

Bonded African Grey Pair

How do I get my African greys to lay fertile eggs?

Q: I have a pair of Congo African greys that have laid 17 infertile eggs to date. I have had them DNA-tested, and they are a true pair. They are very bonded. Do you have any suggestions as to what to do to get fertile eggs?

I have an indoor bird room. I have them in 48-inch by 28-inch by 48-inch cages. I have all three pairs against one wall, with a shower curtain hung between each cage. They each have boot nest boxes. I feed Zupreem Fruit Blend pellets, about 1/8 of a cup of sunflower seed mix and fresh fruit or vegetables twice a day. I also boil eggs and feed this about once a week. They drink from water bottles. They are banded. They are supposedly about 10 years old. I don't believe they were ever anyone's pets. I have had them a year now. They sat on the eggs full term. On day 31, I pulled the eggs to candle them and all were infertile. They have laid three clutches in a year. I have two monitors on them and would see them copulating in the evening.

Jean Pattison, also known as "The African Queen," explains:

Greys are cyclic layers and may be out of sync. The hormones in both the female and male birds dictate when they prepare for breeding and when they are able to mate and fertilize the eggs. In the hen, hormones also control the sitting and feeding of the chicks.

The male's hormones tell him when breeding is over and when he needs to guard the nest entrance and look for food while the hen is sitting on the eggs. If eggs are removed from the nest, the male's sperm level may be too low to fertilize a new clutch of eggs so soon, even if the hen solicits mating. With the African greys, it is to no advantage to pull the infertile eggs. (You were wise to leave them for the 31 days). They both will need to "cycle" again and be in sync. There are many other species of parrots, such as cockatiels, that will immediately lay more eggs if eggs are taken away or destroyed. This is generally not the case with African greys.

As a rule, greys will lay another clutch of eggs at just about the time offspring would be weaning. This is regardless of the fact that if they rear the young themselves or if you take the chicks for hand-feeding – or even if the eggs are infertile and removed. The laying time between clutches of eggs is generally four months (their cycle). Since you have only had them one year, it may take another season before they get it right, or to get in sync.

I would remove the curtains when the other pairs are done breeding (in the off season). This will sometimes stimulate the males, since there is now competition. Or you could remove the nest box for a few months to stop them from breeding to give them time to get into sync, if that is the problem.

I had a male grey with three "proven" hens for two years, and each produced infertile eggs. When placed with a fourth hen; they had infertile eggs in their first clutch, and one chick in their second and third clutches. All consecutive clutches have produced three chicks. This was over a seven year-period. With all of the hens, the male fed them and copulated, appearing to be very bonded. In light of this and other similar reports, your pair may not really be compatible.

I would stop feeding the egg food due to its high-protein content, which may stimulate breeding when they are not ready. I would also cut back on the veggies, which may be diluting the nutrition in the pellets. Feed veggies in small amounts – what most people would consider as treats, and mostly the dark green and orange vegetables for the vitamin-A, beta carotene content. The sugar in the fruit may be artificially satisfying their calorie intake, thus they are not eating all the nutritional pellets they need.