

Breeding Brotogeris

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By Robbie Harris I am a Canadian aviculturist who recently started keeping Brotogeris parakeets. The availability of species in this country appears to differ from that available to you. For example, I know of no grey cheeks in Canada. I have been fortunate enough to acquire two pairs of tui parakeets and some plains and golden wings. I heard that you have tuis and have bred them successfully. I would very much like to do the same. Can you please let me know if your management of tuis differs in any way from what is stated in your book, Grey-cheeked Parakeets And Other Brotogeris.

There are relatively no tui or plain parakeets for aviculturists to work with in the United States. Some years back, I was fortunate enough to find the few that had been imported, and work with and breed tuis.

The setup for tuis is like the setup for grey-cheeked parakeets (diet, cage size, nest boxes and so forth). Each pair is an individual, and what may work for one pair, may not work for another. If a pair does not like a standard budgie nest box, then a larger, longer, wider, cockatiel-size or any other type of nest box can be tried. Grey cheeks are the same way — one pair may nest in a standard budgie box, while another pair may prefer something a bit larger or smaller. If they were nesting in the wild, their nest site inside a tree cavity would not be much larger than an adult human fist.

Diets can also vary between each individual bird. So a wide variety of foods should be offered to keep the birds happy and willing to produce. A variety of food is always better. These birds love to pick and choose to their little heart's desire. I have never worked with plain parakeets, but have heard that their personalities are somewhat the same when it comes to trying to entice them to breed. Photo: Robbie Harris Grey-cheeked parakeets.

Golden-winged parakeets need the same treatment as all the other Brotogeris to get them to settle down and produce. Here in the U.S. golden wings, canary wings, white wings, orange chins, grey cheeks and cobalt wings are usually available. The suggestions in my book will help you to get your Brotogeris to set up housekeeping and produce young.

Hopefully things will get easier, so bird breeders can someday swap birds between the two countries. Then we can all work with these different wonderful species.

I have just purchased a bonded pair of grey-cheeked parakeets, 4 and 3 years of age. The woman I bought this pair from told me they breed best if they can hear other breeding pairs of Brotogeris. Is this true? Do I need another pair? Can they be allowed to see each other or only within earshot? Also, I have read that the grey cheeks are the noisiest of the Brotogeris. Is this true? I have an opportunity to purchase a pair of canary/white-winged parakeets next week. I am not sure if I should stick to the grey cheeks or expand into the other varieties of Brotogeris. The woman I bought the pair from also has a pair of the tovi (orange-chinned parakeets), but she is not sure if she wants to sell them yet. Can they be kept together within their genus in larger flight cages outside of the breeding season, or can they even be kept with other hookbills, canaries and grass parakeets? The woman told me her other breeding pair of grey cheeks bred at 4½ years of age, but the hen died at 17 years. Is that the normal age for them to breed? Photo: Robbie Harris Tui parakeet.

A pair of grey cheeks can breed and raise young, even without other pairs around. Sometimes they do a bit better if other pairs are in the same building, within good earshot. They can also be allowed to see one another, at least our pairs see each other, and they do fine.

When a few pairs are set up close by, many times they lay eggs and raise young at the same time. They seem to stimulate each other into breeding. This can be helpful if a pair seems uninterested in nesting. We keep our pairs in the same building, and this has worked best for our birds. We also have other species in the same building — various species of conures — and the grey cheeks do not seem to be bothered by their presence.

As for noise, yes they can be the noisiest of the Brotogeris, and sometimes louder than some other species of parrots.

When you speak of keeping a different species of Brotogeris in a flight, I hope this refers to them as being kept in their own individual cages inside the flight enclosure. I would not mix the different species in a free-flight cage. Each pair should have their own set-up and cage. Pairs can and do fight when housed together, especially during breeding season. I have known people that have set up pairs in a single flight. They had chicks in the nest boxes, and the other pairs went in and killed all the chicks. For the best breeding results keep each pair to their own enclosure!

As for age, most start breeding around 2 to 3 years old, and can easily continue breeding well into their teen years, as long as they are housed correctly and on a great diet.

Brotogeris are disappearing from the U.S., and if bird breeders cease working with this difficult species, the birds may disappear within 10 years. Because you sound like you are interested in working with all kinds of Brotogeris, see if you can talk the woman into selling off her other pairs, and get them set up. Keep in mind, the younger the birds, the better they seem to produce (higher fertility, more eggs laid and so forth). As these birds age, they may still nest, but they tend to rear less and less young each year. Be sure to keep some babies back and work with them as future breeders.

In the late 1980s when thousands of baby grey cheeks were being imported to the U.S. I set up baby grey cheeks in individual cages per pair, and when many were only 9 month old they were already producing large clutches of eggs and chicks — some with six to eight babies per clutch. These same birds now continue to rear young, but are only producing a few chicks here and there, because many are now about 20 years old. I hope you keep your interest upbeat, and work with all kinds of Brotogeris!

Robbieharris.com Robbie Harris has a Web site so people can easily get in touch with her. She will post things she learns that may be of some importance to others, such as hoax e-mails. Questions for her Bird Breeder column can be sent through her Web site: www.robbeharris.com . She will answer questions that seem to be the most frequently asked and those that will help many.

Robbie Harris raises a wide variety of exotic birds at her home in Southern California. She has written two books, *Breeding Conures and Grey-Cheeked Parakeets and Other Brotogeris*, and owns and raises a large variety of African parrots, including greys, Jardine's, Capes, Senegals, red bellies, brown heads and Meyer's. Harris has received seven U.S. First Breeding Awards for various types of psittacines.