

the Emergence of a Snowflake

A Possible U.S. First Breeding of the Albino Pacific Parrotlet

*an interview with Eric Antheunisse and Kevin & Julie Stang
by Dale R. Thompson, Lemon Cove, CA*

There are seven parrotlets found in the *Forpus* genus. All are found in South America except for two species; the first being the Mexican Parrotlet and the second being the nominate race of the Spectacled Parrotlet. The first is obviously found in Mexico while the second barely enters Central America through Eastern Panama.

The most common and most popular parrotlet in captivity is the Pacific or Celestial Parrotlet, *Forpus coelestis*, which originates from the Pacific (hence its name) side of the Andes in South America. They are found in western Ecuador through northwest Peru.

Even though the parrotlet is not the smallest parrot in the world (the Pigmy Parrots takes that role), it is the smallest parrot found in captivity. Whereas the Pigmy Parrot has difficulty even lasting 24 hours in captivity, the parrotlets have taken well to reproducing in captivity. Even though the parrotlets are around five to six inches in total length, they appear even smaller when observed in person. Sexual dimorphism is present in the adults but, for many newcomers, some of the females can be confusing as to which species they belong.

The immediate difference between the sexes of the Pacific Parrotlets is in the eye streaks. The male has a cobalt-blue streak of feathers extending from

the eye while the female has an emerald-green eye streak

With the large numbers of Pacific Parrotlets being successfully bred in captivity, there have been several mutations that have appeared. The following are well documented: Dark-eyed (American) Yellow, Fallow, Blue, Lutino, Pastel and Cinnamon. There are several other dilutes (in addition to the Pastel and Cinnamon) appearing but they have not been named and their genetics must be more perfectly determined. All the above are recessive in their genetics.

The Albino is a combination of two other colors (Lutino and Blue) which is why it was not covered in the previous paragraph. Soon (they are probably now occurring) there will be Cinnamon-blues, etc. There appears to be two different types of Yellows; one in the States developed by Rainer Erhart, and another Yellow in Europe that retains some of its green feathers. This latter bird may in fact be another type of dilute mutation.

The Blue mutation of the Pacific Parrotlet is a beautiful powder blue in color which is why it is so well liked in aviculture. The males retain their cobalt feathers which even enhance the mutation and gives it that two-tone look that is so desired. The females are softer in their blue tones and are almost turquoise in coloration. The front of the body is baby blue and this

contrasts nicely with the dark blue back.

The Lutino mutation of the Pacific Parrotlet has the red-eye and the face of the male appears to have a deeper yellow than the rest of the bird. This mutation is far less common in the U.S. than the blue.

When any mutation occurs, the bird is sometimes rather small. When this happens, one must out-cross to a normal colored bird to acquire the correct size. Long-term inbreeding can even cause infertility or problems of poor egg laying. It appears that the Blue mutation Pacific Parrotlets coming in from Europe have been outcrossed as they are not only good-sized birds but have been reproducing very well.

Since both the Blue and Lutino mutations in the Pacific Parrotlet are recessive in their genetics, an Albino offspring can be acquired very simply. There are many combinations that can be bred to acquire the Albino, even two Lutino parents. They would both have to be split to blue and this was, indeed, the parentage of the Albino Pacific Parrotlet occurring in the aviaries of Eric Antheunisse.

The parrotlets are housed in individual pairs in cages measuring 18 inches x 18 inches x 30 inches wide. A vertical wooden nest box measuring 6 inches x 8 inches x 11 inches in depth are placed on the front of each cage with a wire latter extending down from a 1¼ inch entrance hole to the shavings below. A solid partition is placed between each of the breeding pairs so they cannot see each other.

The parrotlets are fed a balanced pelleted diet daily in an open bowl along with a water dish. Automatic waterers are not used. Because parrotlets enjoy bathing in their watering dish it is changed as needed. Tube waterers are not used.

Most of the mutation parrotlets are allowed to rear their own young just as do the normally colored ones. When a pair of Lutino Pacific Parrotlets laid five fertile eggs and they began to hatch, it was assumed that they were all Lutino as they all had red eyes. It was not known then that this pair was split to blue. They began hatching around October 20, 1997. When the first or largest baby broke its pinfeathers, its

Photo by Kevin & Julie Stang



The first albino Pacific Parrotlet produced in American aviculture with two of its lutino siblings.



Photo by Kevin & Julie Stang

Handfeeding parrots as small as Pacific Parrotlets is not only time consuming but exciting, especially when they are albino and lutino.

Photo by Eric Antheunisse



The European breeders are noted for their success breeding lutino, blue, and albino Pacific Parrotlets. The albino is produced by a combination of lutino and blue genetic factors.

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Advertisers Index

Absolutely Aussie.....	5
Aves Communications.....	26
Avicultural Consultation Service.....	9
Avocet Manufacturing, Ltd.....	inside F.C.
Beakers Graphic Designs.....	12
Cedar Hill Bird Enterprises.....	31
Cuttlebone Plus	13
Everybody's Bird Mart (Pomona, CA).....	39
Fantastic Feathers.....	33
Goodman's Aviary.....	33
Grubco.....	35
Hagen, Rolf C. (USA) Corp.-Tropicana.....	15
Hawkeye Parrots	20
Humidair Incubator Company	19
Lima's Exotic Birds	33
L/M Animal Farms	inside B.C.
L & M Bird Leg Bands	30
Lyon Electric Company, Inc.	37
Magnolia Bird Farm	31
Out of the Blue Aviaries.....	32
Phoenix Cage Co.	16
Rainbow Gardens.....	31
Red Bird Products, Inc.	12
Sun Seed Co. Inc.	Back Cover

feathers emerged brilliantly white in color instead of yellow. When the bird showed a good amount of white feathers, the parents outright killed the largest bird but did not attack the four smaller babies that were still pink and did not show their color. It was immediately decided that the remainder of the birds be removed for handfeeding.

Kevin and Julie Stang took over the duties of handfeeding the four remaining babies. The babies were only a few grams in weight, with the smallest being approximately 4 grams. They were graduated in size as parrotlets can hatch from 18 hours or more apart from each other. During the feeding process, the babies can even become more unequal in size as the parents may feed the largest babies more food than the smallest.

The babies were kept in one tub to retain as much heat as possible. Single chicks seldom do well by themselves at a very young age but within a group of babies the combined body mass generates and retains heat much better.

They were placed in a brooder maintained at 93° F. At the beginning, the babies were given six to seven feedings per day. In fact, the largest baby in the group could hold only 1 cc of formula during one feeding. Exact (8% fat) handfeeding formula was used along with Instant Ounces. They were fed every two hours for there first two days and then the frequency was gradually reduced. Even at 21 days, though, the babies were still on five feedings per day. The tiny chicks were fed from 3:00 A.M. until 11:00 P.M. at night. Both Kevin and Julie took turns with the handfeeding duties as one person would soon be exhausted with this horrendous schedule. Even so, the split schedule took its toll.

The young parrotlets began to show feather color at around two weeks of age. It was impossible to guess beforehand what color the babies would be, as their pin feathers did not show any indication of color (yellow or white). It seemed that the pin feathers emerged directly out of the body and immediately showed color.

The third baby of the remaining offspring (total of four) turned out to be an Albino. So, if the complete clutch


had of survived, the first and the fourth baby would have been Albinos. The remaining offspring were obviously Lutino.

Weaning of the Albino and Lutino Parrotlets was just as one would wean a Budgie. It is simple if one handfeeds them correctly with no stunting. As with many weaning parrots, spray millet was used to assist them during the weaning process. Most young parrots and parakeets love this "food on a stick." After this, the complete weaning process was easy and the birds were weaned onto the same vegetable and pelleted diet the parents are given. The Albino, when weaned, was brilliantly white as snow — like a living snowflake.

The parents of these birds immediately went back on eggs with five of seven eggs being fertile. With the many pairs of mutation Pacific Parrotlets that Mr. Eric Antheunisse has bred, the Lutinos, Blues, Pastels and more, we are assured to see several additional mutations to follow in the near future.

I was informed that Antheunisse already has the Blue Pastels being produced. What an endless amount of mutations there are out there waiting to be developed. The possibilities of new mutations for the Pacific Parrotlets are endless, following the path of the Indian Ring-necked Parakeet. Mr. Antheunisse informed me that when he visited Europe in November, 1997, he observed many other new Pacific Parrotlet mutations and their combinations including Blue Fallows, Pies, Yellow-headed Greens (buttercups), and Cobalts just to name a few. We only hope that more and more people reproduce these wonderful little gems.

Eric Antheunisse is a full time aviculturist who has been raising birds for more than 15 years. He also promotes many of the northern California Bird Marts. His knowledge goes far beyond the Pacific Parrotlets. He breeds hundreds of psittacine birds from macaws, cockatoos, Amazons, Africans, Australians, emus and more. He specializes in conures and mutation psittacines. He has large collection of conures with over 30 species including many rare ones. He has developed several gene pools so he can establish some of the rarer species such as the White-eared Conure.

Kevin and Julie Stang have been handfeeding many of Mr. Antheunisse's birds for several years and have always done an excellent job with the birds, even the very tiny ones as referred to in this article. 

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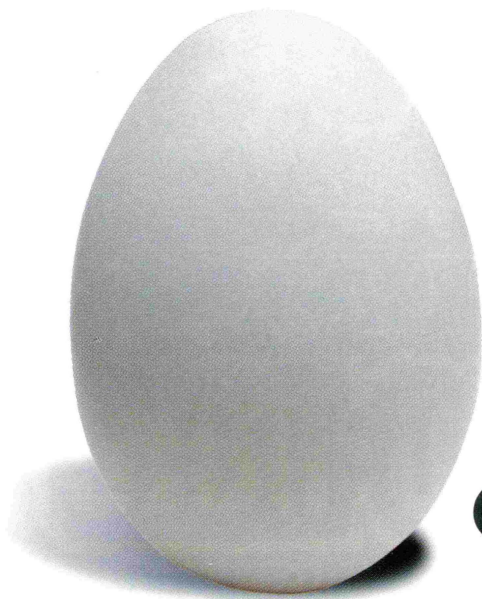
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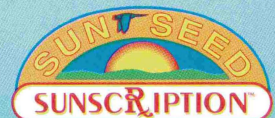
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