

Possible First U.S. Breeding of Blue-winged Parrotlet Subspecies

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POSSIBLE FIRST BREEDING

This article describes what may be a first U.S. breeding of the Blue-winged Parrotlet subspecies *Forpus xanthopterygius flavissimus*. If you are aware of this bird being bred anywhere in the U.S.A. prior to 22 November 1995, please contact the AFA Business Office with details and verification.

Every once in a while something actually turns out to be better than expected. Such was the case in April 1995 when Robert and I went to the San Jose airport to pick up a shipment of more than 40 pairs of parrotlets. Although we knew we had obtained Blue-wingeds, to our astonishment, we found we had a very distinct subspecies that we had never before seen in the United States.

The nominate species of the Blue-winged Parrotlet, *Forpus xanthopterygius*, is found primarily in Argentina. In addition, there are five subspecies of Blue-wingeds that are found in Columbia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

These large parrotlets are five and one half inches in length and weigh 35 to 40 grams. Mostly deep green, the males have deep violet-blue wings, backs, and rumps. Females have light yellow-green feathers between the eyes. Both males and females have gray beaks and legs. Also, these birds have very large eyes compared to other parrotlets.

The surprise subspecies we received in the shipment is *Forpus xanthopterygius flavissimus* which is found in Brazil. This beautiful bright emerald-green bird has a striking butter-yellow face, cheeks, and forehead. Males have brilliant lilac-blue feathers on the wings, rump, and back which is much softer and brighter than found in

the nominates. Females have lime-green underbellies and evergreen wings. These parrotlets also have gray beaks and legs but are smaller than the nominate species. *Flavissimus* are approximately five inches in length and 30 grams in weight.



Handfeeding a ten-day-old baby *F. x. flavissimus*.

Once we got the birds home and into the quarantine room, we had a chance to examine them more thoroughly. All new birds are given a physical examination which includes a visual inspection, weighing, cultured, gram stained, a psittacosis test is run, and the bird is checked for megabacteria. Supplemental psittacosis tests are done after 30 days and prior to their release from quarantine at 90 days. We also record each bird's band number, sex, mate's band number, the date we obtained the bird, and from whom they were purchased. Any unusual characteristics or observations are also noted. Any birds in distress are imme-

diately isolated, placed on heat, and taken to our avian veterinarian.

After quarantine, the birds were set up in our indoor aviary. This building is heated during the winter (and foggy summer days) to keep the temperature at or above 60°F with 50% relative humidity. During the summer it is not air-conditioned so it can get as warm as 90°F and the humidity as low as 8%. It also has an air filtration and artificial lighting is on 13 hours a day.

Each pair was placed in a wooden cage 2 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 18 inches high with wire fronts and bottom. All parrotlets tend to breed best when they can hear each other but not see each other. Also, the wood has the added bonus of keeping fruits, vegetables, and droppings from being thrown into a neighbor's cage. This cuts down on the risk of spreading disease. A wooden nest box is filled with untreated pine shavings and mounted on the front of the cage. Natural wood perches are provided to encourage chewing and foot exercise.

Since parrotlets are one of the few birds that eat both pellets and seeds, we give ours both. We blend our own seed mix from a safflower-based large hookbill mix, remove the peanuts in the shell, and add extra hemp seed and black oil sunflower. Parrotlets, unlike cockatoos and Amazons, need extra fat and protein when breeding and feeding babies. They also have Petamine™, cuttlebone, and mineral block available at all times. Water is biologically filtered and provided in glass tube fountains.

The bulk of the diet is made up of fruits, vegetables, and greens. They are also fed cooked beans, rice, or pasta, egg food, and whole-grain breads daily. Vitamins and powdered calcium are sprinkled over the soft foods; Spirulina™ and wheat grass powders are mixed into the egg food and are alternately given several times a week.

Within a few weeks, several pairs began exploring the nest boxes and by November 1, 1995, we had our first egg. The hen proceeded to lay one every other day until a clutch of six was reached. She brooded them from day one. She was dutifully fed by the male and only exited the nest box to defecate. After four days, the first egg

candled fertile. Subsequently, all the eggs proved to be fertile.

On November 22nd, I peeked into the nest box to find a tiny, naked, pink baby less than an inch long. Babies continued to hatch every other day. Although the parents took excellent care of them, we pulled the oldest two when the fifth and sixth babies hatched so as not to over-burden the parents. Usually we try to wait until babies are at least 10 days old unless it is large clutch or the parents are having problems.

The babies were placed in a basket on clean pine shavings and put in a brooder set at 90°F. They were fed every four hours beginning at 7:00 A.M. and continuing until 11:00 P.M. Since they were less than 10 days old, they were given a supplemental 2:00 A.M. feeding. If they were older this would not be necessary.

We happen to believe that hand-fed parrotlets make the best breeders because they are not afraid of people. If these birds are placed with others and not cuddled and played with, they will know that they are birds and have no trouble producing healthy babies.

Each baby was closed-banded with an identification number which was recorded along with its parents' identification numbers, date egg was laid, hatch date, date baby was pulled, and sex. Babies are weighed each morning prior to their first feeding to monitor weight gain. When the bird is eventually sold, the date and buyer's name will also be recorded.

Like all baby parrotlets, the Blue-wingeds grew rapidly. Their eyes were open by 10 days; ears at two weeks. Sex could be determined by three weeks and they were almost fully feathered at four. By five weeks they were beginning to nibble on pellets, seeds, and millet spray and by six weeks were completely weaned.

Since then, we have had several pair produce babies and are setting up the second generation of unrelated birds. Not only is it important to continue to retain the purity of this subspecies but also to keep the strongest genetic stock possible. With careful management and a little luck, this gorgeous subspecies will be around for a long time. 



Male Blue-winged subspecies Forpus xanthopterygius flavissimus showing unique colors.



Male Blue-winged subspecies Forpus xanthopterygius flavissimus showing the colors of the underwing.



The female F. x. flavissimus showing the underwing.