

WITH CALMNESS TO SUCCESS!

Breeding fig-parrots in Weltvogelpark Walsrode

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With a maximum size of 20 cm, fig-parrots (Tribe Cyclopsittacini) are among the smaller species within the Order Psittaciformes.

Weltvogelpark Walsrode houses four of the five known species of these small parrots (Genus *Cyclopsitta* and *Psittaculirostris*). During the 2012 breeding season the Orangebreasted Fig-parrots (*Cyclopsitta guillemittii*) as well as the Double-eyed Fig-parrots (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma*) successfully parent-reared their young. Germany-wide, both species can only be seen in Weltvogelpark Walsrode.

**Above: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot male.
Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot female.**



All the seven recognized subspecies of the Orange-breasted Fig-parrot inhabit rain, monsoon and swamp forest in lowlands and hilly regions up to 1100 m on New Guinea and surrounding islands. In the wild the main breeding season is between December and June. These fig-parrots nest in a hole that they excavate themselves in an arboreal termitarium. In contrast, the Double-eyed Fig-parrots nest in existing cavities in a hollow of a high tree or in a rotten tree trunk or limb. This species has eight recognized subspecies which are found on New Guinea and on the northeast coast of Australia.

Double-eyed Fig-parrots inhabit lowland and montane forest, mangroves and more open woodland up to 2000 m. The main breeding season occurs between March and June in

New Guinea, while in Australia the birds mainly breed between August and November.

A special feature, alluded to in their name, is the diet of these small parrots – in the wild they mainly feed on fruits of various fig trees, preferring the seeds rather than the flesh of the figs. Additionally, a variety of other fruits and berries, nectar and also insects and their larvae are taken.



In captivity experiences have shown that fig-parrots are very sensitive to disturbance, especially during the breeding season. Changes in their direct surroundings as well as at the nest box can unsettle them. It is very important to deal with the birds very carefully in order to breed them successfully.

To encourage our breeding pairs of Orange-breasted fig-parrots to start breeding, we construct nest boxes with a size of 30 cm x 20 cm x 20 cm (length x width x height) that are placed in the enclosures behind the scenes. These nest

boxes are made of waterproof particle board. An entrance hole with a diameter of 4 to 6 cm is provided on both sides of the boxes.



Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot Male in front of nesting box.

The boxes are entirely filled with natural cork tiles. The cork is scratched a bit at the entrance hole to provide the birds with a starting point to begin excavating their nest cavity in the cork tiles. Digging the cavity together stimulates the pair's breeding instinct. Once the nest cavity is approximately 8 to 10 cm in diameter, the female lays her eggs – normally two, but one or three eggs are possible. The young hatch after an incubation period of about 20 to 22 days. The parents adjust the size of the nest cavity to the size of their



growing offspring. These birds are tidy by nature – the chicks deposit their droppings directly out of the nest box so that the interior stays clean.

Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot Nesting box, with breeding hole (marked).

In contrast to the Orange-breasted Fig parrots, the Double-eyed Fig-parrots are provided with a natural wooden trunk as nesting box. The cavity is approximately 20 cm x 25 cm (width x height) with a diameter of about 15 cm. The entrance hole is about 4 to 6 cm in diameter and situated 20 cm above the nest floor maximally. The nest floor is lined with wood shavings.

(Note by the editor: The name of the Double-eyed Fig-parrots is derived from the cheek patches of some subspecies that vaguely resemble eyes.)

As soon as a pair of fig-parrots has eggs, the birds are left in peace until the approximate hatch date of the chicks.



Shortly afterwards, the nest box is inspected, but only when the female has left the box to feed.

Above: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot Juvenile.



Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot with 2 juveniles.

When there is proof that there are small chicks inside the box, the diet of the birds is adjusted.

The standard fig-parrot diet at the park consists of germinated seeds, a fruit mixture made of blue berries, grapes, apples and papaya as well as dried figs which are soaked at least for 24 h in water. Additionally, one table spoon of Versele Laga and tropical pate are added. The birds also have ad libitum access to millet. After the chicks hatch the standard diet is supplemented with a mash made of three parts of Versele Laga NutriBird A21 and one part Versele Laga Orlux Lori.

When the chicks are about 14 days old, recently moulted, white mealworms are added to the food.

Right: Double-eyed Fig-parrot Female.
Below: Double-eyed Fig-parrot Male.



Generally, the birds are disrupted as little as possible during the incubation period as well as after the chicks hatch. Only a few keepers that the fig-parrots know well care for them. After 35 to 42 days the offspring leave the nest box for the first time, but they regularly return to their nest during the first days after fledging. At the age of 60 to 70 days the young are separated from their parents and put together as a juvenile group per species in an enclosure adjacent to the enclosure of the parents.

Because these fig-parrots are known to be very sensitive to disturbances at their nest boxes and the immediate surroundings, the young are not banded with closed rings (in consultation with the ministry). Instead, they are banded with open aluminium rings when separated from their parents.

After the separation of the first fully grown offspring, both breeding pairs of the Orangebreasted Fig-parrots began with a new clutch. One chick already left the nest box of the first breeding pair in the beginning of September; another chick

of the second breeding pair hatched in September. The Double-eyed Fig-parrots also seem to be getting ready for their next brood!



Left: Double-eyed Fig-parrot Juvenile after fledging.

Below: Double-eyed Fig-parrot Juvenile separated from parents.



Below: Double-eyed Fig-parrot Juvenile separated from parents.



Right: Cage for juveniles.





Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot Juvenile separated from parents.

Breeding of fig-parrots at Weltvogelpark did work out quite well this year – two breeding pairs of the Orange-breasted Fig-parrot have successfully reared four chicks in total so far. Two pairs of the Double-eyed Fig-parrots have reared one chick each. In the year of its 50th anniversary Weltvogelpark Walsrode is very excited about this great breeding success of the fig-parrots! And we are looking forward to many more beautiful young...



Left: Orange-breasted Fig-parrot juveniles exploring their new cage.

References:

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