

One Man's Conservation Efforts to Save the Hoffman's Conure

by Yvonne I. Patterson
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The Hoffman's Conure *Pyrrhura hoffmanni* cannot be purchased in this country. It's a shame they've never been established in captivity, as they have such charming and sweet personalities. Like most conures, they are very curious and very active. Sometimes referred to as a Sulphur-winged Parakeet, they are a small conure approximately eight inches in length.

Their cute red ear coverts and spot on the chin highlight their inquisitive faces. They appear to be mostly green until observed closely. The throat and breast feathers have orange-yellow tips; the undersides of flight feathers are olive-yellow; the tail is reddish-olive margined with green; and the primaries and outer secondaries are yellow which turn to green towards the tips. Yellow on the wings forms a band which is conspicuous in flight, although it is entirely hidden while perched.

The Hoffman's Conure only occurs in Central America — more specifically, the southern part of Costa Rica and the western part of Panama. It is named after German physician Carl Hoffmann who explored the upper portions of the volcanic ridges in the mid-1850's. He died in 1857 and is commemorated in the names of a dozen species. Hoffman's Conures are extremely difficult to spot in the wild, as they frequent the canopies of the tall forest trees. Occasionally they will be spotted flying across semi-open country. As they quickly fly past, one can spot the wings flashing yellow in the sunlight or, with a very good eye, the red ear coverts. They are usually in small flocks and rather wary. However, like several other types of conures in the wild, they can be slowly approached if they are feeding on fruits or seeds of trees.

In 1979, a group of 35 Hoffman's Conures were exported from Panama to the U.S. by Dr. Nathan Gale. Dr. Gale has been a veterinarian in



The Hoffman's Conure (Pyrrhura hoffmanni) is quite rare in captivity. It is bred by several aviculturists under a consortium in hopes to establish this species in captivity.

Photo by George D. Dodge/Dale R. Thompson

Panama, first with the Canal Zone and later with the military, for over 20 years. His request was to try to establish this rare species in captivity. The birds were then placed in several aviaries in Arizona, where Chris Rowley first reproduced them in captivity in 1982. Both Chris Rowley and Dr. Gale were awarded a U.S. first breeding award. The total numbers declined

even though they were marginally reproduced. In 1990, all birds were transferred to an aviary in California which made a total of 11 Hoffman's Conures. They included four wild-caughts which now were at least 11 years old, and seven offspring. Of the 11 birds, there were only four females, the older two being the wild-caughts.

With these 11 birds, one individual

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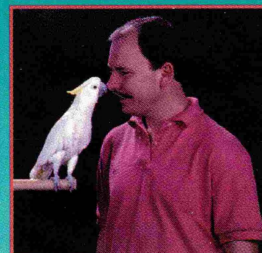
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has worked diligently to produce a total of 45 Hoffman's Conures in captivity. Because there were only two mature females, only two pairs reproduced that first year. This group of conures, as they bred, were handfed to ensure the survivability of the young. They were parent-reared for approximately 10 days then removed for handfeeding. No eggs were artificially incubated. All babies, the first year, were kept with others of their own kind and *never* played with. The babies that were handfed not only produced second generation, but they also parent-reared their offspring to self-sufficiency. This project has proven, without a doubt, that handfed parrots, at least conures that are not imprinted, can make very good future breeders.

A breeding consortium was created. Originally there were three people on it, and recently a fourth. The consortium has been built where none of these birds will be sold commercially within the U.S. The Hoffman's Consortium follows the format of the AFA's Red Siskin Project, inasmuch as babies are banded and placed with other consortium breeders. The breeders

cannot sell any of the offspring as they all belong to the consortium. The long-term goal of the Hoffman's breeding consortium is to send a minimum of three pairs to as many countries with very good aviculturists, to trade for other species that are rare in the U.S. A couple species of birds that are being considered for trade are the Yellow-faced Parrotlet and the Sierra Parakeet. The purpose of this consortium is obviously to establish the *hoffmanni* in captivity and to help save other rare species which occur in minimal numbers in the U.S. The Wild Bird Conservation Act of '92 may affect species being imported into the U.S. Certainly there would be no problem exporting the *hoffmanni* to other aviculturists in foreign countries.

To walk into the *hoffmanni* room to feed and water, one notes that their screams are much like the noisy chatter you hear when viewing a group of conures in the wild. "Kreey-kreey-kreey-kreey" is at such a high decibel you're grateful for not having a headache that day. However, there's something different about this species. They don't stay at the back of the flight yelling, or run into their nest box

as other conure species do. They fly to the front to get near you, and will actually shove their mate away with their body. When you pour water out of a pitcher into their water bowls, they invariably stick their heads under the flow and begin taking their daily baths. Many times it's been necessary to refill the water bowls by the time you've watered that particular room, as they've splashed it all out.

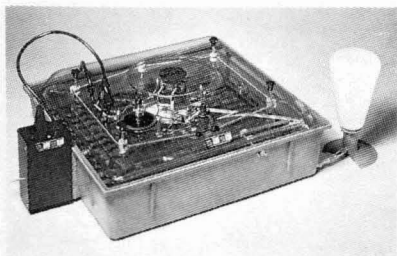
This one individual who works so hard with the Hoffman's Conure has also raised over 250 species of birds (softbills, hookbills, aquatic, etc.). He is extremely well respected in the "bird world." There's hardly a "bird person" who hasn't seen his captivating photos of birds or read his informative articles. This man is none other than our editor-in-chief, Dale Thompson. His love for this energetic species is so much admired and respected that it is appropriate to praise him for his unselfish efforts in this issue of *Watchbird*. Thompson feels that his efforts with the Hoffman's Conure are worthwhile and also serve as a tribute to his good friend Dr. Nathan Gale who first inspired and expedited the work. ●



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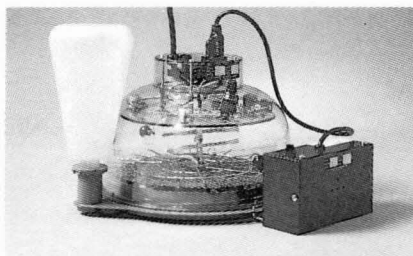
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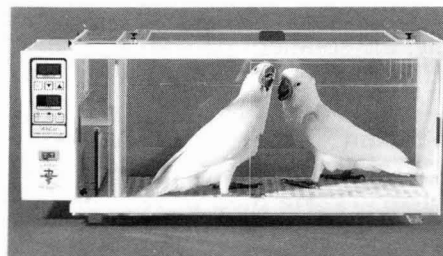
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