

Breeding Parrotlets

I'd like to breed birds, are parrotlets a good bird species to start with?

Q: I need help with choosing which bird I should breed. I've never bred birds before, and I'd like a bird that is for beginners, preferably not a budgie or cockatiel. Are parrotlets considered a good beginning bird to breed? I also need help on brooders and feeding.

Sandee Molenda explains:

First, anyone interested in breeding birds should work with a reputable bird breeder who specializes in the species of bird you wish to breed. After you've aligned yourself with an experienced bird breeder, and are fully aware of the challenges and considerations involved with breeding birds, here are some general guidelines on parrotlets.

Parrotlets are not as easy to breed as budgies, cockatiels or lovebirds but certainly easier than Amazons or other large parrots. They need a large cage (at least 24 inches x 24 inches), privacy (preferably with no other birds in the room) and a diet higher in fat and protein than most other small hookbills. A diet rich in fresh foods, such as fruit, vegetables, greens, sprouted seeds, cooked grains and legumes, millet and whole-grain breads should be fed daily.

Breeding parrotlets also need at least some seed in the diet to prevent stress bars in the chicks. I recommend Volkman's Parrotlet Super, which is based on the seed mix I have fed for more than 20 years. Egg food, Petamine™ Nestling Food and dry lory powder also should be fed to supplement protein requirements. Vitamins and powdered calcium should be provided several times a week, sprinkled on the fresh food. Mineral block, cuttlebone and fresh, clean water should always be available.

Parrotlets breed best when you have more than one pair and they can hear each other but not see one another. Dividers should be placed between the cages to cut down on aggression and territorialism between pairs. The nest box should be placed on the front of the cage in the upper most top corner so when the hen is looking out of the box she sees the inside of the cage and is very secure. Nest box should be 10-inches tall, 7-inches wide and 7-inches deep and should be filled with untreated pine shavings.

Parrotlets should be at least a year old before being bred. They will lay an egg every other day and will brood them for 18 to 21 days. Average clutch size is six to eight although they can be larger – most mutations will have smaller clutches. Chicks can be pulled for hand-feeding at 10 to 14 days of age and should be banded with either American or English budgie leg bands. They should be brooded at 89 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit and fed every four hours, at least five times a day.

No need to feed during the night. Any reputable commercial brooder designed for parrots will work with parrotlets. Any commercial hand-feeding formula is good as well just be sure and only use that brand when feeding chicks; do not change formulas during the hand-feeding process. Chicks will start picking at food such as millet, seed and pellets at about 4 to 5 weeks of age and can be moved to a cage at 5 weeks. They are usually weaned at 6 to 7 weeks old.