

# Breeding the Purple-bellied Parrot

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The Purple-bellied Parrot, *Triclaria malachitacea*, is native to south-eastern Brazil. Although it is not believed to be rare in the wild, little has been recorded about its habits. These birds are truly in a class of their own; they are not related to nor do they resemble any other species.

The Purple-bellied Parrot is approximately 10 inches in length, its plumage is emerald green, the thighs and the undersides of the wings and tail are tinged with blue. Their bill is horn colored, their eyes are brown, and their feet and legs are gray. One of the features that sets these parrots apart from most is that they are dimorphic, the male bears a patch of dark purple feathers on its chest starting from the lower breast down through the center of the abdomen, whereas the female is green.

In breeding the Purple-bellied Parrot in captivity the difficulty was not in encouraging the pairs to breed or providing them with an elaborate habitat nor formulating a special diet, but simply in keeping them alive. In 1989, a group of 20 young Purple-bellies (10 pairs) were legally imported into the United States by way of a USDA quarantine station in Los Angeles, California. During the next two years, due to a series of illnesses including an outbreak of Pacheco's virus and numerous upper respiratory disorders, this number would dwindle down to only six birds. The six remaining Purple-bellies consisted of four females and two males. To the best of my knowledge, these were, until now, the only Purple-bellied Parrots in captivity in this country.

These six birds are housed in a breeding barn among other mixed species, in flights that measure 4' wide x 6' high x 6' deep, constructed of 1/2" x 1" wire. The birds were set up for breeding in trios, two females to each male and provided with two nest boxes. The nest boxes are approxi-

mately the size of a deep cockatiel box, 10" x 10" x 20", constructed of metal and fully lined with wood. Their diet consists of a safflower based parrot mix supplemented with spray millet, whole wheat bread and assorted fruits and vegetables. The Purple-bellied Parrots are particularly fond of strawberries, oranges, grapes, green beans and corn.

The first signs of breeding activity were noticed in early February 1992; the breeding pairs were approximately three years old. There was a dramatic change in their personality, where they were usually very calm and quiet they had now become very active and excited, flying about their cages calling and singing to each other as they went. Their song is a high pitched whistle-chirp that is quite musical. By late February, one of the hens from one trio disappeared into a nest box, and not long after that another hen from the second trio also went to nest. In both flights the males displayed monogamous tendencies, choosing to mate with only one hen. Never did the single hens visit the nest boxes provided for them. It was obvious that the single hens were subordinate to the mated females, and though they were never the object of abuse they always kept a proper distance.

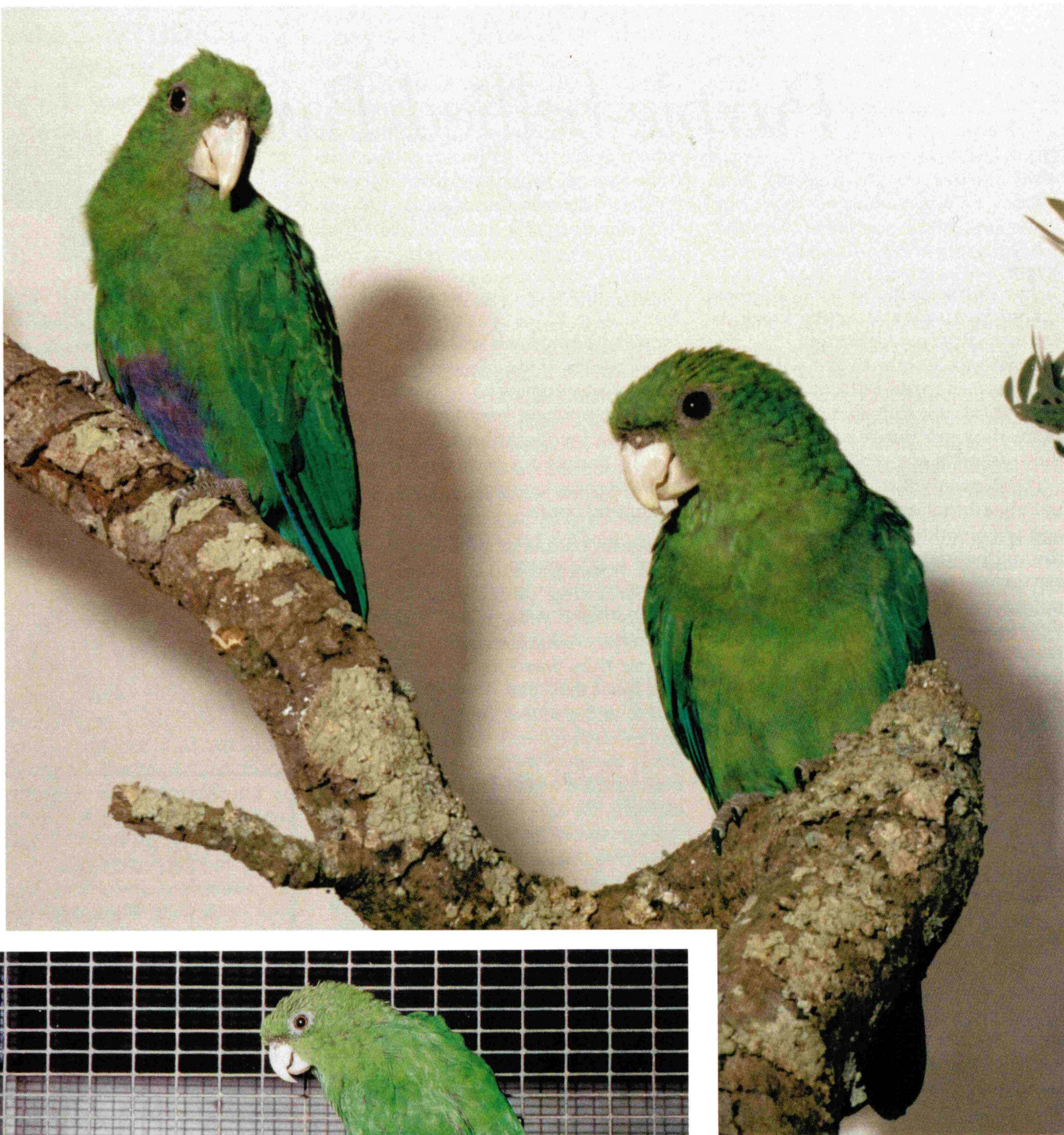
On March 22, 1992 the first egg was discovered. Not knowing what kind of parents these birds would prove to be, it was decided to pull the eggs for artificial incubation and handfeeding. Five days after the first egg was laid, the hen laid another and then again every two to three days after that until she had laid a total of eight eggs. The second hen began to lay 17 days after the first hen. She basically followed the same pattern as the first, laying every two to three days until she had laid a total of seven eggs. Pulling the eggs is not difficult, the hens while on the nest are not overly protective,

aggressive or frightened. The hens were never observed outside the nest box after they started to lay, and they remained in the nest for a period of five to seven days after the last eggs were pulled. The eggs were elliptical in shape, white with a dull finish and measured an average of 1.19 inches in length. Of the eight eggs laid by the first hen all were fertile, but of the seven that were laid by the second hen only the first two were fertile.

The eggs were incubated in a Peterzime incubator, model 1-M04, at 99.1°, with 50% humidity. After 26 days of incubation, the first egg hatched on April 17th, 1992 (timed perfectly to coincide with their owner's birthday). Out of the 10 fertile eggs, seven were successfully hatched. From day one, the chicks were fed a commercial handfeeding formula. The babies grew quickly; by the 14th day gray downy feathers had begun to replace the pure white down that the chicks were born with. Their eyes began to open at about 21 days, and pin feathers started to appear during their fourth week. The chicks weaned at nine to 10 weeks old. It was during this period of weaning that two of the chicks died due to a respiratory disorder.

When the chicks were weaned they were all green, just like the adult hens. It was not until their first molt at approximately six months of age that the males obtained the purple feathers on their chest. It was also observed that the narrow eye-rings surrounding each eye changed in color from off-white to dark gray as the birds matured. Of the chicks successfully raised, there are three males and two females. All of these birds have been or will be paired and introduced back into our breeding program. Two of these young males have been paired with the two single adult females from the breeder trios, another male and



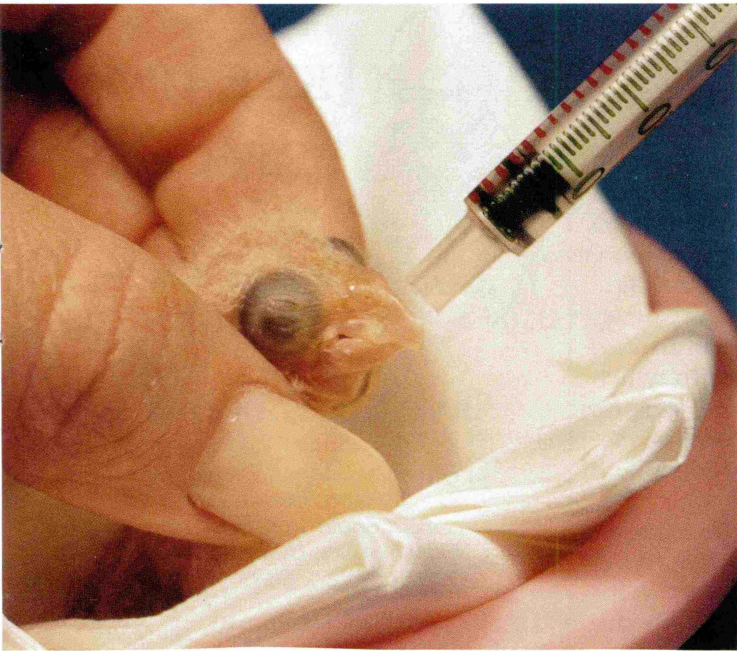


*These two young Purple-bellied Parrots were paired together forming the first unrelated domestically bred pair. When the chicks are weaned, they are green, just like the adult hens. It is not until their first molt at approximately six months of age that the males obtain the purple feathers on their belly.*

female are housed together forming the first unrelated domestically bred pair.

Since these Purple-bellied Parrot babies were being kept for breeding stock, they were not handled in a way which would make pets of them, nevertheless they display great affec-





*Two day old Purple-bellied Parrot.*



*The babies' eyes opened at about 21 days old.*



*The Purple-bellies nested in boxes that were approximately the same size as a deep cockatiel box, 10" x 10" x 20", constructed of metal and fully lined with wood.*

*Five Purple-belly chicks were successfully raised in 1992. Shown here shortly after weaning at about ten weeks old. Purple-bellies are particularly fond of strawberries, apples, oranges, grapes, green beans and corn.*



tion, curiosity, playfulness, and the ability to speak. As I feed each day, I am greeted through high pitched squeals of delight, "Hi guys, what'cha doing?" There can be no doubt that these birds would make good pets, that is, some day when there are more of them. ●