

Update: Arizona Seed Crackers Society Halfmoon Conure Breeding Consortium

by Gary Clifton, Mesa, Arizona

AFA has awarded a grant of \$2000.00 to the ASCS Halfmoon Breeding Consortium to obtain additional, unrelated breeding stock and to help cover costs for using the SPARKS computer program. Thus far, one bird has been purchased at a cost of \$65.00 and the SPARKS user fee of \$200.00 per year will be paid to ISIS (International Species Identification System) in May when it becomes due. Prior to obtaining the AFA grant, the Consortium has raised funds and spent approximately \$3000.00 on birds and the initial ISIS fee of \$250.00.

Presently the Consortium owns five pairs of *A.c. clarae* and has four singles paired with privately-owned mates. Additionally, there are three pairs privately held but registered in the studbook. These birds are all paired to achieve maximum genetic diversity, but one privately held pair is almost over-represented in the population and some of the rest of the population consists of siblings. The AFA grant will allow purchase of additional, unrelated stock. In addition to the *A.c. clarae* population, the consortium also owns two surplus males of the *A.c. eburnirostrum* sub-species.



Aratinga canicularis eburnirostrum

Identification of Sub-species

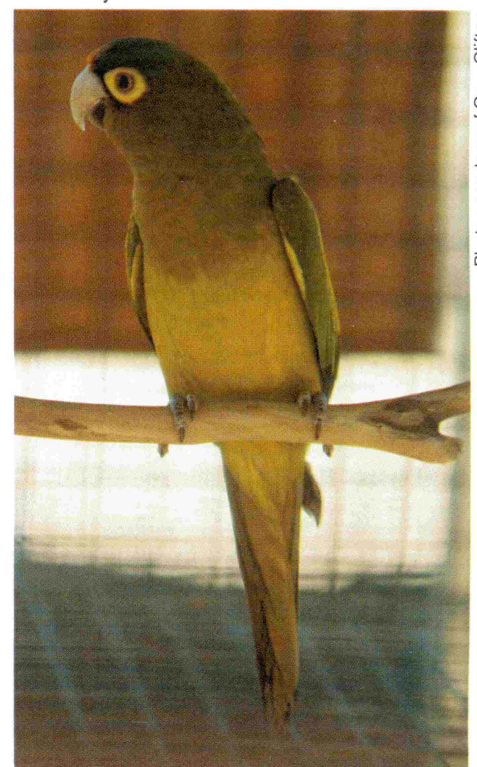
1. *Aratinga canicularis canicularis* —The nominate species has a largeish orange area on the forehead and strongly resembles a Peach-fronted Conure except for beak coloration. *A.c. canicularis* has horn colored mandibles, both upper and lower.

2. *Aratinga canicularis eburnirostrum* —Similar in appearance to *A.c. canicularis* overall, the most obvious difference is beak coloration. The lower mandible has a large dark spot on each side, at first glance this subspecies appears to have a horn colored upper and blackish lower mandible. Closer examination reveals variable horn colored areas on the lower mandible, typically a thin “stripe” right down the center. The orange on the forehead extends to and comes in contact with the bare eye ring.

3. *Aratinga canicularis clarae* — Similar to *A.c. eburnirostrum* but with a more restricted orange area on the forehead. Beak coloration is a horn colored upper mandible while the lower mandible is horn colored with a large black spot on each side as in *A.c. eburnirostrum*. Forshaw describes the markings on the lower mandible as being more blackish in *A.c. clarae* and more brownish-black in *A.c. eburnirostrum*, but specimens seen by ASCS haven't shown any discernible difference between the sub-species in terms of beak coloration. The orange on the forehead is variable but definitely more restricted than in *A.c. canicularis* or *A.c. eburnirostrum*. At one extreme the orange on the forehead may be restricted to two or three feathers, at the other extreme the orange will extend almost, but not quite, into contact with the eye ring. In general terms, the orange area on the foreheads of *A.c. canicularis* and *A.c. eburnirostrum* are much like the forehead markings of the Peach-fronted Conure, whereas the orange marking of *A.c. clarae* does not come into contact with the eye ring and usually is noticeably smaller overall.

Appearance is quite similar in all three sub-species, a close look for distinguishing features is required to distinguish among them. Even with the

close similarity in appearance, the ASCS Halfmoon Consortium will not knowingly hybridize between the subspecies since we haven't done field studies and do not know if there are behavioral differences in wild populations. *A.c. clarae* in the wild is confined to western Mexico, in an area Forshaw describes as “from Sinaloa south to Colima and inland to western Durango and central Michoacán.” Since Mexico halted exploration in 1980, this species hasn't been legal in international trade for over a decade. Overwhelmingly common in the United States in the late 1970s, today they could be described as uncommon, but available. Generally speaking, breeders have devoted their efforts and resources to breeding more financially lucrative species. As a result, the population in captivity in the United States has declined sharply. Anecdotal sampling of breeders in Arizona and Florida suggest the species is less prolific than some other conures, with one or two clutches per year typical. Clutch size frequently is three or four, at times only one or two. Breeding appears to be definitely seasonal, from early March until mid-May. ●



Aratinga canicularis clarae

Photos courtesy of Gary Clifton