Breeding the Bourke Parakeet by Ed Hoyn

For many aviculturists, having bred budgies and cockatiels for some time and who want to breed something a bit more exotic, I can recommend no better bird than the Bourke parakeet. That's how it happened to me. I acquired my first Bourkes in the 60's and from then until the present time I have never been without a pair or two of these charming little fellows. Their soft colors, pleasant chatter and active nature make them an ideal bird for anyone who prefers the smaller hookbills.

In the normal colored Bourke the adult male is by far the most beautiful of the pair. When I received my first pair we only had the normal colors but now we have several beautiful mutations. I have seen four of these newer varieties - the pied, cinnamon, yellow and rosey. Of these I have seen, the rosey is by a wide margin my favorite. To me this little bird is truly a beauty.

The Bourkes make an ideal aviary bird and even wooded cages are safe since they do NOT chew or gnaw. Their requirements are small compared to other birds. My basic mixture is 3 parts parakeet seed mix, one part finch mix, 1 part small black sunflower, 1 1/2 parts pullet starter or chick starter. In addition to this seed mixture I supply them with fresh water, vitamins, greens, grit and canned mixed vegetables.

I breed in individual cages which should be at least 4 feet long, 2 feet wide and 2 feet high. For nest boxes I prefer one 12" long by 7 or 8 inches squared. A slightly larger box will do just as well if this is all you have. In the bottom of the nest I put an inch or two of corn cobs or wood shavings. I am sure they would breed as young as eight months. I prefer to wait until the birds are 11 or 12 months of age.

I receive phone calls from many first time breeders of Bourkes showing concern because their pairs have laid one or two eggs and apparently are not going to set. Don't worry about this as, without exception, the
Bourke parakeet will not set tight until after the third egg is laid. Incubation starts in earnest after #3 appears and you will seldom see the hen off the nest. Some of my birds have to be nudged gently to one side so the eggs can be checked.

Bourkes make reliable parents. I have used these industrious birds to foster Red Rumps (a much larger bird), Scarlet Chested and Turquoisines. At the present time I have a pair of Bourkes feeding 3 of their own as well as a young Turquoisine and this is their first clutch of youngsters!

I find it difficult to sex young Bourkes before 3 or 4 months of age. Careful observation is suggested as the youngsters approach 3 weeks of age. Around this time the old pair may want to nest again and some may neglect their young. If such neglect is apparent remove the male as the hen will finish off the feeding of the nestlings. In the many years I have raised Bourkes I have NEVER had a pair pick the young as some other varieties do. I keep the Bourkes in flights with many small hookbills as well as finches with no harm coming to any of the birds thus caged.

Concerning the plight of the Bourkes in the wild, a report shows they are holding their own. How long this will continue is anyone's guess. Give our so called civilization some time and we will have them on the endangered and threatened lists! I am ashamed to admit it but my generation has caused more birds, animals and plant life to become extinct than at any other time in environmental history. I've been around for a long time and to me it would seem each generation has less and less concern for nature's living creatures, including the present day rape of all our beautiful forests and water ways.

The lost song of a bird, the proud stance of an animal which has become extinct is over-shadowed with man's greed for power and the almighty dollar! Take for instance the Alaska oil spill. According to Alaska's Fish & Wildlife Department, the oil spill killed between 90,000 and 270,000 birds alone. They estimate
it will take 70 years before the environment will again be what it was originally. How many of us will be around at that time?

I only hope and pray we can educate the coming generation to take better care of their world and the creatures who share it with them. If we show no respect for the environment we live in, how then, will we respect our fellow humans.