

How Can I Help First-time Parent Parrotlets?

How can I help my birds to raise their first clutch?

Q: I have a male and female parrotlets. The female has just laid an egg on the bottom of the cage. What do I do to care for these birds if they want to raise their young? I would like to see them raise the chicks.

Sandee Molenda explains:

First, the birds should be at least a year old before breeding. If they are not, separate them until they are. Immature males often do not feed the chicks or hen and hens can develop problems such as egg binding. They need to be set up with a nest box so that the eggs will be protected and the chicks healthy and strong.

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 can also 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.

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 by 7-inches wide by 7-inches deep and should be filled with untreated pine shavings.

If parent-raising the chicks, the parental male should be removed from the cage when the chicks start to fledge at 4 to 5 weeks old. If not, he may attack and even kill his male offspring. The hen will continue to feed the chicks but food, such as millet, seeds and pellets, should be readily available to assist in weaning. Parent-raised birds tend to take longer to wean than hand-fed, and the chicks should not be moved to a new cage until they are completely weaned, which can be as late as 8 weeks of age.