

# Fig Parrots, No Longer a Problem—If

by John Pruitt, Apex, North Carolina

Measuring about 14mm x 20mm (.56 in. x .80 in.), the eggs were devoid of markings being simply a plain, soft ivory color.

Incubation began with the laying of the first egg, and the first chick hatched 14 days later. The second chick hatched just over a day after that with the third egg failing to hatch; unfortunately, it was infertile. Sadly within the first day of its life the smaller of the chicks died, but the larger of the two thrived and it fledged only 17 days after hatching.

As rearing food, a variety of small live food was provided; the favorite food were flies of "mini" maggots. The maggots themselves, which are only about 6mm (.24 in.) long, were also popular but were only considered by the birds when all of the flies had been eaten. A satisfactory way of dispensing the flies is to offer them in a jar whose lid is perforated with a few holes. The flies then escape in small groups, slowly enough to allow the birds to catch them. One must take great care, however, that sufficient flies escape to nourish the youngsters. To guarantee an ample supply it is preferable to deliver handfuls of them to the aviary periodically, in addition to those continually emerging from the jar. Small meal worms were also provided as well as the usual insectivorous diet. All live food was generously sprinkled with calcium lactate and vionate powders.

A slightly smaller edition of the adult birds, the youngster's plumage hinted at the green-blue of the future but for the present displayed mostly a dull gray-brown. It was a healthy bird and reached independence about three weeks after fledging.

## References

Richard Howard & Alick Moore, *A complete checklist of the birds of the world.*



**F**ig parrots are among the most colorful of all the parrot family. They originate in New Guinea (which is comprised of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea), north-eastern Australia and offshore islands including the Western Paupan and Aru Islands of Indonesia. Most of the fig parrot species are sexually dimorphic while immatures resemble the adult female.

There are four types of fig parrots generally kept in the United States, the Desmarest's, Salvadori's, Edwards's and the Double-eyed. Of these the Edwards's is my favorite. It is found in north-eastern New Guinea from the Humboldt Bay in Irian Jaya east to the Huron Gulf in Papua New Guinea. Most of my work has been with this species.

The behavior of the Edwards's Fig Parrot resembles that of the Caique (of South America) with its strong jumping capability. The fig parrots are also very strong chewers. This brilliantly colored bird is quiet by nature and has a very pleasant chirp that resembles singing. I have not heard that any fig parrot has the ability to mimic or "talk" but I believe that one of my wild caught males is beginning to say hello. The males are attentive to their mates and young. When one of my males feels that his female is being threatened, he will flutter around her as if he were giving her a hug. When they eat they will take a bite and sling their food. One must place plastic around the cages or be willing to scrub the walls often. It is, however, unwise to place plastic tightly around the cages as it cuts off air circulation and the birds may eat the plastic.

In the past, fig parrots have not been easy to raise, especially when parent rearing the young. Presently, I know of only about half a dozen aviculturists in the U.S. who are success-

fully raising fig parrots. Diet seems to play an important role in the survival of the young, especially after the age of two weeks. Fig parrot diets can range from a lory nectar to a very complex vitamin mixture. I raise my Edwards's Fig Parrots mainly on kiwi fruit, banana, apple and figs to which is added a simplified vitamin mixture. As a base, I use Prime vitamins to which I add vitamin E, B-complex, Potassium Glutamate and vitamin C. I mix these groups of powdered vitamins thoroughly together in a large zip-lock plastic bag after which I place the mixed compound back into the bottles. I then dispense this mixture of vitamins according to the directions on the Prime label. I want to clarify that there are two forms of K, one being a mineral, the other being a vitamin. I use the *mineral* K (Potassium Glutamate) in my fig parrot diet. Most fig parrots produced in past years have had a problem of babies hemorrhaging while still in the egg, which was due to a lack of vitamin K. Prime vitamins has enough vitamin K to prevent this from happening. It is important to check your labels to make sure you are adding an additional supplement of Potassium Glutamate, *not* Potassium Chloride.

Fruit contains a lot of fiber and water which I feel plays an important part in the diet of fig parrots. In the future, I will try removing vitamin C and Potassium Glutamate from my vitamin mixture as I feel there are sufficient amounts of these two ingredients in figs and kiwi fruit. I do not know at this time, but I believe that Prime vitamins mixed with vitamins E and B complex will be sufficient for rearing fig parrots. Many people believe that fig parrots need a high protein diet but this is simply not true. One can see that my diet above is not high in protein. There is a possibility that a high

protein diet could be helpful, but it is not necessary to getting the parents to raise their babies past the two week stage. In the past, young fig parrots have had the problem of getting their crops compacted with seed. Now we know that we must remove all seed in the parents' diet approximately one week before the expected hatch date.

Most of my fig parrots have been great parents but one must watch the females carefully. The females may act as though they are sitting on their eggs but they may be just sitting in the nest box but *not* on the eggs, hence no incubation. I believe this happens because the adult females are wild caught. When that does happen, I remove the eggs and replace them with infertile eggs laid previously by any one of the females. This gives the

female something to sit on. If I do not supply infertile eggs, the female will repeatedly lay more eggs.

The fertile eggs that are removed are placed in an incubator. Incubation time is usually approximately 24 days. When the eggs have an internal pip, I remove them from the incubator and replace them under the female. This way she can raise the babies while I get some needed sleep.

Because the Edwards's Fig Parrot eggs are so round I have had some problems with the babies being breech (the head being toward the narrow end of the egg) or having other problems such as the head being under the wing. These problems are corrected when I place the eggs in the incubator and tip the air-sac end slightly upward. This enables the baby fig

parrot to develop correctly. Second and third generation fig parrots appear to be more calm and will do a better job of incubating and staying on their eggs. For the Edwards's, the average clutch is two eggs. Normally my pairs will lay about four to five clutches per year.

I currently house my fig parrots in cages measuring 2 ft X 3 ft. I would not suggest keeping them in cages smaller than that. The nest boxes measure 10 in X 10 in X 10 in and they have been very successful. My pairs seem to have a strong will to lay eggs so I do not feel that other aviculturists will have any problems with giving their fig parrots any similar nest box even if the sizes are somewhat different.

My Edwards's Fig Parrots presently have two different color patterns. In one group, four males have blue feathers on the outside fringe of the yellow and red cheek patches, while in the other group the two males' feathers are fringed with light green. With the blue fringed feathers being only five or six feathers and the green fringe being about 20 feathers, I don't know if the difference comes from two different bloodlines or could possibly qualify as a subspecies. I am watching both color groups to see if they use the different colors as a means of identifying one another as do the large macaws with the feathers on the skin around the eyes.

American aviculture has approximately 50 Edwards's Fig Parrots left in it. I feel that with the new understanding of breeding these birds and now that pairs are being kept singly instead of in colonies, there is still enough of a gene pool to continue this species of parrot. I am interested in starting a stud book on the five fig parrots now found in the U.S. The species are Edwards's, Desmarest's, Salvadori's, Double-eyed and Orange-breasted Fig Parrots. Some species are somewhat common while others are very scarce.

Anyone interested in breeding fig parrots please contact John Pruitt at (919) 362-8283 in Apex, North Carolina. I am looking forward to speaking with other people who have worked with fig parrots. I have truly been blessed by many people who worked with fig parrots many years before I became interested and who have been a great help to me. In particular, my thanks to Scott and Cindy Chappell. ➤

Photo by John Pruitt



*Male Edwards's Fig Parrot. This rainbow colored small parrot has a chance in aviculture now that more has been learned about its care and feeding.*