

MY EXPERIENCES WITH THE

Lineolated Parakeet

Because of their many positive attributes, these parakeets make excellent pets in a variety of situations says, **Jason Crean**



PHOTO: MARGARET NAVARRO

They looked at me with their large, soulful eyes

The Lineolated, or Barred, Parakeet (*Bolborhynchus lineola*) is one of the most unique psittacines I have ever had the pleasure of keeping.

Many breeders and pet owners are acquiring Lineolated Parakeets because of their quiet and tender personality, short, fan-like tail, and great intelligence, even for one of the smallest parrots. This parakeet is native to Central America, South America and even as far north as Mexico, where it lives in flocks and forms monogamous pairings with its chosen mate.

The wild type is green, with dark barring that runs down its back and rump. Though they cannot be sexed visually with ease, careful examination can lead one to its central tail feather which will be nearly all black in the male. Some accomplished

breeders are more adept at visual determination, but I have found some hens will have a darker area on this feather as well, so I always use DNA sexing to be sure. I have not found gender to matter in the least when keeping one of these little creatures as a pet.

After an interesting turn of events, I received my first pair of Lineolated Parakeets. A friend of mine needed two hens, and the breeder would only sell groups of four birds, thus, I purchased a pair so she could receive her hens. It worked out rather well! I was completely taken with these little birds because of their unique posture and behavior. Almost immediately, I noticed them as being incredibly quiet, just emitting a "chittering" - much like the common budgerigar. They very rarely gave off even a hint of noise, so

much so that I thought they had escaped at times! As I grew accustomed to them, and them to me, it was clear that they were quite happy, and content enough to go to nest and vocalize more often.

After they seemed settled, I introduced a nestbox that was suitable for a lovebird (25cm long, 16cm wide and 18cm deep). I lined the bottom with several sheets of newspaper, and stuffed the box full of aspen shavings, coconut fibers, and cotton sharp fibers. Within the first four weeks, the pair had wisped up the fibers into a covered nest within the nestbox and had laid their first clutch of four white eggs that were surprisingly large. Both the male and female spent a great deal of time in their love nest, though the male started spending more time outside the box as the eggs got closer to hatching.

About 20 days had passed and they hatched out two chicks. The chicks had some white, fluffy down and large heads that made them quite clumsy. The parents did not seem to mind nestbox inspection here and there, and they took very good care of both babies. The male was usually seen eating and was, presumably, feeding the hen, as she was only spotted outside the nest a few times. They absolutely loved green peas, and went through countless peas every day when feeding their offspring. The male apparently fed the hen as well as the chicks, though I heard the hen feeding the chicks at times when the male was outside of the nestbox.

At day 24, I pulled these two chicks from the nest in order to handraise them. These were amongst the easiest and calmest chicks I had ever raised. They looked at me with their large, soulful eyes, a trait they never lose, and allowed me to feed them, while uttering only what I can call a light "barking" noise. They positively loved the sight of people, hobbling over in the brooder to see who was entering the nursery.

Even at this young age they are avid climbers and are quite adventurous. Always curious, they would tilt their heads to the side to get a better view of anyone looking down into their warm, temporary home. As they started to feather, small cobalt blue feathers pierced through the casings. The chicks sat quietly together all the time, even after they learned to perch in a cage and became more active. Nevertheless, they absolutely welcomed any person who wanted to interact.

Food, Glorious Food

As the chicks grew, I realized it was not only their parents who loved to eat! Today, I supply each cage with large feed bowls, spreading the different foods on the bottom so that each food item can easily be seen. I also place a perch in front of the bowl, that can easily be removed and cleaned. They have an



PHOTO: NANETTE FUENTES

They love a swing



PHOTO: NANETTE FUENTES

... and a shiny bell

Though I do not feed a great deal of seed, I do give them some millet spray and some organic parakeet seed mixed in with their sprouts. They are not as active as parrotlets, so they do not seem to require a great deal of high-energy seed in addition to their already varied diets. Other experts have had success with a greater percentage of seed in the diet, but my pairs love the dietary diversity, and it shows when they feed their chicks or clean out their feed cups.

A Bird of a Different Color

Color preference does seem to matter to some pet owners, and the color mutations of the Lineolated Parakeet are varied enough so that anyone can find a color they prefer. As I said, the wild type is the green, which itself has variation - as in the olive. The blue series includes a turquoise color (blue), a cobalt, and a mauve (dark blue or slate). There is also a lutino, which is yellow, and cremino, a light yellow or cream color. Both lutino and cremino individuals also possess red eyes. New mutations are being developed at this time.

As a side note, the genetics of these little birds are somewhat related to that of the lovebird. There are 'color factors' of genes: for example, if a male is mauve (double factor blue) and a hen is the blue, when these two mate and produce offspring, the chicks will be cobalt (single factor).

immediate need to keep themselves clean and, after consuming soft foods, will immediately rub their smooth, shiny beaks and heads on the nearest perch.

The chicks consumed a high quality pellet, a cooked mix of pasta, rice, beans and corn, fresh organic seed sprouts, and fruits and vegetables of all kinds. I think any bird owner can say that their birds at home detest certain foods, flinging them out of the cage with disgust. However, my experience with Lineolated Parakeets has illustrated their love for food in all forms, rarely leaving anything in their bowl untouched.



PHOTO: MARGARET NAVARRO

Always curious they tilt their heads to get a better view of what's going on

Feeling at Home

In addition to having large feed cups and perches that are easily cleaned, I also include a swing and toys from which they can hang. They seem to love the simple, colored plastic links that can keep them busy for hours. Some will use the plush huts that are so popular with lovebirds and parrotlets today. Most importantly, a network of perches, where they can move about, is vital. Lineolated keets walk up and down, back and forth among different perches in their cages.

I typically use a cage that has more length than height. A 30-inch long cage that has a height and depth of 18 inches each seems to be the perfect size for movement and play. They do have a tendency to forage on the ground, so a frequent cage cleaning, or a grate that can keep them from eating soiled food, should be considered.

Their soft and gentle nature is absolutely mesmerizing. They have an almost 'primate-like' walk, bobbing along a perch, one foot over the other. Their large rounded heads always welcome a scratch and it shows in their dark, round eyes. They are quite playful as adults, playing with toys while hanging upside down from one foot, or carefully plucking pieces of string or straw from toys that I supply my cockatiels with regularly. Many of my birds also are quite good at using their feet while eating, which seems to be a great help in holding larger food items.

At first impression, one would think that this little bird would not be an accomplished mimic. However, they can be quite good at reproducing sounds like

whistles, words and phrases, as young as just a few months old. Handfed chicks seem to be much stronger mimics than their parent-raised counterparts. Though they go through their "terrible two's" under one year of age, like most parrot

playing with a shiny bell here and there. I always provide fresh willow branches for them, for chewing and climbing. They truly seem to keep themselves busy with what their owners provide for enrichment.

Lineolated Parakeets in Aviculture

This species is becoming more common in the US though they have been breeding and raising them in Europe for some time. They are not as common as some other species similar in size and temperament. They make excellent pets in a variety of situations because of their many positive attributes.

This parakeet, topping off at seven inches, much like a lovebird, is what I consider the perfect apartment bird because of its size, quiet disposition and needs for only the basic things in life. I have acquired birds from European stock and have found them to be larger in size and a bit hardier than some of the individuals I had previously kept. These little birds are quite friendly and happy to be with people, but can keep themselves



PHOTO: NANETTE FUENTES

I give them *some* millet spray

species, with the occasional nip here and there, this phase passes quickly and easily with frequent handling and training. Many breeders have found them to be surprisingly intelligent and patient. Males do seem to mimic more than females, but either will make a tame, affectionate pet.

Behaviorally, they have very little that would be seen as undesirable. They are not known to feather pick nor perform any other type of stressful behavior. They seem to be content with their toys, hanging from them when they can, and

amused with toys and swings when no one is around. As an added member to a family, they really cannot be beat. ■

Jason J Crean is a biology instructor at high school and college level, works in the zoological community, and takes great joy in educating people of all ages about the avian world. He holds two degrees in biology and a graduate certificate in Zoo & Aquarium Science. He raises hookbills and softbills which can be seen at www.beaksbirdhouse.com.