

## Five of the 25 Best Birds To Breed

### These birds top bird breeders' lists

By Margrethe Warden

The January issue of BIRD TALK magazine featured 25 of the top bird species to breed. Here are the details on those last five birds, and if you want to see all 25, check out the January print issue.

#### 21. Sun Conures

If you want to work with a brightly colored species but are hesitant to get into lorries with their dietary differences, consider breeding sun conures (*Aratinga solstitialis*). Sun conures are one of the most gorgeous birds in aviculture, and they have wonderful, engaging personalities. They make excellent family birds, because they'll usually be equally friendly with all members.

Inexpensive to acquire and small enough to house pairs indoors, sun conures make an excellent choice for a first-time bird breeder. They are not, however, birds to keep if you live in an apartment or condo or if you have neighbors close enough to be bothered by strange noises. *Aratinga conure* species are known for their loud calls.

They are hardy little birds that breed well in captivity. Once feathered, the chicks more resemble their cousin the jenday conure (*Aratinga jandaya*) with predominantly green bodies. As they mature and molt, they "ripen" into beautiful shades of orange and yellow.

#### 22. Lineolated Parakeets

Lineolated parakeets (*Bolborhynchus lineola*) are delightful, small birds that are making a name for themselves lately. The recent increased demand for these parakeets makes their spot on the top 25 list even more relevant. The current supply cannot meet the demand, so it might be a good bird to look at for your next breeding cycle.

These little guys have all the qualities of a large parrot without any of the negative aspects. They're cute and cuddly; they speak well, whistle and have sweet voices. Like parrotlets and lovebirds, they will not destroy your furniture.

They breed well in captivity but will not tolerate intrusion when they are in the nest. According to Bob Nelson of Oregon, you can breed pairs indoors or outdoors. If you pull the first clutch at 14 days, Nelson said, the parents will often go back to nest. Lineolated parakeets do quite well on a quality small hookbill seed containing hemp and Niger. Nelson also offers extra hemp and some dry eggfood to the adults' diet when chicks are present. Lineolated parakeets produce several color mutations and are popular on the bird show circuit, too.

#### 23. Salvadori's Fig Parrots

Salvadori's fig parrots (*Psittaculirostris salvadorii*) make the list of best birds to breed not because they're inexpensive or easy to breed but because they need attention from aviculturists. Although they rarely find their way into the pet trade, those who have hand-reared these parrots insist that they make great companions.

Male Salvadori fig parrots have a bright red breast, making it simple to determine the bird's sex. Despite their lack of presence in U.S. aviculture, these birds breed prolifically. Most make good parents; you can leave the chicks with the adults even after they have gone back to nest. Parent-reared chicks will often assist in the rearing of additional clutches.

These lively parrots require an enclosure larger than other similarly-sized parrots. Matt Schmit of Texas houses his in flights that are 6 feet deep, 2 feet wide and 3 feet tall.

As their name suggests, Fig parrots relish figs, which should be included in their daily diet. If fresh figs aren't available, substitute soaked dry figs. In addition to figs, Schmit feeds his fig parrots a variety of fruits and vegetables, a sunflower-based seed mix and a cooked mix of brown rice, lentils and split peas. "Fig parrots are not picky eaters. They will sample most anything that is put in their bowl."

According to Schmit, they also need higher levels of vitamin K in their diet. Talk to your avian veterinarian about adding an adequate supplement.

Fig parrots love to chew, so provide plenty of fresh branches to keep their beaks trimmed.

#### 24. Greater Indian Hill Mynahs

One of the most interesting birds to work with has to be the greater Indian hill mynah. These chatty birds have enjoyed enormous popularity over the last few decades, in part because of their impressive mimic ability.

Like many other softbilled birds, they do not have the life expectancy we see with parrots. According to aviculturist Dick Schroeder of California, mynahs should be included as one of the best birds to breed for a couple of reasons. 1. They are no longer being imported, so to maintain the current levels of mynahs in the country, we'll need to breed them here. 2. The demand for them far exceeds the supply.

Mynahs must be provided with a low-iron softbill pellet diet, because of their susceptibility to iron storage disease. Supplement this diet with fruit and live foods, such as crickets or mealworms, during breeding season.

Schroeder recommends a cage no smaller than 2 feet by 2 feet by 4 feet. Depth is more important than height, because mynahs like to hop back and forth. A larger cage, of course, would be appreciated by your birds. It might be best to house these messy eaters outdoors or you'll find yourself constantly cleaning up fruit pieces from around the cage.

Mynahs can breed in a cockatiel nest box. They don't respond well to intrusion during breeding and will often toss their eggs out of the nest at the slightest provocation, so stay away.

The chicks are easy to hand-rear. Pull them from the nest around 10 days of age; they generally don't need heat at this point. Because these softbills have no crop, you will need to feed them frequently in the beginning but the food does not have to be heated. Simply soak some pellets, add some fruit and you're ready to hand-feed.

#### 25. Umbrella Cockatoos

If you're looking to breed a large bird, but macaws aren't your thing, give cockatoos a try. Cockatoos are well-known for their loving and inquisitive nature. One of the most popular large cockatoos, the umbrella (*Cacatua alba*), is beloved in aviculture for its social nature and reasonable price.

Because of their size and curious beaks, these cockatoos require sturdy cages with enough room for flying. Provide plenty of branches or untreated wood for enrichment, too. In fact, umbrellas will chew right through a wooden nest box if you're not careful to monitor them.

There are some drawbacks to working with cockatoos. They generate quite a bit of dust, which makes indoor breeding undesirable. Also, the males, especially those who were at one time tame, often show significant aggressive toward their mates, which can result in severe injury or death. Acquire males that have been socialized with other cockatoos at an early age. Finally, a happy cockatoo loves to "sing" and any neighbors within hearing distance might not appreciate their special kind of music.