

# Our First Brotogeris

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“I think we should go back and get him” is the way it started four years ago. My wife Chris and I had just left a little Grey-cheeked Parakeet on the perch at a Florida coastal pet store one Sunday and were driving back home. He was a friendly little dude, chatted with everyone, got on your finger, paid attention to you, wanted a good home!

“I think we should go back and get him.” I turned into a parking lot along the road and we talked about where we would put him. After all, we did have an African Grey and a macaw at the time. “We’ll get a little cage and keep him in the kitchen for a while and see how he does.” A good answer. I went back the way we had come and, just as the place was closing, we bought “Cheeks” and a cage and headed for home.

Four years later, our Grey-cheeked Parakeets have bred for three years. We are working on second generation breeding and have all of the *Brotogeris* species except the Tui, Plain, or Yellow-winged (Canary).

## Chris' Tiny Wings (CTW) Aviary

CTW Aviary is set up in two areas: inside and outside. The indoor cages were custom made and each is 18" x 18" x 24". Each contains a toy, a Manzanita branch (for chewing), a water bowl, a fresh food bowl and a dry food bowl. Each cage has a pair of *Brotogeris* and a lovebird size nestbox. We house three pairs of Grey-cheeked and one pair of Orange-chinned inside.

There are several different sizes of cages set up in banks outdoors. Some of the cages are 24" x 24" x 36" and are arranged side by side. These cages are identical in every respect and are separated for three-fourths of their length with a privacy panel. We used 1" x 2" oak for perches and the nestboxes are 10" x 10" x 8". We have a small, two-compartment dog dish we use for feeding: fresh on one side, dry

on the other. In the front of each cage is the water bowl and each cage has a timed sprinkler.

Another section has cages that measure 24" x 36" x 36", side by side and are identical to the smaller cages (except for size), right down to the sprinklers.

There is also a community cage which is 36" x 36" x 48". This cage has two feeding positions and a larger water bowl. It also has two nestboxes with room for two more. For this cage, the sprinkler has a larger spray area.

CTW Aviary is located in central Florida. For that reason, we can be a little more experimental with breeding indoors and outdoors. CTW Aviary presently has a good selection of *Brotogeris* and can evaluate different influences and how the breeding cycles relate.

## Population at CTW Aviary

We have been able to add to our collection this year a single Grey-cheeked (paired with one of this year's babies will give us five pairs), two White-winged (which gives us two pairs and two males) and a single Orange-chinned (which gives us three pairs). We also have a pair of Cobalt-winged and two pairs of Golden-winged Parakeets. The total *Brotogeris* population is as follows: Grey-cheeked *Brotogeris pyrrhopterus*, five pairs; Orange-chinned *Brotogeris jugularis*, three pairs; White-winged *Brotogeris versicolorus*, two pairs plus two males; Cobalt-winged *Brotogeris cyanoptera*, one pair; Golden-winged *Brotogeris chrysopterus*, two pairs.

We have been successful for three years in breeding *Brotogeris*. This year we received our first clutch of Orange-chinned eggs (all infertile). Next year, we expect our second generation of Grey-cheeked. Last year, one of our Grey-cheeked pairs gave us a double clutch. The hen laid and hatched five in January-February and laid five eggs and hatched two babies (the rest were infertile) in June-July.

## General Characteristics

Cobalt-winged Parakeets are Chris' favorites. They give the initial appearance of tiny Amazons. They have a very small but vivid orange spot under the lower mandible. There is a yellow wash on the front, fading to light green on the crown. The wings are magnificent. The Cobalt-winged are

stocky birds compared to most of the other *Brotogeris* we have.

Golden-winged Parakeets are my favorites. They are a dark olive green with a black wash to the facial feathers; the periophthalmic ring really stands out. The most impressive feature of the Golden-winged is the small, triangular patch of pure golden feathers at the bend of the wing. Only when the wings are extended is the golden patch visible against a dark green background.

White-winged Parakeets are a little bit darker than the subspecies *B.v. chiriri* (Canary-winged). This subspecies has some white primary feathers that are almost invisible until the wing is opened. Some of the secondary feathers show a very subtle yellow wash on white. These birds tend to be a little more territorial and a couple of the males become very vocal when we change the water and food bowls.

Grey-cheeked are friendly and just talk up a storm! When there are 10 to 15 together at any one time, they can be very loud. A solitary bird can become just as spoiled and just as demanding as any other larger bird, i.e. macaw or cockatoo, although will remain much more quiet. The most interesting feature of the Grey-cheeked is the orange patch under the wing next to the body. This orange patch tends to peek out at the bend of the wing on mature birds.

Orange-chinned Parakeets are a middle green between the Golden-winged and the Grey-cheeked. Being somewhat plain in coloring, they do have the same type of patch under the wing as the Grey-cheeked except the patch is a light yellow, not orange. These differ from the rest of the *Brotogeris* having a medium bronze patch on the outside of the folded wing. The orange (in Orange-chinned) is visible as a small spot under the lower mandible. Orange-chinned seem to be “bossy” birds.

## Nesting at CTW Aviary

Here in Florida, the nesting season begins sometime in November. We replace or repair all nestboxes before Thanksgiving. Our nestboxes for the inside birds are cycled. We take them away from the older pairs during June through November. If we have a pair that is just new to each other and the environment, then we leave the box



*Condominium cages.*



*Orange-chinned Parakeet. The orange chin spot is barely visible in this photo.*



*Grey-cheeked Parakeets breed fairly well and make wonderful pets.*

up all year.

During the June-November time, we re-line the insides with cork. We use a variation on the cork that Robbie Harris described in her book on *Brotogeris*. We found that the burnt cork panels she recommended leave a lot of charcoalish residue that even settles in the birds' nares. We glue three layers of the bulletin board-type cork into the nest boxes: all sides and the top. We use Elmer's white school glue and the cork is a sand color and comes in a roll easily cut with scissors.

We fill the box with pine shavings to about two inches lower than the entry hole. We have found that as the cork is chewed and mixed with pine shavings, the level increases to about an inch under the hole. This seems to be about where the birds feel most comfortable.

The outside boxes are removed only long enough to be re-lined and re-filled. We try to do this during September and October. Before we add the pine shavings, we sprinkle some 5% Sevin dust in the bottom of the box. We were told this would keep the bugs to a minimum and so far we haven't had any problems. Additionally, we get the boxes for the "yard birds" completed just before cooler weather starts. The theory is that as the nights get cooler, they need a sheltered place to go and the new



*A cage set up outdoors for breeding Brotogeris.*

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cork and shavings satisfies the nest construction instinct.

### **Eggs and Incubation at CTW Aviary**

There does not seem to be a predictable period of time when the pairs finally go to nest. We have had eggs laid from late December to late May. We do notice that as egg laying time nears, the texture of the box filling becomes finer. Also, the pair will excavate a deep depression in the corner of the box farthest from the entrance hole. The depth of the depression seems to be a personal variation among pairs.

Egg laying, once started, occurs every two days on average. It seems that the interval between egg #1 and egg #2 is three days and the last egg of the clutch is again three days. Incubation usually starts with the second egg and then, typically, the hen starts to incubate her clutch.

Both male and female are very protective of the clutch of eggs. We have to use care and caution when inspecting the eggs. We use a #2 lead pencil to mark the eggs and a candler which has a long tube the size of a pencil tip to candle the eggs. Once we know the condition of the last egg, we try not to disturb the nest any longer.

### **Hatching and Brooding at CTW Aviary**

We count 28 days from the date the second egg was laid. We feel that the hen typically does not start to incubate until the second egg and if we use that date, we will be closer to actual hatch date for the first egg. The day before the projected hatch date, we change the diet of the pair. At least a week prior to the first hatch of the season, we have cooked the soft food recipe that Robbie Harris publishes in her book. The soft food is fed to the pair in a different container, one which we can hang very near the nestbox hole.

The soft food allows the male and the female to feed the chicks quickly and virtually effortlessly. There is very little requirement for digestion of the soft food and less energy is expended because the parents do not have to predigest the normal fruit/veggies/hard food.

We allow the parents to feed and brood the chicks for 12 days on average. We pull the first two chicks together (for companionship) when

the younger of the two is 12 days old. At this time, it is easy to band the bird. Any later and the leg of the older chick is getting too large for the band. As the other chicks reach 12 days, we pull and band them. We pull the last two together so that there is not a solitary chick left in the nestbox. Next year, we intend to let a pair of Grey-cheeked parents try to raise one chick through weaning.

We have some very good parents and some not-so-good parents. We have one pair of Grey-cheeked that always produces fertile eggs, but will not sit on them. We have a pair that buries their eggs and tries to pretend they aren't there. A pair of Orange-chinned seems to break their eggs; we think it is the male, but can't be sure.

We have not been successful hatching eggs in the incubator. There are many variables involved and we learn something new each time. Next year we will save eggs!

### **Out of the Box at CTW Aviary**

We keep the chicks in a five gallon aquarium with a small stuffed teddy bear on one end and the Kaytee chlorophyll pine shavings on the bottom. We use our smallest bedroom as a nursery and can keep the temperature in the room at 85 degrees. The chicks get fed four times every 24 hours after they are pulled from the box. Feeding times are usually 7:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 6:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

Each chick is weighed every morning prior to feeding and notes are kept as to daily weight, feeding times, amounts fed and any other necessary information. Baby *Brotogeris* start at 30 to 35 g (12 days) and are initially fed 4cc of formula. During the weight gain/loss/wean cycle, they reach 80 g before returning to a weaned weight of 55 to 60 g.

We use Pretty Bird Handrearing Formula exclusively. We fill a small crock with tap water and zap it in the microwave for 60 seconds. This boils the water, thereby heating the crock which will maintain the formula at a higher temperature longer. We thoroughly mix the formula using a spoon and test temperature with the old-fashioned wrist method. We use latex gloves for the first month and wash and keep all utensils in Nolvasan. We feed using a 5cc O-ring syringe and use the same syringe for all chicks but different syringes and formula for dif-

ferent clutches that are being fed at the same time.

### **Weaning at CTW Aviary**

Weaning the chicks starts with week four. At week four, the original two are feathering well and standing on their own most of the time. We cut out and plastic coat a piece of 1/4" x 1/4" screen which then lays on top of the normal wire bottom of a standard 18" x 18" x 24" cage. We add the original stuffed bear plus another, and put in a small crock of Multi-grain Cheerios mixed with the small Pretty Bird nuggets. Once we see the Cheerios are being eaten, we add a small crock of water.

During the next four weeks, we eliminate the noon feeding and then start to decrease intake from 10cc per feeding to 8cc per feeding. By week six, we are at 8cc twice per day.

As the Cheerios are eaten, we decrease the daily quantity of Cheerios until only Pretty Bird is left in the bowl. At this time, we add a second crock which contains the normal adult fruit/veggie mix. When we see the fruit/veggie mix being eaten, we start a gradual change from the small Pretty Bird nuggets to the medium size shapes. These seem to be just right for their little feet to hold.

As baby *Brotogeris* begin to wean, they tend to get a bit crabby and stand-offish when handfed. By the time eight weeks pass, they are eating a normal diet and are on the last of the 2cc nightly "attention" feedings. We let them fly on a daily basis and any chicks that stay on with us do not get their wings clipped. Those chicks leaving for other places will get their wings clipped prior to departure to prevent accidents.

At six weeks, we clip toenails and send the blood off for sexing. By the time the babies are weaned, we know the sex of each bird. We are not successful sexing the chicks by pelvic examination and, of course, they are too young for surgical sexing.

We get a tremendous amount of satisfaction raising our "pocket parrots" and hardly a day goes by that we don't learn something different or new. We have become assistant veterinarians over the past few years and can demonstrate a wide knowledge in the field of aviculture. Our birds have been in shows and some have traveled huge distances to new homes. ●