

Successfully Breeding African Grey Parrots

How can I get African grey parrots to breed?

Q: How can I get my African grey parrots to breed? I have two African grey parrots that have been together for about 20 years. The female started laying eggs — three unfertile. She is laying again in the nest box, but she doesn't seem interested. Over 20 years ago, I bred African grey parrots, but they were wild and all three pairs had lots of babies. These two are from different parents. I never take them out of their cage so they are not bonded to me, but they talk to me in the morning when we take showers. They share a large bathroom with big windows with a cockatoo in another cage about three feet away from them.

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

What I describe is the norm, but there are always exceptions. Nothing is written in stone. I do not know all the circumstances surrounding this pair of birds, so I will generalize.

When African greys are put together as young chicks, it seems they never breed. Perhaps there is something in their genetics that make them seek out different flocks when they mature to prevent inbreeding. African greys have to like each other to breed. They also need to be on the same hormonal cycle to breed, and privacy helps. Many times, other birds, especially loud birds in close proximity, can keep a pair from breeding.

If possible, I would remove the cockatoo from the African greys' nesting area. Allow the hen to sit on her eggs and to leave them on her own. Allow three weeks beyond the normal hatch time before you remove them. Once the eggs are removed, remove their nest box to allow the birds to come into condition together. Wait about three months, return the nest box (about September) and start providing longer dark time — shorter daylight hours. Because there is a big window, adjust your lighting to match the outside seasonal lighting. African grey parrots usually start copulating in October as the days become shorter.

It is usually about a month later that the hen lays her eggs. Always provide a night light because African grey parrots are very active at night. The bird's diet should include some sunflower seed and little fruit and vegetables. I recommend a pellet-based diet of about 70-percent pellets and 30-percent good seed mix. African grey parrots seem to need the extra fat. A breeder pellet would be good at this time, but after a second clutch, go back to a regular pellet.

Try this for the breeding season coming up. If these birds were once pet birds, the male might never know what to do. After 20 years, if it has not happened, it might never happen. However, with the hen becoming sexually active, this may bring the male into sexual maturity.