

Breeding of the Blue-rumped Parrot

(*Psittinus cyanurus cyanurus*)

by Rick Jordan

The Blue-rumped Parrot (*Psittinus cyanurus cyanurus*) is a small parrot from southwestern Thailand. It is also found through Malaysia and on several of the islands of Indonesia. *Psittinus c. cyanurus* is the smallest of the three known sub-species with an adult size approximately the same as some of the larger love birds.

It is quite common throughout its range. Until quite recently it has been very rare in captivity, probably due to an unusually high mortality rate during importation, the cause of which has never been explained. In the past three or four years the shipments of this species have consisted of young birds and survival rates have increased dramatically.

Sexual dimorphism is marked in mature birds. Males are distinguished by a pale blue head and red upper mandible whereas the females' heads are brown and the upper mandible is brownish-red in color. This dimorphism is very similar to that of many of the Asian parakeets. As a matter of fact, the behavior and physical attributes of the Blue-rumped Parrot are similar to many of the *Psittacula* parakeets except for their lack of a long pointed tail.

My original pair and an extra male were purchased in the late summer of 1990. The proven hen is on breeding loan from Ernie Colazzi of Dallas, Texas. All four birds were placed in one cage to allow for pairing with the mates of their choice. The pairs established themselves very quickly and they began to fight amongst each other within a week. The alpha pair consisted of the oldest hen and oldest male. They always perched in the highest space available and they ate before the second pair was allowed near the food. After a week, the two pairs were separated. Fighting was usually between the females, not the

males. In many cases the dominate female actually fought off both males also.

Not knowing a whole lot about this particular species, I began my breeding trials by placing both pairs in cages that were next to each other. This later proved to be a mistake as the hens spent several hours a day fighting through the wire. Cages were constructed of one inch by one half inch, 14 gauge wire. Both cages measured two feet wide by three feet tall by three feet long. The food was placed at the front of the cage and the nest was placed at the rear.

Nest boxes were designed by myself and built by a friend, Rob Gibson. They were sort of an "L" shape with a 4" x 4" entrance box nailed on the front. This entrance box actually stuck into the cage with the remainder of the box extending onto the outside. In this manner there was an entrance that was internal and the hen had to climb through a four inch hallway, turn right and go down a 12 inch corridor before reaching the actual nest quarters at the bottom. I was trying to simulate the depth and feel of a hollow branch rather than that of a tree trunk. The inside measurements of the corridors were only six inches by six inches.

Neither pair showed any interest in the nest boxes in the first year. They consumed large quantities of seeds, fruits, figs, berries and branches cut from the large ficus trees (*Ficus benjamina*) in the yard. Raw sweet corn was relished as well as most other vegetables and fruits. The seeds were consumed as a second choice.

In November of 1991, the two pairs were moved to Miami, Florida. The original cages and nestboxes were provided once again. Both pairs were side by side which seemed to stimulate the males. Singing was noticed in both the males and, less frequently,

the females.

After a few months in Miami, the males began to show aggression towards human intervention. They never really competed with each other, only with the feeders or people that came near the cage. When no one was around they were content to sit on their perches and sing to amuse or stimulate the females. Their song consisted of three different whistle tones sung high to low. Their threat posture was to fly at the front wire, flaring the tail, lifting the wings, dilating the eyes and repeating the whistle tones in a distinct staccato manner. If approached, they would return to the perch and continue the tail and wing movements. After a few weeks the female would retreat to the immediate interior of the nest and observe the male's defense posture. This was the first time the female was seen entering the nest.

In June of 1992 the rains drenched the nest box and the interior was soaked and somewhat muddy. In early July, when the rains stopped, the weather turned very hot. At this point the nest dried out but the nesting material needed to be changed. On July 11th, I purchased a new bag of pine shavings to clean the nests that had been rain soaked. When I opened the box on July 12th, an egg was in the middle of the dirty shavings and the hen was standing nearby. I made a decision not to change the nest until she appeared to be brooding.

On July 14th, the second egg was laid. The filth in the nest was too much for me so I changed the nesting material and replaced the eggs. That entire day the hen stayed out of the box and fought through the wire with the female Blue-rumped in the next cage. The fighting continued the next day and I decided that something had to be done. I moved the second pair of birds to the other side of the breeding area where they could not be seen, only heard. The two eggs were removed from the nest and placed under a broody cockatiel. The dirty nesting shavings were removed and replaced with fresh pine shavings.

On July 16th the third egg appeared in the cleaned nest. By this time the hen had returned to her duties in the box and in the following four days laid two more eggs, on July 18th and 20th.

By this time the first two eggs under

the cockatiel were showing signs of fertility. Since I had heard such hand-rearing horrors of this species, the fertile eggs were returned to the original Blue-rumped hen to be hatched and, hopefully, fed.

During the next two weeks the eggs were candled every other day to assess fertility. The hen was surprisingly participatory and moved aside for the task. The third egg was fertile but died very early in development. The fourth and fifth eggs were infertile. After two weeks of brooding, the three bad eggs were removed which left the hen with the two normally developing eggs.

While incubating, the hen was never seen leaving the box. It is assumed that the male fed her as he consumed large quantities of food and was always busy flying back and forth to the nest entrance. He never entered the nest. This behavior is also very typical of most *Psittacula* parakeets. The hen is usually very aggressive and has been known to kill a male that approaches the eggs or young. There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part, the males are only allowed to come to the entrance hole and are forbidden to enter the nest.

On August 4th one egg had pipped and the chick was moving about in the aircell. On the evening of August 5th a chick was seen in the box and the unhatched egg was still beside it. The chick was strong and stood on its own power from the very beginning.

Description

The offspring of this species are very similar to *Psittacula* chicks. Beak is horn colored with some orange pigmentation. Body and head structure is similar to that of a young Moustached Parakeet. Very short white down on back from the neck to the tail. The down feathers are very thin and short like little needles. It gave the chicks a crew-cut look. This was the only noticeable difference between this species and that of the Asian parakeets.

By the following morning the chick had been fed by the hen. Minute amounts of corn could be seen in the crop as well as some type of white liquid. The hen remained in the upper chamber of the nest box and observed my interruption. The chick weighed four grams with the tiny bit of food in its crop.

On the morning of August 7th, the second egg had pipped. The first chick had been fed corn and other vegetable matter. Once again the hen would not leave the nest but remained at a distance and allowed me to observe and weigh the chick. On this day (day two) the chick weighed five grams with a little food in the crop. I would estimate the crop capacity at about one half to three quarters of a milliliter.

On August 8th by 10:30 a.m., the second chick had hatched and had already been fed. The crop contents of the second chick also consisted of some type of white liquid. The eggshells of the hatched eggs had disappeared immediately after hatch on both occasions. I suspect that the female consumed the eggshells and these somehow became part of the first and second feeding of the chicks.

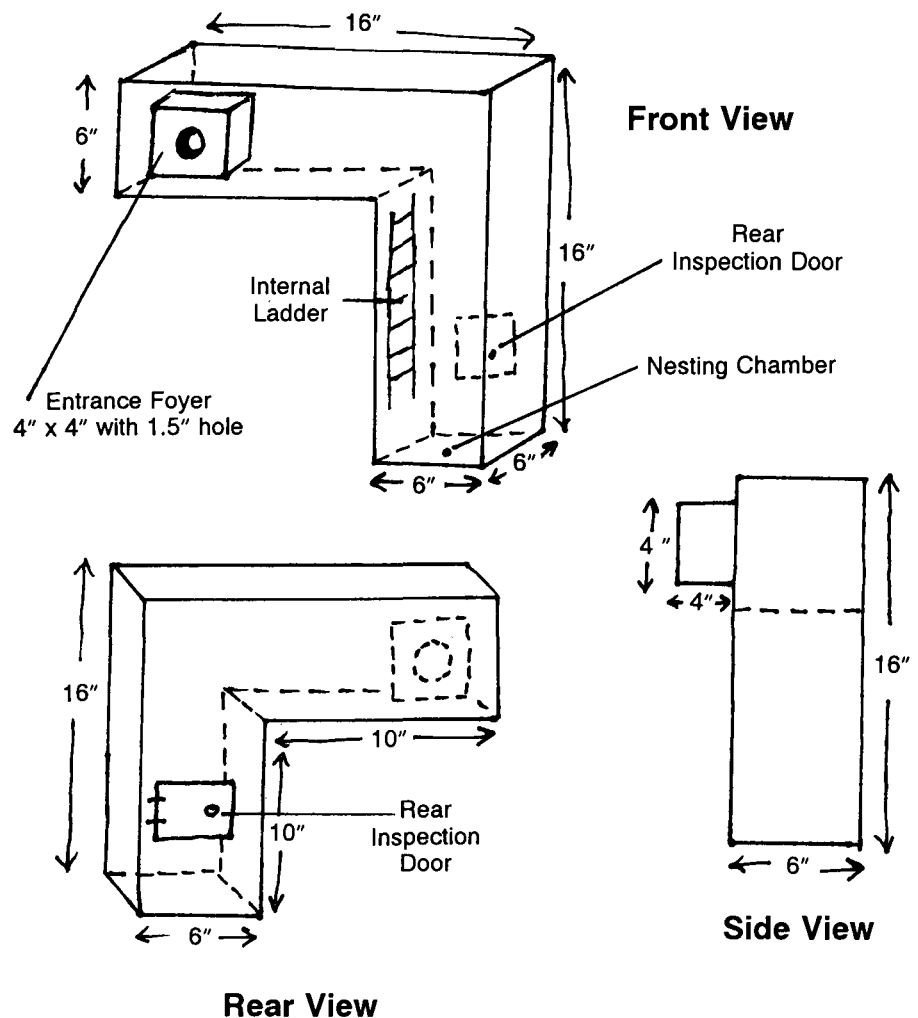
The hen continued to spend all of

her time in the nest and the chicks snuggled close together in the center of the nesting area. Only the male was observed eating.

August 16th the youngest chick was pulled for handrearing. Despite the warning I had received that these birds were difficult to rear, I decided that there would be nothing learned if I didn't give it a try. At eight days old, the eyes were slit and there was a blue color to the skin on the wings and back where the feathers would eventually sprout. This skin color pattern was very similar to the young Rose-ringed Parakeets of about the same age. The beak was a light horn and orange and the feet were pink with a grey overcast. Feeding response was easily solicited by touching the end of the beak. Upon entry to the nursery the chick weighed 19 grams.

Handrearing proceeded as it would for any other type bird. I experienced

Blue-rumped Parrot Nest Box



no crop problems and no bacterial problems during the entire rearing process. The chicks were brooded in the same manner as any of the *Psittacula* parakeets that were being reared at the time. Once the down feathers were replaced by short pins, the chicks were brooded at room temperature with a clutch mate.

Chick 1 was still with the parent birds. At 11 days of age the eyes were open, the beak was light orange, feet pink with a grey overcast, and the feeding response was strong. This chick, even though parent fed, was not shy and did not resist human intervention.

August 17th, the hen was seen out of the box eating. She consumed large quantities of fresh corn and vegetables as well as a little seed and spray millet.

August 18th, chick 1 in the nest has pin feathers approximately a quarter inch long on the edges of the wings. It is now very aware and makes small growling noises when approached by humans. Chick 2 in the nursery is following an expected normal digestion pattern on our regular feeding formula. Weight gains are good and the chick has a good attitude.

August 23, Hurricane Andrew was heading for the Florida coast so I pulled the oldest chick from the parent birds. It had very little fear of humans and only growled when handled. There was no hesitancy to eat when formula was offered. The crop capacities of both birds was approximately five to six milliliters. Both chicks sleep together.

September 6th, the chicks have silver pin-feather shafts on the head, back, crop area, and legs. Feathers open on wings and tail. The tail is approximately one inch long. Both birds are very vocal, they call when they see the nursery keeper. Both beaks are a pale orange with a black area at the growing edge near the nares. Eyes were dark but defined when in the light. Feet grey, nails black. Crop capacity has increased to 12 to 14 milliliters and digestion is rapid with a three to four hour refill time.

September 12, (ages 36 and 38 days), the chicks preferred to perch on the provided stick rather than sit on the bottom of the cage. They both nibbled at spray millet and fruit. Pin feathers were open on entire back and nape but the silver pin-shafts still

existed on the top and front of the head. This species seems very active, similar to fig parrots, and they will fly out of the weaning cages as soon as the door was opened.

September 18, (ages 42 and 44 days), both birds are eating spray millet and vegetables. They vocalize for food, perch continuously, and fly out of the cage the second the door is open. The beaks are orange and the plumage is similar to that of the adults except not as bright. Their heads were green, unlike the adult birds and the maroon wing patches consist of only a few red feathers. Handfeeding continued three times a day but the crops were not filled to allow for the chicks to eat on their own.

September 25, (ages 49 and 51 days), the chicks were completely weaned. They eat all day and will accept formula if offered. The beaks began to turn back to a horn color with brown streaks throughout. They were extremely active little birds and vocalized constantly. When the nursery keeper entered the nursery they would chatter amongst themselves.

For the next two months there was little change in the birds. Their weaning weights were 76 grams for the young bird and 80 grams for older one. In the beginning of December it was noticed that some dark brown/maroon feathers were appearing on the heads of the chicks. This color pattern continued to develop until the entire head was covered. It is a color similar to that of the adult females but has a more maroon tone to it. They would be easily distinguished as young birds if placed into a cage of adults.

Unlike the Asian parakeets, these birds continue to be calm and can be handled at 150 days of age. Their plumage more closely resembles that of the adult females except that much of the dark blue in the wings and body is replaced by green on the young birds. The beaks of both birds are beginning to lighten considerably and are now a light horn color. They are extremely active birds and will eat almost anything that they are fed. Sometimes the two birds tend to bicker between themselves but as yet these little spats are not dangerous aggression. When properly established in captivity, these little birds will make enchanting companion or aviary subjects.

An important factor to remember is that Blue-rumped Parrots are female aggressive. They do not bond during the non-breeding season and will not roost side by side. This does not indicate that the pair is incompatible. When the hen comes into breeding condition she will accept the courtship ritual of the male and allow him to breed her. Do not break up pairs unless they are constantly fighting. If there is tranquility between the two birds they may very well breed.

Statistics

Eggs Measured:

1. 27 mm x 21 mm
2. 27 mm x 22 mm
3. 27.8 mm x 20.5 mm
4. 25.0 mm x 20.0 mm
5. Not measured.

Incubation Period: 23 days

Leg Band Size: Cockatiel

Weaned: Approximately 50 days

Weight Gains:

Chick 2 (Nursery)

- Day 1 - 4 grams
- Day 7 - 16 grams
- Day 14 - 29 grams
- Day 21 - 42 grams
- Day 28 - 55 grams
- Day 35 - 65 grams
- Day 42 - 75 grams
- Day 49 - 76 grams . . . Weaned
- 150 Days - 74 grams

Chick 1 (Nest)

- Day 1 - 5 grams
- Day 7 - 20 grams
- Day 14 - 33 grams
- Day 21 - 45 grams
- Day 28 - 58 grams
- Day 35 - 68 grams
- Day 42 - 72 grams
- Day 49 - 80 grams . . . Weaned
- 150 Days - 77 grams

Feeding Formula

- 50 Zoo Preen Primate Chow Biscuits
- 1 Tablespoon of Sunflower Oil
- 1 Tablespoon Wheat-grass Powder
- 1 Tablespoon Spirulina Powder
- 1/2 cup raw, shelled sunflower

Place all ingredients into blender and cover with water. Blend until smooth, adding water if necessary. Cook in microwave for 10 minutes and be sure to bring mixture to a boil around the edges. Thin to proper consistency with water and ice cubes. Add four teaspoons of Nutrition Plus vitamin powder when formula has cooled to 105°Fahrenheit. ●

Breeding of the Blue-rumped Parrot

by Robbie Harris
La Habra, California

The *Psittinus cyanurus*, is commonly known here in the U.S. as the Blue-rumped Parrot or Malaysian Blue-rumped Parrot. They are also referred to in some books by the names of Little or Rainbow Parrot. The Blue-rumped is a small type of parrot, similar in size to the Peach-faced Lovebird. The adult plumage of these birds is very striking, especially in the males. Like the Eclectus Parrots, males and female are colored quite differently from each other. The male has a blue head, with a dark blue color on the lower back and rump. The wings are green with each feather edged in a light yellowish color. A small maroon patch is on the upper wing coverts. The flanks and under the wings are red, The upper mandible is bright red, with the lower brownish. The iris is a yellowish-white. Feet and legs are grayish. The males have more of a blue wash over their body, where the females' color is slightly yellowish-green.

The female has some of the same characteristics in color as the male, such as the yellow feather edging, red under the wings, feet color and iris color. My hen has a solid dark brown head. As young birds feather into adult plumage, they will either start to "blue up" in the head feathers or go brown. As my domestically raised birds approached a year old they lost their baby coloring and have a solid dark brown head, just like their mother.

The Blue-rumped Parrots are distributed from south-western Thailand and southern Burma, through Malaysia to Borneo and Sumatra, Indonesia. They inhabit forested areas feeding on fruits, seeds and blossoms. I've been told that where these birds nest is very warm. The temperature stays at about 95° with the humidity about 90% day and night.

Many years back, I purchased some Blue-rumped parrots from an importer who brought a small number of these birds into the U.S. They were young birds, not yet in their full adult plumage. Visual sexing did not work well on these birds. I had some surgically sexed to find that one of the "hens" with somewhat of a brown head was a young male. It took almost a year for the Blue-rumpeds to color into their full splendor. After years of intense work and study of these birds, beautiful healthy chicks were finally produced. I successfully reared two youngsters to weaning. When I say the word "work" with these birds, I do mean it.

Lots of close work and observation went into breeding these birds. Here is how it all went ... Success and true pairing just was not happening. I tried to observe them close up and from afar. But the birds would just usually sit motionless, not doing much. A video camera is what told the real story on these birds. After much observation, studying tapes of the Blue-rumpeds and changing mates

around, a true pair did finally form. I now had a pair that was truly compatible. Now it was just a matter of patience and time, along with making sure this pair was completely happy and at ease with their surroundings.

The pair was set up outdoors in a wire cage, no added heat or cooling (I live in Southern California in an area where the weather usually does not drop below 40°F). The cage measured 36" wide, 33" tall and 23" deep. A wooden nest box measuring 9" x 10" by 14" deep having a 3" in diameter hole was offered to the pair. The nest box was lined in a dark cork, which was adhered to the inside with non-toxic glue. To the bottom of the nest box three inches of pine shavings was added to use as a base. I now use the cork lining for many types of birds with great success.

As a safety precaution their cage is inside a large wire enclosure. This wire building has many pairs of birds set up in individual cages for breeding. They do not seem to be bothered by their close neighbors of different species, and the neighbors do not mind the Blue-rumpeds either. Next to the Blue-rumped Parrot's cage are Philippine Blue-naped Parrots. Spectacled Amazons, Timneh Gray Parrots and Plum-crowned and White-crowned Pionus (all of which are breeding).

The diet I provide for the Blue-rumpeds is very similar to the diet I offer to most of my other parrots. They have available to them at all times a variety of dry seeds consisting of medium size gray sunflower seed, safflower seed and a parakeet mix containing 42% canary seed. Along with the dry seeds the pair is given daily a bowl of fresh cut up fruits, vegetables and greens. Corn on the cob and cranberries are their favorite foods which are always the first to be eaten. I find it amazing that two little birds can quickly devour an entire ear of corn and seem to be waiting for more.

In early spring, the male courts the hen into breeding with his melodious singing. Soon she shows signs of nest-

Parrot Bands • Cockatiel Bands • Lovebird Bands
Farakeet Bands • Canary Bands • Handfeeding Syringes
All sizes of plastic bands • Band Cutters • Nets

Stainless Steel Feeding Needles

Pipettes • Claw Scissors

FAST
SERVICE!

Send self-addressed, stamped envelope
for complete brochure.

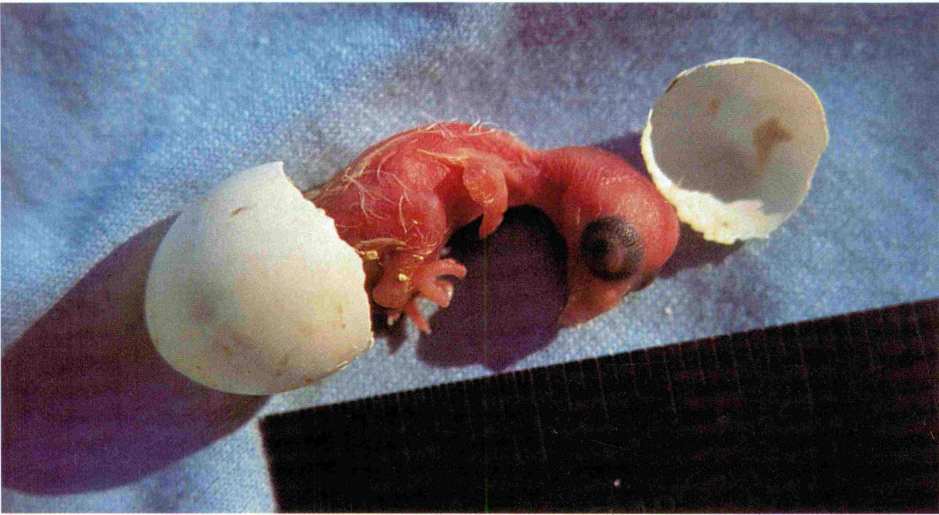
L & M BIRD LEG BANDS

P.O. Box 2943 • San Bernardino, CA 92406
(909) 882-4649 Monday thru Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (PST)

Closed month of July for vacation.



Photo by Robbie Harris



Just hatched! Psittinus cyanurus was first bred in the United States in 1992 by Robbie Harris. These photos show the development stages of a young Blue-rumped Parrot.

Photo by Robbie Harris



Five weeks old.

Photo by Robbie Harris



Eight weeks old.

ing by inspecting the nest box during the daylight hours. A couple of weeks before the hen lays her eggs she starts to spend a great deal of time inside the nest box, day and night. The male is not seen entering the box at all. While the hen is setting up housekeeping inside the box, he is standing guard much of the time on the perch right outside the entrance hole. The hen starts to spend most of the day inside the nest box now, chewing on the inside of the box cutting away por-



Photo by George D. Dodge/Dale R. Thompson

Adult male (Psittinus cyanurus). The Blue-rumped Parrot inhabits Thailand, south Burma, through Malasia to Borneo and Sumatra. This species has had some difficulties surviving in captivity and very few have been reproduced.

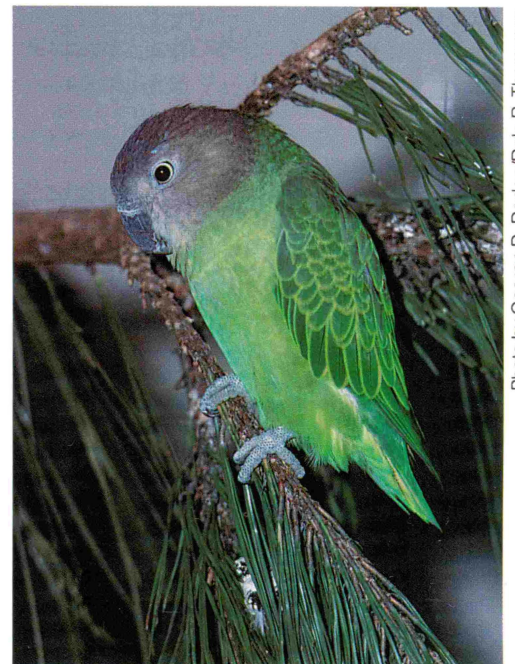


Photo by George D. Dodge/Dale R. Thompson

Adult female (Psittinus cyanurus).

tions of the corking and creating, as she sees it, a nest for her eggs to come.

Just a note; the hen can become quite aggressive towards the male, so if she does not want him in the next box he will not attempt to cross her. Hens can be very aggressive towards males, as well as other birds. Some years ago I had a hen kill another hen that was in the same large holding cage with her. These birds often behave very much like some Eclectus Parrots. Care and a very watchful eye is needed for some Blue-rumped.

On April 16, 1992, I discovered the first Blue-rumped Parrot egg inside the nest. By April 25th a total of six eggs were laid. The hen did all the incubation, the male was never seen entering the nest box. Midway through incubation I candled the eggs with my "Probe-lite" egg candler. With the battery operated egg candler I did not have to remove the eggs from the nest, as this candling did not disturb the hen. With the "Probe-lite" I could tell that all six eggs were fertile and developing perfectly.

On May 9, the first chick hatched under the hen after 23 days of incubation. The parents would not feed their chick (this is the same thing I went through last year with their chicks). The newly hatched chick, weighing four grams, was removed from the parent's nest and placed in my homemade brooder for hand rearing by me. May 11, the second chick hatched. This one, too, was not fed and also had to be removed for hand rearing. The third chick hatched May 12 and was fed by the parents, it remained in the nest box. The fourth and fifth chicks soon hatched. She cared for and fed all three of these chicks but, as I soon discovered, it must have been done very poorly. Within a few days she started to lose her chicks. They appeared fed but had very dry skin.

The two remaining chicks that I had been handfeeding also had very dry skin problems. The humidity was kept higher than usual in the brooder but did not seem to correct this problem. They developed slowly and digested their food too slowly. Their formula was thinned down with more water than usual, and a few drops of oil were added to the hand rearing formula. This may have helped push the food through a bit more quickly.

I decided to give these two guys

some roommates for company to cuddle with, just in an effort to try anything to get them to grow better. The roommates I selected had to be close in size and age so two Tovi Parakeets, one Peach-fronted Conure and two Dusky-headed Conures moved in with the Blue-rumped chicks. The Blue-rumped chicks appeared to be more comfortable with the company but their digestion was still slow. Their formula just did not move through their little bodies as fast as I'd like. A crop flush for the two became a daily routine.

The added company of chicks seemed to help raise and keep the humidity in the tank higher. The Blue-rumped chicks also really seemed to like to push their way into the crowd to regulate their own heat as needed. They still had problems opening their eyes since hampered by their too dry skin. I gently washed the skin area around their eyes a few times a day and soon their eye lids started to open and stay open. On June 8, bee pollen, sunflower seed oil (raw) and mango juice were added to their handfeeding diet. With these additives and "sponge baths" the chicks seemed to digest their food better. These warm water sponge baths took place two to four times a day, as needed. The chicks looked better, more pink in color and shiny as a result.

By mid June the chicks started to develop quills. The chicks were now progressing better in their growth and development. It seemed like a real battle to keep these two Blue-rumped chicks alive and well but by the end of June they weighted about 50 grams each and were looking just great! By July 12, the chicks were eating on their own. They would eat parrot pellets, and soft foods, mainly apple at that time along with some grapes and bread. They quickly starting eating seed offered, primarily parakeet mix. Very soon sunflower seed and safflower seed along with other types of parrot pellets were eaten by the chicks.

The weaning chicks did not look like their parents in color. Their coloring as youngsters was quite different. The chicks are mainly shades of green, body and head. Chick number one has a horn color beak. The head is bluish green right on the top. Chest is light green and the rump is a royal blue. The underwing coverts are light

orange mixed slightly with a bit of red. The eyes are yellowish. The head on this chick is just slightly larger than that of the second chick. This chick seems to have more of a song in it's voice, but it is possible they have the same song type voice. These birds are very quiet and normally make very little sound at all. The feet are gray, and this chick is missing a toe nail on it's right foot.

The second chick is very much the same, with just a few differences. On this chick the horn colored beak has a bit of a yellow/orange color to it. The underwing coverts are red, not orange. This chick also has a spot of reddish color on the top of the wing just behind the shoulder (the first chick does not show this color of red yet).

As personality goes, these little guys have become very independent. They are not friendly to me, nor do they want to come out of their cage to play and be held, like many handfed chicks do. As chicks they are not playful at all, compared to other chicks like conures, African parrots and Brotogeris. They eat, drink and basically just sit on their perch until it is time to eat again. These birds are mainly enjoyed for their beauty, and the pleasant sounds they produce. At first they did want attention, but once they were eating completely on their own, they were no longer interested in me.

When they were four months old they were moved out of the house and were set up in an unheated outdoor building. As they settled in their new cage outdoors, the individual personalities started to show. They were quite different in personality, as well as in some of their coloring. One was very curious, almost tame again. Upon seeing me, this one would break into song and just sing its little heart out as the clutch mate just stood by and watched quietly. They even looked different, as one had a larger head with bigger dark eyes. But after all that speculation they still both colored out just under a year old into their adult plumage-as "girls". Presently the parents are on another clutch. Maybe I'll be able to do some trading?

Robbie Harris is the author of two books published by T.F.H. - *Grey-cheeked Parakeets and Other Brotogeris* and *Breeding Conures*. She has been living with her two children and concentrating on her bird breeding programs since 1985. ●