid red, as well as the overall bird seemed to be slightly larger than other White-eyed Conures. Going by the pelvic bones and personal appraisal, I guessed that this pretty bird was a hen. But, I thought it still best to have her surgically sexed to have my suspicions confirmed. As it turned out, the bird was a hen. I soon purchased another White-eyed Conure, a male, as a mate for my pretty hen. Upon putting the two together it became even more obvious that they were two very different birds. She was a little larger in comparison in body and head. Her color was also

very different as her green was a bit darker, along with her red cheek markings which made her even more different. I decided this was not a proper match, so I started to do research for information on this species. Back then, not much literature could be found on these birds. I did discover that she was a White-eyed Conure, but of a different sub-species than is normally imported. I found that she was an *Aratinga leucophthalmus callogenys*. This information at the time was found in *Parrots of the World* by Joseph Forshaw. In later years, a photo and more information was published on this sub-species in Thomas Arndt's book *Encyclopedia of Conures – The Aratingas*.

It took me some years until I found her the proper mate of the correct sub-species. In the meantime, she remained set up in a breeding situation with the original White-eyed Conure male that I first got for her. My search would not end until I would find another *Aratinga leucophthalmus callogenys* male. But for years the pair remained together and never produced anything. They just kept one another company. They seemed to get along, so I'm not really sure why they never went to nest.

Sometime later, about five or so years, I located another *Aratinga leucophthalmus callogenys*. It appeared



Photos by Robbie Harris

This female White-eyed Conure was in captivity over 15 years before a mate was found.



This pair of rare subspecies of the White-eyed Conure, *Aratinga leucophthalmus callogenys*, show red cheek patches compared to complete green heads of their near relatives.



A young White-eyed Conure does not yet show the red cheek coloration of the adults.

to me to be a male, so I purchased it with very high hopes. I immediately had the White-eyed Conure surgically sexed and found indeed he was a male. The male was in good health and after about a month the two were placed together for breeding. During the male's routine quarantine on my property, I separated the hen from her long time temporary partner to make the introduction easier with the new male. This way, after the month of being alone she would welcome a new mate, and it worked; she did.

The pair was set up in a wire cage measuring about three feet wide, and two feet deep and tall. They were

given a deep, wooden cockatiel nest box about 15" tall, which contained a layer of pine shavings inside. This box was attached to the outside of their cage. A hole in the wire of the cage had been cut approximately four inches square so the pair could easily enter their nest box and chew on their entrance hole. The pair immediately used their nest box to hide in as well as to sleep in each night. These two birds were always very quiet and rarely seen. At the slightest sound from people, the two would dash inside their box and would not come out until all was clear. They are not terribly destructive when it comes to chewing on their nest box or their perches. They just barely chew on their nest box. (The wooden nest box they are presently using they have already had for three years, and it still looks pretty good). All their box needs is an occasional cleaning. They really seemed to like each other or were at least very content with each other's company. By watching and observing the pair's behavior, I felt there just may be some hope for future breeding of this pair.

The diet they were offered is the same as for my other conures. It can be found in detail in my book, *Breeding Conures*, T.F.H. publications. Various dry seeds are always available to them in their feed bowl, which is actually a large, flat, aluminum cake pan. I used to use the metal rabbit feeders that hung on the side of the cage, but through the years I found that too much uneaten seed got pushed out by the birds and was wasted when tossed out to the bottom of their cage. With flat feeder trays, they can see most of all the types of seeds, eat what they want and very little is wasted. By feeding in this fashion very little good seed is wasted in the bottom of their cage. Conclusion, the trays work best for me and my birds. The basic dry seed diet I offer to my conures is medium grey stripe sunflower seed, safflower seed and a parakeet mix containing 42 percent canary seed. Each day a bowl of sprouted seeds along with fruits and vegetables were offered to them. This soft food is always a favorite, as they seem to be eagerly waiting my arrival with this treat. Some of the varieties of soft foods offered are apples, oranges, peas and corn (fresh or frozen depending on the time of the year), grated carrots and beets, broccoli, various greens and, when in

season, peaches, nectarines, apricots, plums and papaya. The apple and corn appear to be the favorite foods. The soft foods are cut up into "foot size" pieces. All the cut up varieties of soft foods are put in a bowl with the sprouts, dusted with powdered vitamins and calcium and all mixed together well and served to the birds on flat dishes. This is the easiest way for me to feed all my birds. One scoop of this menu of chopped, soft foods is easy to serve and well liked by my birds. They can grab what they want and climb to their perch and munch away with food "in hand".

As the years went on, I started to wonder if they were a true pair. They really seemed to like one another, but no attempt to breed was taking place. I decided to have the pair surgically sexed again just to be sure. I have heard of mistakes happening, and it is very rare for this to happen, but the chance was still there. The re-examination did again prove that they were a true pair, male and female appearing mature and in excellent health. So more patience and time and thought was needed on my part.

Once the pair of White-eyed Conures were set up in their new cage, they were rarely seen. They would dive into their nest box at the sight or sound of anyone approaching. Their new cage was 7 1/2 feet off the ground (this measurement is from top of cage) so I did not always do a daily nest box check. A ladder was needed to peek inside, and I was actually getting to the point where I did not expect too much out of them anyway. As the winter months approached, a random nest box check seemed to be more than sufficient to me (about twice a week).

On January 6, 1991, I decided to do that random nest box check. I climbed up on the ladder, gently opened the side peep hole to their nest box and was surprised to find them sitting on two eggs. Within two days a third egg was laid. After about a week I candled the eggs with my probe-lite (a hand held battery operated egg candler). As I gently touched each egg in the nest box with the brightly lighted tip of the candler I found all three eggs were fertile.

On January 30th, one chick hatched out, under its parents. A couple of days later, February 1st, a second chick hatched. The parents fed their offspring very well, as all

appeared to be going great and the pair proved to be excellent parents. The third egg never did hatch. The two chicks seemed to be always well fed and appeared very healthy. Before the chicks were a month of age I removed them from the nest box for hand rearing. I am sure these parents would have raised the two just fine, but I prefer to finish the rearing myself. I hand feed all the chicks that are hatched out by my birds, from the tiny parrotlets on up to the large macaws, so these White-eyed Conures were not treated any differently.

The two chicks were placed in a plastic brooder tank, with one-half the brooder sitting on a heating pad set on "low". The inside of the brooder was lined with paper toweling having a layer of soft, screened pine shavings to keep the chicks clean and dry. This special pine bedding has no sharp splinters so if any chick should chew on some of the shavings and swallow them, the foreign material can usually be digested right through their system with no harm to the chick. The chicks were fed three to four times a day on my homemade hand feeding formula. The hand rearing was virtually done by the book (my book, *Breeding Conures*, T.F.H. publications). The hand feeding formula as well as any details of care are contained in this book. The chicks grew quickly and were completely weaned by the time they were ten weeks of age. No red cheek feathers appeared on the just feathered, weaned babies. They were all green except for the red feather edging on their wings. I have read that the immature birds have almost no red feathering. This is typical of many green conures, the Cherry-headed Conure, Red-throated Conure and even the nominate White-eyed Conure as these chicks too are almost all green until they get a bit older. As of this date, the pair has not yet returned to nest. They only had this single clutch.

I'd like to end this with just a little personal note. There are two ways that I get the very most enjoyment and fulfillment out of raising birds. The first is the breeding of my birds and raising their beautiful chicks. The second is being able to help other people with their birds and hearing of their score of successes by their return letters and phone calls. These are indeed the true bird breeding awards to me! ●

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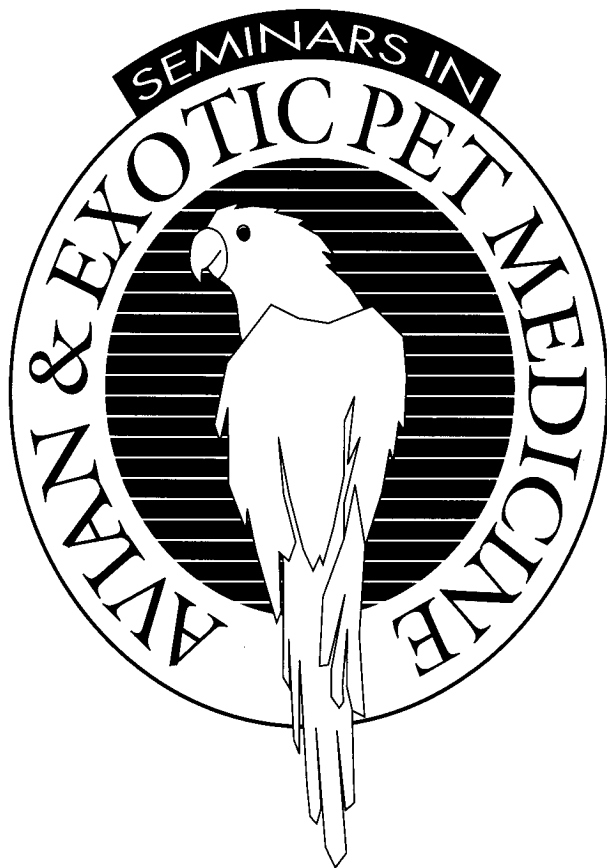
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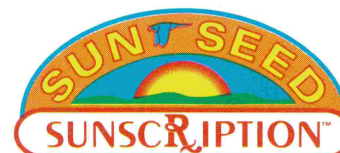
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