Breeding the Indian Verditer Flycatcher
Muscicapa thalassina

by Martin Vince
Sedgwick County Zoo, Wichita, Kansas

There are three flycatchers commonly known as verditer flycatchers: the Philippine, Nilgiri and of course the most familiar of all, the Indian Verditer Flycatcher. A denizen of lightly wooded, fairly open country, the Indian Verditer is a lively and attractive bird earning its living by hawking insects from its usual perch of a bare twig.

Measuring only about 15 cm (6 in.) the two races of the Indian Verditer, M. t. thalassina and M. t. thalassoides occupy a large range, stretching from the Himalayas to Indochina, Thailand and Malaysia as well as Sumatra and Borneo. The entire plumage of the male bird is a bright green-blue, with an even brighter color on the head and throat although the wings and tail are somewhat darker. The loral area is made prominent by a small black patch and the under-tail covert is highlighted by a dirty white fringe. The female resembles the male but is duller in color throughout and small white spots pepper the throat and sides of the chin.

Once acclimatised the Verditer will prove reasonably hardy, but will certainly need heated winter accommodation if kept in an outside flight. The diet is fairly straightforward: I prefer a fine grade insectile mix to which I add various live foods such as meal worms, wax moth larvae, small crickets, blow flies and chrysalises. Approximately 15% of the total diet is made up of live food.

Here at Sedgwick County Zoo, our pair of Verditors are housed in an aviary measuring 3 m x 1 m x 2 m high (10 ft. x 3 ft. x 6 ft. high). It is not an outdoor flight but just one of a complex of aviaries contained within a purposely built “off exhibit” facility. The building’s temperature is thermostatically controlled and the air humidified by means of a mister system programmed to come on three times a week for a duration of five minutes. During the summer the afternoons temperature of the building will rise to about 28°C (82°F) and the humidity level will be about 65 percent. During the winter the building will get no cooler than about 16°C (60°F).

In August 1993, our pair of flycatchers successfully fledged one youngster. Their aviary was not heavily planted but merely decorated with two hanging baskets and a 1 m (3 ft.) high ficus tree. This particular pair has been in captivity for several years and has therefore become quite steady in the company of people. A more nervous or newly imported pair would certainly benefit from a thickly planted aviary, especially since in the wild the verditer flycatcher retreats to denser forests to breed.

Nest building began on June 22, and lasted for 13 days. A substantial nest was built within an empty half open-fronted box measuring 15 cm x 15 cm x 23 cm high (6 in. x 6 in. 9 in.). The nest itself was a full 7 cm (3 in.) deep and comprised: sphagnum moss, pieces of fine string, leaf fragments and fine grasses. However, the major ingredient by far was wool. Bison (Bison bison) wool found scattered throughout the zoo’s North American Prairie exhibit was used by the flycatchers to build almost 60% of their nest. Interestingly, the birds did appear to discriminate between nesting materials that reflected different levels of brightness. The whiter colored wools and plant fibers were repeatedly ignored in favor of the duller shades such as brown and green. Presumably brighter materials are considered too conspicuous to risk the safety of the nest.

Throughout the nest building process and indeed the entire nesting period, the female was extremely adept at concealing her work. Only once did I catch her red-handed and in the process of carrying (bison) wool to the nesting box. But even then when she saw me and realizing she could do nothing to disguise her activity, she froze, looking as guilty as it’s possible for a bird to look while trying to remain nonchalant. Not once did I actually see her take nesting material to the box, but her absence made her very conspicuous and it was therefore easy to surmise her labors. While she worked busily the male appeared to play no part in the nest building, although he would stand guard and alert her to the approach of danger. At such times the very rapid, loud rattle of a song was uttered. Quite a pleasant sound, this appears to be the only voice the verditer flycatcher has; I have never been able to detect any kind of a call-note.

A clutch can consist of anything from three to five eggs and sometimes a pair may even only produce two. This pair laid three eggs, almost immediately after the nest was complete.
Fig Parrots, No Longer a Problem--If

by John Pruitt, Apex, North Carolina

Fig 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, Salvador'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 he 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 successfully 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 Glutane 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 Glutane) 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 Glutenate, not Potassium Chloride.

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