

LOVEBIRDS: Agapornis From Africa

Lovebirds are a group of small stocky parrots from Africa. Although these birds are only about six inches long they more than make up for it with a wealth of color and vivacious personality. The three species commonly available as pets are the Peach-faced, Black-masked and Fischers. Blue-masked are commonly seen but these are only a blue form of the Black-masked.

Lovebirds, especially the Peach-faced, are being bred in a wide variety of mutations. Serious breeders of these birds produce such colors as lutino, violet, pastel, and others to numerous to mention. This makes them prime candidates for those who wish to learn about heredity and the role the science of genetics plays in living things.

Not only are people breeding mutations within a single species but many are hybridizing or interbreeding between the species as well. Due to this practice it has become difficult to find pure Fischers as more often than not they have been crossed with the Black-masked. It is sad to see the solid red-orange forehead of the Fischers replaced with the mix of dark gray to orange. The true species genetic diversity is gradually becoming lost. This is why it is so important for breeders to take on the responsibility of not polluting the gene pool of any given kind of animal.

Lovebirds are not what the name suggests. Yes, it is true that a bonded pair will sit close to each other but they are just as capable of ruthless fighting among themselves. The result can be missing feathers, toes, eyes or even death. To avoid this birds kept in a large colony must be introduced as juveniles.

Lovebirds are easily bred if indeed you have a true pair. Many birds sold as “pairs” are just two birds thrown together. Since both sexes look so much alike it is often necessary to have the birds DNA sexed.

It is fascinating to watch a Peach-faced cut paper or palm fronds to size, work it into the feathers on the rump and then carry it to the nest. The birds will fill a nestbox with paper and then make a chamber in which the hen will lay her eggs. In about 23 days the eggs will hatch. If a playful pet is desired the babies are taken at about one week of age and reared by hand.