

## CAPTIVATING QUAKERS

by Linda Greeson

Quite a few Quaker parrots passed through my hands before I realized what little gems they really are. Our original breeding flock was made up of wild caught birds imported from South America. They were not aggressive and easy to manage, but their interest in me was strictly as a source of food. When I started hand feeding their babies I wanted to keep them all. They show no fear of humans from the day they are taken from the nest. Some start saying "M'm! M'm! Good!" at six weeks of age, and becoming playful even before this. They are easy to hand feed and are weaned with a minimum of difficulty. They accept new foods with enthusiasm and enjoy almost anything offered them.

The Quakers are also referred to as Monk Parakeets or Gray Breasted Parakeets. They are a medium sized bird, usually eleven to twelve inches in length. The upper parts are varying shades of green, brighter on the wings and tail. The cheeks and throat are gray, merging into pale gray, white tipped breast feathers. The flight feathers are blue, edged with black.

They are attractive in appearance even if not as strikingly vivid as some other species. Their soft brown eyes are instantly appealing.

There exists an extremely rare yellow mutation and a beautiful powdery Wedgwood blue which I am presently breeding. Regardless of their color, the Quakers have the same delightful personalities.

They are unique in that they are the only nest building parrots known. In the wild, and when colony bred, each pair of birds builds its own separate chamber within the main nest structure, similar to an apartment house. Each chamber consists of two separate sections - an inner living-dining area and a front porch. The parent birds spend a great deal of time on their front porch guarding their precious eggs and chicks.

The eggs are laid and incubated in the back dining room area. As the chicks grow larger they move into the living room. The parent birds are

constantly re-constructing and repairing the nest, working industriously at this even when burdened with the task of feeding a clutch of baby chicks.

Quakers are an excellent choice for those looking for a family pet. If properly hand fed and given attention during the weaning period there is little or no danger of their biting children. They rapidly form a strong bond to their owners. They are tough little birds, and with a life expectancy of about forty years the owners can look forward to their pet Quaker entertaining their grand children.

Choosing a suitable cage for your pet is an important decision. Except for you, the owner, and its food and water, the most important thing in your bird's life is his cage. Selecting one which both appeals to your taste in furnishings and provides a happy home for your bird requires considerable thought in advance of making the purchase.

The Quakers' cage requirements are modest. The minimum size should be 18 inches x 24 inches x by 18 inches high. This size cage is acceptable if it is used only as a place of refuge -that is a sleeping place and a feeding station. When in doubt, larger is always better.

For prospective breeders quakers are also an excellent choice if both the family and the neighbors are tolerant of the amount of noise generated by a flock. They are both hardy and prolific birds with an ever present good market for the offspring. Kept singly, as pets, they are quiet, limiting themselves almost exclusively to talking, singing, and whistling. When kept in large numbers, either colony bred or housed in adjacent individual cages, they are incredibly noisy.

Quakers are strong chewers and will easily chew their way out of anything less than 16 gauge wire. Any type wire as large as one by two may be used as long as it is of sufficiently strong gauge.

They are very tolerant of varied weather conditions, protected on the coldest nights by their habit of roosting in their nests. Those apartment houses they build are used as home all year round, not just in breeding season.

As with all species, the diet given both pets and breeding birds is most important. We rely on good quality pelleted food as the mainstay of our Quakers' diets. If fed a seed mix they will require calcium and vitamin supplements. We frequently supplement their diet with fruits and vegetables. Corn, carrots, apples, and grapes are universal favorites. We try very hard to limit our pets' treats to these nutritional foods and resist the temptation to succumb to their begging for cookies and other sweets.

I not only breed Quakers, but I love them. One of our first hand fed babies is still a favorite pet, and he is absolutely delightful. His talking ability and vocabulary rivals that of our African Gray in spite of the fact that we have little free time to spend on giving lessons. He loves to play, hides in my pocket, lies upside down in my hand, and is always happy and sweet. I confess that there are times when I tire of hearing him whistle Dixie, but he is easily diverted by a new toy. He has a great time even with the cardboard center of a roll of toilet tissue. He totally enjoys his toys, and we totally enjoy him.