

Breeding the Fairy Lorikeet

(*Charmosyna pulchella pulchella*)

by Dick Schroeder
Inglewood, California

This little gem is every bit as exquisite as its name implies. Being primarily red below and dark green on the upper parts, it gives the impression of a miniature Stella's Lorikeet (*C. papou stellae*), although at 7" (18 cm) its less than half the Stella's size. The rump is blue. The thighs are purple-black as is the nape and the top of the head. The tail is green at the base, red in the middle, and yellow at the tip, with bright yellow on the underside. The red breast is streaked with bright yellow. There is a sub-species (*C. pulchella rothschildi*) which has a broad green band on the upper breast, as well as the yellow streaks. As with the red Stellas, they are dimorphic, the females having yellow on the sides of the rump.

Their distribution in the wild is in the mountains of New Guinea, particularly from the Vogelkop, West Irian,



The subspecies *Charmosyna pulchella pulchella* was first reproduced in captivity by Dick Schroeder on October 10, 1989. This photo shows the adult (left) with a youngster.

east to the Huon Peninsula and southern Papua.

The genus *Charmosyna* has always held some of my favorite psittacines. They are among the most colorful of all parrots, as well as having a certain dignity that's hard to describe unless you've experienced it. So, in July of 1988, when I heard that Fairy Lori-



This photo shows the subspecies *Charmosyna pulchella rothschildi*. The difference between these subspecies is that the *C.p. rothschildi* has a large, green chest patch that is lacking in *C.p. pulchella*. *C.p. rothschildi* was first bred by the San Diego Zoo.

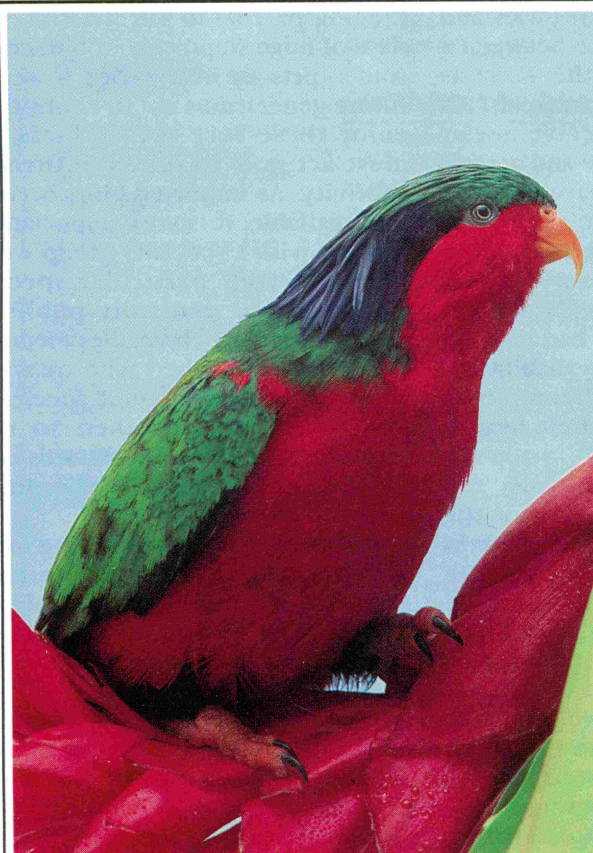
keets were soon to be available from a local importer, I had to have some.

I purchased nine birds (all he had). They included both subspecies. After an observation/quarantine period in my garage, they were set up in three pairs, two pairs of *C.p. rothschildi* and one pair of the nominate race. There were three extra males.

They were all housed in identical cages, being 2'x2'x4' with 6" square x 10" deep nest boxes. The entrance holes were 2" in diameter. These units were stacked three high and were originally planned for holding cages for babies, and not intended for breeding, but you know how that goes when space is limited.

The diet of the Fairies is the same as most of our other *Charmosynas* — Avico Lory Life Nectar and fresh fruit. The Stellas will eat the Lory Life dry diet just fine (with the addition of nectar), but the Red-flanked (*C. placensis*) and the Striated (*C. multi-striata*) seldom touch the dry diet. In fact, they seldom eat the fruit although they are fond of grapes. I feel that nectar is a necessity with the smaller members of this genus.

The first Fairies to go to nest for us were a pair of *C. rothschildi*. They laid in July of 1989. Two eggs were laid, which is typical of lorries. Having not bred this species before, we weren't sure of the exact hatch date. As luck would have it, the first chick hatched the morning that Maurine and I were leaving for the AFA convention in Phoenix, Arizona. My in-laws were staying at our house to care for the birds and other critters. I didn't want to burden them with the extra worry of a newly hatched chick. I knew that the regular amount of



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food would be plenty for the pair as well as the chick(s?) during the week that we would be gone. We returned as scheduled to find the chick seemingly doing well and the other egg infertile. The next afternoon found the baby dead. There was no food in its crop. It would have been a simple matter to pull the chick for hand rearing but since we had no intentions of making a pet out of it, we let the parents give it a try. Its always a disappointment when something like that happens, but I feel that if they nested once, they'll do it again, hopefully with brighter results.

On September 13th, 1989 I noted in my records that neither of the *C. pulchella* pair had been seen out of the nest for the previous two days, although some of the nectar had been consumed. On September 15th, one egg was laid, followed by the second on the 17th. We estimated the hatch date at October 10th, 1989. On October 11th, I check the nest during the morning feeding, as both birds were out of the box. I discovered a chick just kicking the last of the shell free. Its down was still wet. On October 12th, neither bird was seen out of the box, although the normal amount of food was taken. On October 15th, the other egg still hadn't hatched, so I figured one was all we would get.

At nine days of age, the afternoon feeding (I feed twice a day to the pairs that have chicks or eat all of the morning offering) revealed a chick with a crop so full as to pop. One adult or the other was always in the nest. They also started to eat more fruit at this time, although nectar was still their favorite. They chose grapes first, followed by apple, pear, and papaya. The chick was banded at this time.

The nest was checked at least once a day, usually during the morning feeding, as both birds would be out on the perch at that time. At the first sign of an empty crop, the chick would be pulled for hand feeding. The adults spent less time in the box during this period. In fact, when they were seen engaged in mutual preening on several occasions I was sure we had lost the chick.

By November 10th, it was apparent that the chick was a female as her yellow rump patches were quite evident. In fact, she was pretty well feathered at this time. Food consumption had increased greatly also. The nectar was replenished every afternoon.

The baby left the nest on November

30th. She was 50 days old. Unlike the parent, she had no trace of yellow on the breast; in fact, the breast had a broad green band, much wider than that of *C.p. rothschildi*. The green on the back extended clear up the neck and to the crown of the head. There was no break at the neck. This area is purplish in the adults. The beak was dark at first but began changing to orange in a couple of days. This may be due to the coloring agents in the Avico Lory Life nectar, as I've seen it in my Ornate Lories (*Trichoglossus ornatus*) as well. The baby is well cared for by the adults, and is usually sandwiched between the parents on the perch. All three return to the nest box at night even though the chick has been eating on its own for several weeks now.

At the time of this writing, late December 1989, the proven pair of *C. rothschildi* are nesting again. It looks as if this species may prove to be easy to reproduce in captivity. If you hold any of these feathered jewels, please be aware of the subspecies so as not to hybridize. Who knows when (and if) we'll see any more imported and we need to be very careful with what we have. ●



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