

# Saved from Extinction: The Bicudo and the Curio

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Two of the best song birds in the world are the Bicudo *Oryzoborus crassirostris maximiliani* and the Curio *Oryzoborus angolensis*. Both are native to Brazil and live in the proximity of rivers and lakes. Both birds were formerly found in almost all the states throughout the country of Brazil.

Their exact numbers are unknown; however, the Curios are more plentiful in the wild than the Bicudos, which are extremely rare and almost extinct. The song of the Bicudo is compared to the sound of the flute and the Curio's song is compared to the violin.

The Bicudo is about 15 cm (6 in.) long and both the male and female are born brown in color. Only the male's feathers will turn a cobalt black color with white feathers at the tip of its wings. Likewise, only the male Bicudo sings and will start singing at an early stage even while its feathers are still brown.

The Curio is about 11 cm (4½ in.) long. Both the male and female are born brown in color, but the female will remain brown throughout her life and rarely sings. The male will begin singing at an early age, but as an adult its chest and stomach feathers turn to a rich, wine color and the feathers on its tail, back, head and neck turn black with a few white feathers at the tips of its wings. Their food in the wild consists mainly of seeds and insects.

The causes of these birds' near extinction in the wild are: being captured in large numbers by illegal smugglers and dealers; destruction of their natural habitats; deadly insecticides used in agriculture; and natural predators.

On a recent trip to Brazil, we visited Mr. Marcilio Picinini in the city of Matias Barbosa. Seventeen years ago, he realized the need to start raising the

Bicudo and Curio in captivity. He has created one of the most exciting aviaries that I have ever seen and his success in raising these two species is unbelievable and unequaled. Actually we could say that because of his work, both of these magnificent song birds are not going to be included on the extinction list.

Licensed by the Brazilian government to breed and sell these birds, Picinini is presently producing more than 1,000 babies from both species. His aviary contains approximately 30 Bicudo females and five males as well as 500 Curio females and 60 males. The male of both species will breed up to 30 females. A Curio will live up to 25 years of age and the Bicudo will live up to 40 years of age. Both species will lay one egg every two days until a clutch totaling three to four eggs is laid.

While the Brazilian people have a special love for cage birds, the Bicudo and the Curio are the most popular songbirds kept in captivity in that country. Prior to Picinini's achievements in producing these two species in large numbers, many people's attempts at hand raising the birds were not successful. Also at that time, Brazilians were purchasing the birds from dealers who were capturing wild birds and depleting the wild population.

Picinini's birds are closed-banded and legal to possess and sell. Since these songbirds are extremely popular and highly prized by the Brazilian people, the majority of the general public prefers to own this highly prized songbird legally.

Picinini has developed a remarkably successful breeding system and most of his birds are domestic stock and are very tame. His breeding system is as follows: He has a line of cages with a female in each cage. He walks by car-

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*A Bicudo hen on eggs.*



*Bicudo eggs in a nest. The eggs are often fostered under other females. The eggs can be held 7 days before they must be incubated.*

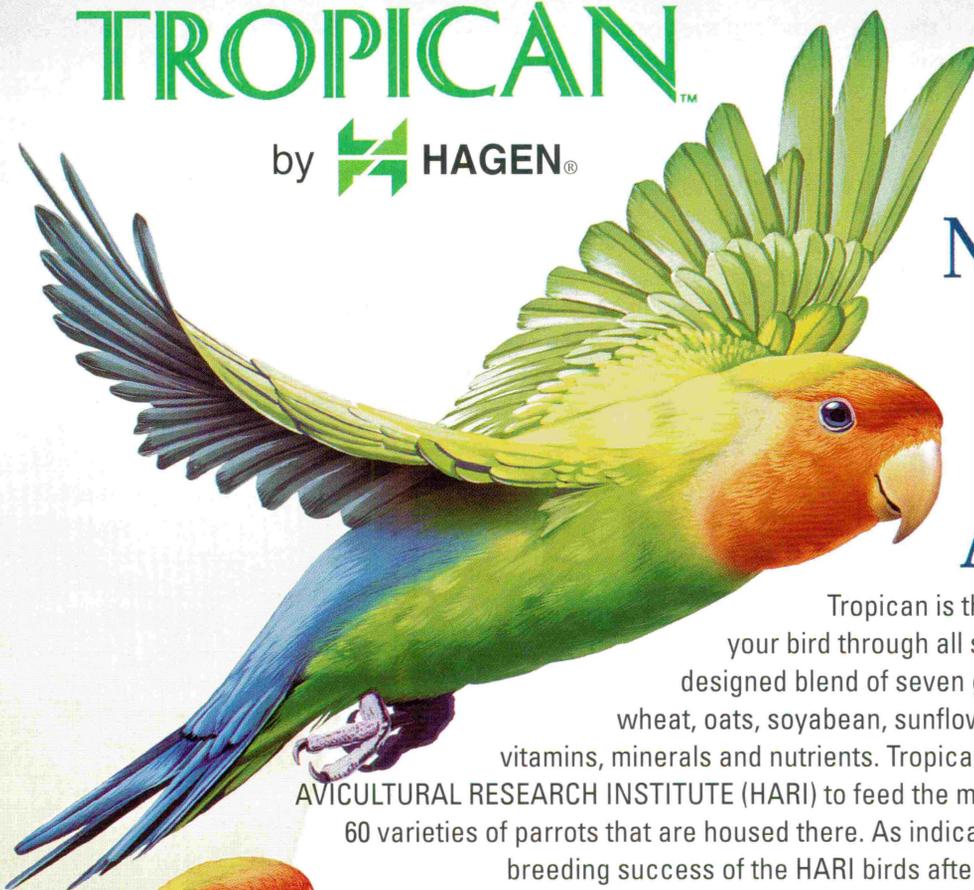
*A Bicudo hen feeding her young.*



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rying a single male in a cage and, if the female is ready to breed, she squats down and flops her wings. The cages are placed side by side with both cage doors open. The male flies from his cage, taking less than five seconds to breed the female, then returns immediately to his own cage.

One of the interesting things we learned is that one single breeding will fertilize the three to four eggs which the female will lay in the next few days.

Throughout the years, Picinini has bred sisters with brothers and mothers with sons. None of the birds has shown any sign of genetic defects.

Unfortunately, most efforts to release captive bred birds into the wild have failed. Those birds born and raised in aviaries do not do well in the wild. Captive bred birds are always caught by their natural predators, mainly hawks, while the wild birds have learned to escape from most predators.

Based on my personal experience with exotic birds, I don't believe the methods for releasing captive bred birds into the wild have been appropriate. The proper plan would be to build a large cage in the wild where birds could become accustomed to flying long distances and living in the wild before setting them free, rather than releasing them from a small cage without benefit of learning the demands of existing in the wild.

The Curio and the Bicudo breed from August through the end of April. Both birds are very sensitive to cold weather and are aggressive by nature. For example, in captivity, the male cannot be left for long with the female because the male will kill the babies in order to bring the female into breeding condition again. True to the birds' combative disposition, given the opportunity, the female will attack the male frequently beating it to death.

Females will begin producing at one year of age. While sitting on the eggs during the 13-day incubation period, it is quite common for the female to bathe and wet the eggs. The babies will start feeding themselves at 30 days old, but the parent will also feed them until they are 40 days old.

Before feeding the birds, Picinini washes and dries the seeds he buys because he believes that insecticides used by farmers will eventually poison the birds. He does not air condition or heat the breeding area and uses very small cages since these birds do not require a large space in which to breed. His birds' diet consists mainly of seeds, live crickets and corn meal cakes which he bakes himself. Once a year, he worms all the birds and administers vitamins fortified with iron.

He is willing to teach individuals to raise and care for songbirds in captivity and has even produced a training video which clearly demonstrates the specifics of rearing these special songbirds.

In the Brazilian market, the price for one Bicudo or Curio can range from US\$ 200 to US\$ 5,000 or 10,000.

Thanks to another dedicated aviculturist, two beautiful birds are being saved from the extinction list and are available for viewing by the public on an appointment basis at Marcilio Picinini's aviary in Matias Barbosa. The city is located in the state of Minas Gerais, approximately three hours' drive from downtown Rio de Janeiro. ➔



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