

BREEDING THE ORANGE-BREASTED FIG PARROT *Cyclopsitta gulielmitertii* AND DOUBLE-EYED FIG PARROT *Cyclopsitta diophthalma* AT WELTVOGELPARK WALSRÖDE

by Anne Hoppmann and Norbert Neumann

Weltvogelpark Walsrode houses four of the five species of fig parrots. Two of these, the Orange-breasted Fig Parrot *Cyclopsitta gulielmitertii* and the Double-eyed Fig Parrot *C. diophthalma*, which in Germany can be seen only at Weltvogelpark Walsrode, successfully reared young during the 2012 breeding season.

The Orange-breasted Fig Parrot, which has seven recognised subspecies, inhabits rainforest, monsoon and swamp forests in the lowlands and hilly regions up to 1,100m (approx. 3,600ft) on the island of New Guinea, Salawati in the western Papuan Islands and on the Aru Islands. In the wild the main breeding season is between December-June. This species nests in a hole which the birds excavate themselves in an arboreal termitarium (termites' nest). In contrast, the Double-eyed Fig Parrot nests in an existing cavity in a rotten tree trunk or limb of a tall tree. This species, which has eight recognised subspecies, is found on New Guinea, the western Papuan Islands and some offshore islands, the Aru Islands and on the north-east coast of Australia. It inhabits lowland and montane forests and more open woodland up to 2,000m (approx. 6,560ft). The main breeding season occurs between March-June on New Guinea, while in Australia this species breeds mainly between August-November.

A special feature, alluded to in their name, is the diet of these small parrots, which in the wild feed mainly on the fruits of various fig trees - they prefer though to eat the seeds rather than the flesh of the figs. In addition, they take a variety of other fruits and berries, nectar and also insects and their larvae.

Experience of keeping fig parrots in captivity has shown that they are very sensitive to disturbance, especially during the breeding season. Changes to their surroundings, especially in and around the nest box, can unsettle them. It is very important, therefore, to be particularly careful when dealing with these birds, if they are to be bred successfully.

To encourage our Orange-breasted Fig Parrots to begin breeding, we provide them with nest boxes measuring 30cm long x 20cm wide x 20cm high (approx. 12in long x 8in wide x 8in high), placed in the enclosure behind the scenes. The nest boxes, which are made of waterproof particle board, have a 4cm-6cm (approx. 1½in-2½in) diameter entrance hole on both sides



Male Orange-breasted Fig Parrot.



Male Orange-breasted Fig Parrot (upper left), female (lower right) and two young birds.



Male Double-eyed Fig Parrot.



Immature Double-eyed Fig Parrot (which resembles the female) having just been removed from its parents' aviary.

of the box. The inside of the boxes are packed full of cork tiles, which are scuffed a bit at the entrance hole to give the birds a starting point, where they can begin to excavate their nest cavity. When the cavity is approximately 8cm-10cm (3¼in-4in) in diameter, the female lays her eggs - she usually lays two, but it is possible she may only lay one or as many as three. The chicks hatch after an incubation period of about 20-22 days. The parents adjust the size of the nest cavity to suit the size of their growing offspring. These birds are by nature tidy - and the chicks deposit their faeces outside the box, so that the interior remains clean.

The Double-eyed Fig Parrots are provided with a nest box made from a section of tree trunk. The cavity is approximately 20cm wide x 25cm high (8in wide x 9¾in high) and about 15cm (6in) in diameter. The entrance hole is about 4cm-6cm (1½in-2¼in) in diameter and is situated a maximum of 20cm (8in) above the floor of the nest cavity on which is placed a layer of wood shavings.

As soon as a pair of fig parrots have eggs, the pair is left in peace until the approximate date that the chicks are due to hatch. Shortly after that, the nest box is inspected, but only after the female has left the box to feed. When we are sure there are chicks in the box, we adjust the diet of the birds. Our standard fig parrot diet consists of germinated seeds and a mixture of blueberries, grapes, apples and papaya, along with dried figs which have been soaked in water for at least 24 hours. To this we add one tablespoonful of Versele-Laga Tropical Patee. They also have access to millet (*ad lib*). Following the hatching of the chicks the standard diet is supplemented with a mash made of three parts Versele-Laga Nutribird A21 and one part Versele-Laga Orlux Lori. When the chicks are about 14 days old, recently moulted white-skinned mealworms are added to the diet.

Only a few keepers that the fig parrots know well care for them and they disrupt the birds as little as possible during the incubation period and after the chicks hatch. After 35-42 days the young leave the nest box for the first time, but regularly return to the nest box during the first few days after fledging. At 60-70 days old the young are separated from their parents and housed together in single species juvenile groups in enclosures adjacent to those of their parents.

Because fig parrots are so sensitive to disturbances at and immediately around the nest box, in consultation with the appropriate ministry the young are not ringed (banded) with a closed ring, but instead are ringed (banded) with an open aluminium ring (band) at the time they are separated from their parents.

After the young had been removed, both breeding pairs of Orange-breasted Fig Parrots laid a second clutch of eggs. At the beginning of

September, one chick belonging to the first pair had already left the nest box and the second pair hatched another chick in September. The Double-eyed Fig Parrots also seemed to be preparing to produce a further brood.

Breeding fig parrots at Weltvogelpark Walsrode has gone well this year, with the two breeding pairs of Orange-breasted Fig Parrots having to date (September 20th 2012) successfully reared a total of four young and the two breeding pairs of Double-eyed Fig Parrots each having reared one youngster. In the year we are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Weltvogelpark Walsrode, we are understandably very excited about having bred these two species of fig parrots and look forward to raising many more young.

Products mentioned in the text

Nutribird A21, Orlux Lori and other Versele-Laga products: Versele-Laga nv, Kappellestraat 70, 9800 Deinze, Belgium. Website: www.versele-laga.com

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*An earlier account by Martina Müller and Norbert Neumann about keeping and breeding Desmarest's Fig Parrot *Psittaculirostris desmarestii*, Salvadori's Fig Parrot *P. salvadorii* and Edwards's Fig Parrot *P. edwardsii* at Walsrode was published in Vol.104, No.2, pp.55-60 (1998).*

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Hoppmann, Anne and Neumann, Norbert. 2012. "Breeding The Orange-breasted Fig Parrot *Cyclopsitta Guliemitertii* And Double-eyed Fig Parrot *Cyclopsitta Diophthalma* At Weltvogelpark Walsrode." *The Avicultural magazine* 118(4), 163–167.

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