Breeding the Green-cheeked Conure
by Davis A. Koffron, Phoenix, Arizona

Over the years I have been privileged to keep and raise many different types of birds, from finches to gamebirds and a variety of hookbills. While they all have special qualities and interesting behaviors, the Green-cheeked Conure remains one of my favorites. Their bold nature, unbridled curiosity, boundless energy and playful disposition makes them stand out as either an aviary bird or as a pet. Green-cheeks always seem to have important bird things to do.

As an aviary bird they are easy to care for, quite willing to breed and frequently raise more than one clutch per season. As a pet their size, willingness to bond with their keeper, ability to learn tricks along with a quiet voice make them ideal for most people.

Our birds are kept outdoors year round without any supplemental heating or cooling. In Phoenix the annual temperatures range from over 110°F in summer to below freezing on the coldest winter nights. Daily temperatures can vary as much as 40 to 50 degrees. Once acclimatized, the birds are very hardy and show little reaction to these temperature variations. Green-cheeks love to bathe and frequently get drenched when the temperature is too cold for my comfort.

Our birds are kept in suspended cages made from 1/2" by 1" welded wire and are 4 feet long by 2 feet high and 2 feet wide. Two natural perches are provided in each cage, one on each end of the cage, one high and one low to maximize flying distance. Food is provided in a flat pan located in an extended portion on the front of the cage. This stops the birds from sitting over their food dish. Water is supplied in bowls situated in a small cage added to the side of the main cage. This is located approximately two feet from the food dish thereby greatly reducing the amount of food transferred from the food dish to the water bowl.

In the wild, birds need to defend their nest from predators, as well as other birds looking for nesting sites. For these reasons, small, dark nests with entrance holes that the bird can barely squeeze through are preferred. We attempt to provide these conditions in our nest boxes. The boxes are made out of 3/4" five ply CDX plywood and have an inside measurement of 6" x 8" x 11" deep. (In a cooler environment I would make the box about three to five inches deeper and reduce the eight inch dimension to six inches.) A two inch diameter entrance hole is located near a top outside corner. The inside of the boxes are stained with a dark brown latex stain. A four inch awning extends over the entrance hole stopping direct sunlight from penetrating the box. The awning, stain, size and location of the entrance hole all combine to reduce the amount of light reaching the nesting chamber. I believe this makes the birds feel more secure. A wire ladder is fastened inside the box to assist the birds in entering and exiting though I doubt if this is really necessary. Nesting material consists of two inches of tightly packed pine shavings or chips. Avoid the "curly" cut shavings as they do not pack well, allowing eggs and or chicks to get buried.

The birds are fed once daily in the morning when they get about 1/4 cup of dry seed mix consisting of the usual types of seeds that are fed to small hookbills. I do add some dog kibble and alfalfa pellets to the seed mix. The seed mix is varied during the year depending upon the weather. The amount of fatty seed is increased dur-

A new mutation of the Green-cheeked Conure is a sex-linked Fallow mutation. This is the best opinion of mutation experts. No matter what this dilute mutation is, it is certainly beautiful.
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ing the colder months and reduced during the hot summer. In addition they receive 1/4 cup of a soft (or wet) mix that consists of the following; 1/3 germinated seeds (sunflower, safflower, buckwheat, milo, barley, wheat, oats, corn, popcorn), 1/3 germinated legumes (varies with availability but can include garbanzo, lima, pinto, mung, small white, kidney and great northern beans; maple, black-eyed, green, Austrian peas and lentils) and 1/3 grated vegetables (including carrots, beets, rutabagas, turnips, yams, zucchini, broccoli, cucumbers, radishes, chopped chard, collards, spinach or other greens. This mix varies daily).

The soft mix is prepared in the following manner. The dry seeds and legumes are combined in a ratio of three parts seeds to two parts legumes. This produces approximately equal portions when germinated.

Day 1: Seeds and legumes are soaked for about one hour in one gallon of water with two tablespoons of bleach. They are then rinsed well and soaked for the rest of the day (approximately 10 to 12 hours) in two gallons of water with two tablespoons of bleach and one teaspoon of calcium propionate. The ingredients are then rinsed and allowed to drain overnight.

Day 2: The soaked mix is put into a large plastic tub and left alone.

Day 3: The germinated mix is rinsed well and left to drain for approximately one half hour. After draining, any supplement is added. I use Vionate vitamins and Tri-calcium phosphate. The vegetables are then grated and mixed in. I have been using this method with only slight variation for about nine years now and have never had the problem of the germinated seeds or legumes spoiling or getting moldy. If you wish to grow longer sprouts, the mix should be rinsed and drained more often. I would also use the bleach and calcium propionate during these rinses. Remember that temperature also plays an important part in how well seeds germinate and how quickly they spoil. Our mix is germinated between 70 to 80 degrees.

In addition to the above, seasonal fruits are given several times a week. Using the above methods we have been very successful in raising many types of pyhurras as well as other hookbills. I must add, however, that I am not a nutritionist and make no claims as to the overall quality of this diet.

Several years ago an unusual looking Green-cheeked Conure was spotted in a friend’s aviary. Subsequently the bird, its siblings and parents were placed in my aviary. The bird proved to be a new mutation that we are currently calling a fallow. I must admit that I am not a mutation expert and over the years the experts have differed in their opinions regarding what this mutation should be called. Some have said that because it is sex-linked it is a cinnamon while others have steadfastly said that due to certain color changes it is a fallow. To be safe, it should probably just be called a dilute. I have also been told that a blue mutation of the Green-cheeked Conure has appeared in Europe.

When all is said and done, I think one has to go a long way to find another bird with all the desirable qualities found in the Green-cheeked Conure. I highly recommend this bird for novices and experienced breeders alike.
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