

AN ACROBATIC LITTLE EXTROVERT

The Nanday Conure

by
Matthew M. Vriends, Ph.D.
Rocky Point, NY

Tanya M. Heming-Vriends
Cincinnati, Ohio

The sweet-natured conure family comprises 125 or so different species and subspecies. Conures have peaceful temperaments and, no wonder, thrive in large flocks. In captivity they quickly become accustomed to their keepers.

Because of their fast and beautiful flight, it is wise to house them only in very large aviaries and large cages. The minimum measurements, we think, for an aviary should be 9 ft. x 7½ ft. x 9 ft. (3 m x 2½ m x 3 m). An ideal night shelter measures 6 ft. x 9 ft. x 9 ft. (2 m x 3 m x 3 m). Because birds in general, and conures in particular, like to sleep at the highest possible level in an aviary or cage, the night shelter should be built a little taller than the flight or run. Such construction forces the birds to spend the night in the shelter; this is

especially important when cold weather arrives.

The somewhat plumply built Nanday Conure, *Nandayus nenda*,

measuring some 12 inches and with a weight of about 5 ounces, often has difficulty flying upward and also is rather helpless when on the ground. Its song, unfortunately, is loud and not pleasant to hear, and often is mere screaming. The bird is not too well suited for life in a town house or apartment, although some birds, given time, will quiet down.

Our conures, hence also our Nandays, feed on fruit (pears, cherries, bananas, pineapples cut into small pieces, apples, and various berries), millet seed varieties, spray millet, some small (black) sunflower seeds, canary grass seed, oats, buckwheat, safflower, seeding grasses, cooked mung and

other beans and pulses, and boiled corn, fresh vegetables, especially celery, green peas, beans, and strips of carrot, willow branches, cubes of hard cheese, and some live food, such as mealworms, white worms, and ant pupae. The diet is supplemented with wheat bread soaked in water, well-cooked meat or eggs, cooked rice and pasta, unsweetened breakfast cereals and, as treats, bits of tofu, water-packed tuna and unsweetened yogurt. Some of our birds will nibble on pellets and honey sticks. Soft food (commercially available) is always available, not only in the breeding season.

Photo by G. Ebben and M. Vriends



A pair of colorful Nanday Conures. The sexes look alike.



Make your baby birds stronger.

Feed them Embrace™ A new hand-feeding formula that is scientifically proven to promote optimal weight gain and a healthy immune system. For a free 1.25 pound sample of Embrace, visit AFA tradeshow booth #403 or call 800-345-4767. To find out more, visit ZuPreem.com.

ZuPreem®

Conures have been known to attack and eat smaller bird species during migration in the fall. Thus, it follows logically that they should not be placed with smaller birds in the same housing!

Aratinga

Many ornithologists consider the Nanday Conure a member of the genus *Aratinga*; these birds indeed come in many different plumages, and even their size and origin are not common denominators. They all come from the New World, from Mexico south to most parts of South America, and they generally have a clearly defined eye or periophthalmic ring; some even have a fairly broad region. The mandibles, which are never red, are sturdy and thick in build. Unlike the *Brotogeris* species (with such charming species as the Tui parakeet and the Canary-winged Parakeet), the upper and lower mandibles of these birds are not very strong when clamped shut.

The wedge-shaped tail has smaller dimensions than the long, pointed wings. The last four feathers of the wings are noticeably narrow in shape. Most of the species are primarily green in color, and have large heads and beaks. They live either in jungles or mountains (up to the tree line) or in wide open spaces, but they always are together in small troops of 20-30 birds. Most species even stay together in troops during the breeding season; the Nandays we have seen breeding in groups of 12, 18 and 22 pairs; while roosting, which is mainly outside the breeding season, they gather in tree-tops and sometimes several hundred birds may be seen!

Nesting Habits

The birds build their nests in hollows of palm and other trees, fence-post cavities and such, so *Aratinga* species, including the Nandays, should be given roomy nesting boxes in the aviary. Some species even build their nests in rock crevices. Practically all of the *Aratinga* species are partly migrato-

ry. Those birds are, in contrast with their behavior in the wild, not suitable for keeping in a community-type aviary; they will peck at fellow species and any other species that comes too close to them, and their loud, almost constant screeching can be very disturbing to other birds, especially those breeding.

This screeching also makes them poor candidates for keeping indoors, though we have seen several hand-reared *Aratingas* sitting on their perches and talking a great deal. They can indeed be tamed quite quickly and will then be very affectionate. When they are tame, their screeching is often reduced considerably (no doubt some birds are just worse "screechers" than others, anyway), but we think it's still best to keep them in a large aviary. Initially, they probably will have some difficulty adjusting to aviary life, but if they are left alone for the first few weeks, things probably will fall into place well enough. If keeping them on a perch, it should be at least 30" (75 cm) long and about 3 ft. (1 m) long for larger *Aratinga* species, including the Nanday Conure.

The Nanday Conure

Of the many species belonging to the genus *Aratinga*, the Nanday Conure has some morphological differences so it warrants a place in a separate genus, *Nandayus*, although most ornithologists consider it an extremely close member of the *Aratingas*. The species is found in South America, particularly in southeastern Bolivia, Brazil (especially southern Mato Grosso), Paraguay and northern Argentina (Formosa and Chaco); feral populations, however, have become established in Buenos Aires, California, and southern U.S.A.

Both sexes are primarily green with a blackish-blue cap. The light green color is traversed with the black below the eyes. Some blue appears on the throat and upper breast. The flight feathers are bluish black. The tail is olive green with a beautiful bluish-black point; underneath, the tail is a very dark green.

The bird has red thighs, brownish-pink feet, reddish-brown eyes and a blackish-gray bill. The bird's length is 12" to 12 ⁴/₅" (30 to 32 cm); its wings are 5 ¹/₅" to 7 ³/₅" (18 to 19 cm); and its tail 6 ⁴/₅" (17 cm).

Providing that the birds' accommodations are roomy, they will breed quite quickly. The nesting boxes should not be placed too high, because the birds like to sit on top of them and watch the world go by. When the female is sitting on the eggs, the male may sit for hours on top of the nest box. The female lays two to four eggs, and both the male and female will incubate.

During the breeding season Nandays need plentiful amounts of the following: a rich variety of greens, fruits, buds and willow twigs, almost-ripe grain varieties (in the wild, by the way, they are quite damaging to many agricultural efforts and as a result are hunted virtually year-round), corn-on-the-cob, hard-boiled eggs cut into small pieces. Birds should have calcium available to them, including a salt block or cuttlefish bone. If nutritional requirements have been fully taken care of, breeding results will be completely successful – at least that is our experience.

These delightful birds can adjust very well to even a miserable climate: we kept them in the Netherlands in outdoor aviaries even during the winter months although they had a draft-free and dry shelter. Our best results always have been obtained with a fairly roomy aviary housing just one couple.

Hand-fed, domestically raised Nandays are very hard to beat as pets. They are naturally social birds, love to get but also demand attention, preferably 24 hours per day, and get along extremely well with other birds. We have a pet Nanday who is deeply in love with a Celestial (Pacific) Parrotlet; you should see them while preening. Very charming indeed! It's simply impossible to be indifferent about these charmers with their acrobatic moves and manners. 