

Of all our available pairs, at least 11 have laid, but the majority of chicks hatched could not be raised successfully beyond the first week. On pairs that refuse to accept live food or a more enriched, soft food mixture, the chicks are doomed to an early demise. Only the few pairs that choose to accept the foods containing the essential nutrition sufficient to cover the needs of the young can raise young successfully.

Our successful pair managed to hatch both chicks, one of which was neglected and died on the second day. The first chick was raised by its parents until about 12 days, when it was suddenly abandoned. It was then removed for handrearing and placed in a commercial parrot brooder at 92° and fed with the same lory rearing mixture, consisting of NEKTON LORI (Nekton Produkte - Germany), with additional rearing mix consisting of ground seeds and pulverized sweet corn.

It developed rapidly. The chick was fully fledged at about forty days and it resembled the adult female in coloration, with a grayish-horn colored beak.

This young bird was initially thought to be a female, but after approximately two years, some spots of orange appeared on its breast and the answer was obvious! In fact, prior to its transformation, I had observed "her" copulating with another adult female, but I thought that females may exhibit male copulatory behavior as well. But, I was wrong and that thought now seems to be remote.

The secret to raising and breeding fig parrots successfully is relatively straightforward (I refrain to mention easy, because it is far from it), and is greatly influenced by the diet, especially the quality of the food provided. Also, adult birds would have to be conditioned to consume suitable diets, containing adequate nutrition. Avoid diets that are too oily and fattening in order to prevent obesity. Suitable protein rich foods must be introduced at the onset of rearing chicks, to ensure success. Never provide a monotonous diet consisting of one kind of food item, always provide variety; also, do not forget the sensitive nature and requirements of these fig parrots, which are very prone to stress. Keep in mind, too, that this species and other members of its genus and of the genus *Psittaculirostris* require higher levels of vitamin K and possibly dietary zinc for successful maintenance and reproduction in captivity. ➤

Successful breeding of the Orange-breasted Fig Parrot at Loro Parque

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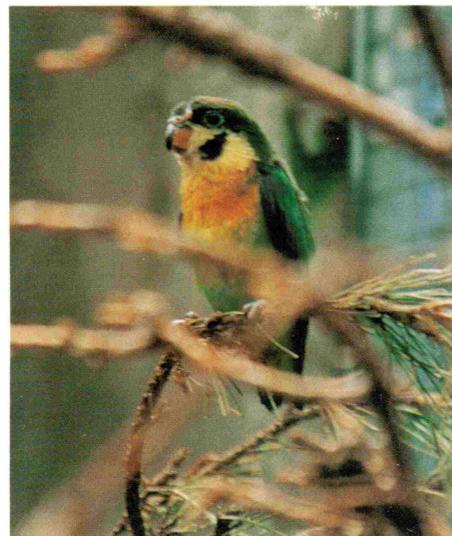
The Orange-breasted Fig Parrot *Opopsitta gulielmiterti* occurs naturally on New Guinea, including Salawati in the Papuan islands, and also the Aru islands, Indonesia. Seven different subspecies have been described, although this figure may be in need of a slight revision. Perhaps the most distinctive subspecies is *Opopsitta gulielmiterti amabilis*, which occurs from the Northeastern region of New Guinea. This subspecies differs very noticeably from other subspecies by the fact that the adult male bird lacks the distinctive orange coloration of the breast and upper abdomen, which is instead a pale yellow. The male bird also lacks the black marking on the ear coverts that is usually present in other subspecies. The female bird by comparison has the black ear coverts and also the rich orange breast and upper abdomen coloration, making sex identification for this subspecies the reverse of the nominate description and most of the other subspecies.

The Orange-breasted Fig Parrot has been represented in the Loro Parque collection by the subspecies *O.g.amabilis* for several years, although in recent years these birds have not been on public display but are accommodated in one of our off-exhibition breeding areas. One pair of *O.g.amabilis* managed to successfully hatch and rear a chick during the early part of the 1994 breeding season. Some of the notes recorded are given as follows;

The breeding cage is situated in an off exhibit area which is not accessible to members of the visiting public. The breeding cage measures 2.93 m. (10 ft.) in length, 1.00 m. (3 ft.) in width and 2.36 m. (8 ft.) in height. One end of the cage is covered and has solid walls, while the middle and far end of the cage is of a more open wire framework design. The birds do have visibility into the adjoining cages, but the pair of

O.g.amabilis in question are not housed within visibility distance of other *Opopsitta* pairs.

The same dietary mixture is fed to the adult pair twice a day throughout the year, once early in the morning and again during the middle of the afternoon. A main dish provides a mixture of various chopped fruits and vegetables, alfalfa, palm fruits and fresh figs. A second dish contains a commercial dietary pellet, a mixture of small dry millet, niger and canary seeds, a canine pellet, a special supplement cake which is made at Loro Parque and live food in the form of mealworms. Throughout the year the diet is supplemented with a general vitamin/mineral powder, plus a small amount of additional Vitamin K in powder form. When the time is approaching for chicks to hatch then the diet is supplemented daily with *Lactobacillus* in powder form sprinkled over the food, which is continued until the chicks have fledged. I have now used similar dietary guide lines to these to successfully rear both species of *Opopsitta* and all three species of *Psittaculiro-*



A newly fledged chick of the Orange-breasted Fig Parrot *Opopsitta gulielmiterti* at Loro Parque, Tenerife, Canary Islands.

Photo by Roger Sweeney

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iris in captivity.

A choice of three different nesting sites was provided within the cage. A small conventional shaped nest box, an Lshaped nest box, and a third nest made from a hollowed section of palm log. In this case, the pair selected the conventional style nest box which measured 30 cm. (12 in.) in height and 15 cm. (6 in.) in both width and length. The entrance hole had a diameter of 5.5 cm. (2 in.). This nest box is situated in the more secluded end of the cage, while the palm log and the Lshaped nest box were located at the opposite end of the cage which is more exposed. Wood shavings are used exclusively to provide a nesting medium within the nest box.

On 23 February 1994, the nest box was inspected and was found to contain two eggs. These eggs were incubated for the full term by the parent birds and were not unduly disturbed for inspection until they had become overdue, on the removal of the eggs from the nest box they were examined and found to be infertile.

The next breeding attempt followed in April when the female again began brooding and the nest box was inspected and was found to contain an egg on 18 April. Two eggs were laid in this clutch which were incubated without any cause for concern in the behaviour of the adult pair. Care was taken during this time to keep any disturbance of the cage to a minimum. On 12 May one chick hatched, the second egg failed to hatch and was removed from the nest box.

The single chick seemed strong and developed well with no specific problems being encountered throughout its rearing period. The nest box was inspected periodically, but this was done with great care to cause as little disturbance to the adult pair as possible. At the age of 15 days a closed leg band was fitted to the leg of the chick, which, by this time, was very strong. The parent birds seemed to be unconcerned by the handling of the chick. The chick first left the nest box on 17 June 1994, although for several subsequent days it returned to the nest box for short

periods of time throughout the day. On its emergence from the nest box the chick resembled the adult female bird in appearance apart from having generally duller plumage coloration, lighter coloration on the sides of the mandible, and by the breast and upper abdomen coloration being a lighter, more yellowish, shade of orange. The chick continued to be fed by the adult birds for some time after it had fledged, but was first seen to eat by itself five days after it had emerged from the nest box.

The population of *O.g.amabilis* at Loro Parque is now growing each year and it is our intention to form new pairs from the birds that are reared. It is also our intention that a pair of *Opopsitta guillemerti* will soon be placed upon public display in the parque, once a new area of aviaries has been constructed especially for fig parrots (*Opopsitta* and *Psittaculirostris* genera) that will allow all five species to be housed and bred on public display together.

In the case of *O.g.amabilis*, great effort will be needed by those working with this bird in aviculture if it is to become established in captivity. To date, very few successful captive breeding results have been recorded. Continued success at Loro Parque will soon require that new blood lines be introduced into our breeding group and I would certainly be interested in communication with any aviculturists who are successfully breeding this species. We would be willing to undertake blood line exchanges of captive bred birds.

There can be few more interesting and captivating psittacines to maintain than the Orange-breasted Fig Parrot. Its beauty, personality and intricate behaviour provide endless fascination and every effort must be made to ensure that the very limited number of birds that are currently maintained in aviculture are properly cared for and can be formed into a potentially selfsustaining captive population. This is a realistic goal, but it will require close cooperation and communication between everyone working with this species. I would welcome any correspondence from other aviculturists maintaining this species at present. ➔



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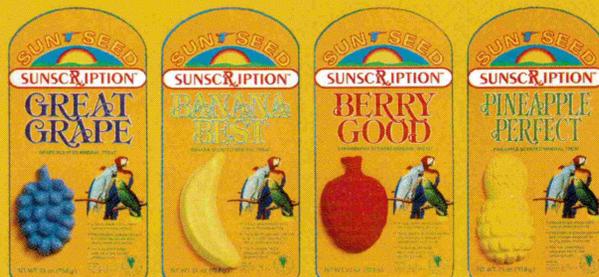
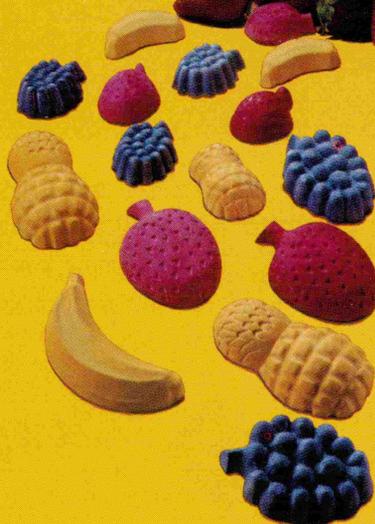
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