

Green-faced Parrotfinches for sale. I didn't believe for one minute that they really were that species. I thought they might be immature Pintails. When I went to see the birds, lo and behold, they really were Green-faced Parrotfinches. He had 30 of them and I bought the whole lot. The best we ever did, though, was to get nests. We never did breed them. Later as I went through a Jakarta bird market, I saw three Manilas. One was slightly larger and had far more yellow on its belly. It was differently colored and I instinctively thought it was a cock. Actually, I now believe in retrospect that by some weird accident I got 30 hens or, perhaps, 30 cocks. The ones I just mentioned are the only ones I've seen in captivity – ever. Even in the wild it occurs only occasionally.

**AFA** – *The Pink-billed Parrotfinch is apparently unknown. A recent attempt was made to bring some in for serious study. Have you ever seen this bird and is it in European aviculture?*

**Fidler** – It is not now in European aviculture at all. The last known bird in European aviculture was in Italy. I did not see it first hand but I saw a photograph of it. Needless to say, it did not breed. If it's not extinct, it is highly endangered.

**AFA** – *Obviously the "in" Parrotfinch right now is the Blue-breasted. Do you feel the pure bloods will be established in British aviculture or that they will be corrupted by the onslaught of outcrosses as is happening in this country?*

**Fidler** – First of all, the Tri-color, as we call it, is established. It's now being bred very regularly. Very many people have it. I don't think there's any danger of its being corrupted by hybridization. There is absolutely no chance of anyone in the U.K. hybridizing that bird. It would have no value if they did.

**AFA** – *We know you are involved with the AFA Red Siskin Project. What is the status of Red Siskins in the U.K.?*

**Fidler** – Perilous, I would say. I know of one other person who is keeping Red Siskins in the U.K. They are bred in Italy which seems to be the hot spot for Red Siskins in Europe. I know one fellow who bred 200 of them last year. There are quite a few Siskin breeders in Holland also. I got some of my stock from a very successful breeder there.

**AFA** – *That's it Mike. Thank you very much.*

**Fidler** – My pleasure. 

# The Special Appeal of Ring-necked Parakeets

## *Psittacula krameri manillensis*

by Tom Marshall  
Leesburg, Virginia

I think that Europeans and Australians practice aviculture far differently than we do. My readings tell me that they seem to be less inclined to raise birds strictly for pets and therefore, rely less on handfeeding and incubator hatching. More often than not they will allow the parent birds to raise their young and they often concentrate their breeding efforts in producing color mutations. Whereas we may appreciate our birds in small cages in the home, they savor their collections outdoors in spacious aviaries.

One species of bird that particularly attracts overseas aviculturists is the Indian Ringneck Parakeet. Europeans, in particular, learned during the hard times, brought on by World War II, that Ringnecks will thrive on most any diet; they are hardy and excellent breeders and parents. These impeccable birds have also held a special appeal for me and, to date, they are the birds with which I have had the most breeding success.

Their "symmetric arrangement of parts" or their conformation makes the Ringneck, in my opinion, the most exquisitely constructed parrot of all

the 300+ species. The bright apple-green plumage perfectly enhances the black ring that encircles the neck and the rose pink half-ring at the back of the neck in the adult male. The red upper mandible also contributes to the stunning impression these birds give. If you have never seen Ringnecks in full adult plumage with their incredibly long tapering tails and tightly held feathers, you may fail to grasp how beautiful these birds are. The production possibilities of a wide array of colors in Ringnecks simply adds to their popularity among those who know them.

Lutinos are a particularly vibrant shade of buttercup yellow, with red eyes. The male sports a pink neck ring with a white (not black as in the normal) half ring, or mandibular stripe. My favorite is the powder blue which has black and white rings on the neck of the adult male. (Males attain adult status and their characteristic rings as early as 18 months to two years).

Other colors are being bred overseas and in the United States, a California breeder developed a green and yellow

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pied and a blue and white pied. The other colors being produced are cinnamon, basically an olive green bird with a brown neck ring; a turquoise, one that appears to change color depending how the light falls on the feathers; a cream albino with red eyes; a gray bird with black flight feathers; and an albino that is devoid of all color but white.

Seldom do Ringnecks breed before October or after March and if the parents raise their own chicks, they rarely double clutch. My original pair, a Lutino male and a normal hen, first went to nest for me in 1981. They were housed in a suspended aviary 10 ft. in length, 3 ft. high and 3 ft. wide. The nestboxes, which hung on the outside of the back end of the flight were 12 in. x 12 in. x 24 in. The entrance hole was 3 in. diameter with a wire ladder leading down into 2 - 4 in. of pine shavings. The hen, however, throws out quite a bit of the shavings prior to laying her eggs. My records indicate the incubation period to be 25 days in my relatively warm basement, with chicks taking up to 50 days to fledge.

I chose to breed Lutino males to normal hens because my limited knowledge of genetics taught me that in working with sex-linked mutations all my Lutino chicks would be hens and all my green birds would be males, split to lutino. My Blues were not sex-linked and are recessive, so each bird in the pair had to be carrying the blue genes. I had a blue male and a hen that was split to blue (one of *her* parents had been blue) in order to produce 50% blue and 50% green birds. I always avoided mating blue with blue or lutino to lutino as this tends to decrease the size of the offspring. I am fearful that many breeders today are breeding like to like in order to capitalize on the value of the individual babies, but in the long run this will impact adversely on the health and size of the birds.

Do Ringnecks make good pets? They don't have that general reputation. Ringnecks, like Eclectus and lovebirds, belong to a matriarchal society. The females rule the roost. Pairs do not maintain an affectionate nature throughout the year and even when they are breeding, their activity is very ritualized and stilted, albeit interesting and amusing to watch. Females do seem to have a temper and males do seem to be a bit timid in their presence.

This translates into a bird that does

not want to be handled too much and certainly not played with in a rough fashion, and because it is built to flee quickly, it can become "flighty" if not interacted with on a regular basis. Ringnecks, which have the widest geographic distribution of any parrot species, are, however, very intelligent. They talk well and will ride around on your shoulders from which they are happy to take "reconnaissance flights" throughout the house.

All of us have heard of the old avian bromide, "clip your birds wings or you will lose them". This was almost what happened to me. I had a handfed female normal Ringneck hen on my shoulder while I was feeding my breeding pairs. I opened the back door and she was gone instantly. She flew, like a rocket, straight up into the bright clear sky before jetting off away from the house towards a forested area a half a mile away. In a split second that bird was gone.

I combed the wooded area, but neither saw nor heard a sign of her. The next day I put a young Ringneck in a cage, hoping that its calls would attract my pet; and I waited and worried most of the day. The young bird never made a sound. How would my escapee know where to return if she wanted to come home? Then, surprisingly, while I was sitting on the patio, staring bewilderedly at my silent green decoy, I heard the familiar contact call of a Ringneck. I knew it wasn't the one in the cage, so I jumped up and frantically scanned the sky for my pet bird. As quickly as she had left, she appeared and landed on the roof of the house. She started to bob her head, her eyes were dilating with excitement, but she seemed determined to remain where she was. Finally, she edged her way to the rain gutter and took a few sips of water. Aha! She was thirsty! Maybe she was hungry, too? I ran into the house and brought out her bowl of seeds, placing it on the patio table. As soon as she spotted the seeds, she flew down and commenced to eat heartily. I picked up the bowl, gingerly, with her on the rim and carried both into the house, down the basement stairs and into the waiting flight. My wayward pet never missed a beat, and continued to eat for a good part of the day. I have no way of knowing how she spent her 24 hours of liberty, but I do know that she was smart enough not to forfeit her "meal ticket" for the abstract notion of freedom. ➔