

# Book Review

Book Review by Dale R. Thompson

## The Large MACAWS: Their Care, Breeding and Conservation

by Joanne Abramson, Brian L. Speer and Jorgen B. Thomsen  
25 Chapters, Written by 20 International Experts with 17 Collaborators  
552 pages Hardbound, 9x12 Format, 350 Color Photographs, Over 70 Illustrations

Seldom is a book written with so much comprehensive material that reaches such a diversified audience as is done through the book, *The Large MACAWS: their Care, Breeding and Conservation*. This book, authored by three experts in their field, covers with great detail the wonderful world of the large macaws. Material on eleven species of macaws are covered from an avicultural, veterinary, conservation and archaeological concept. These eleven macaw species include the Hyacinth, Buffon's, Green-winged, Scarlet, Blue & Gold, Military, Red-fronted, Blue-throated Glaucous, Lear's and Spix's Macaws. The material in this book will be of great interest to not only the macaw pet owner and aviculturist, but to the scientific community, including veterinarians, college and university personnel, museum personnel, etc. The conservation material in this book is extensive and will be of great interest and help to field researchers, biologists, ecologists, etc. The scientific field research discussed in this book covers ecology, taxonomy, genetics, recovery projects and efforts, and reintroduction concepts and projects.

It is difficult to explain how detailed this book is. Subjects are not skimmed over but are given with accuracy and from every viewpoint that is known. Even though it covers a wide group of subjects, the avicultural information is simply outstanding. Covering in detail from identification, pre-purchase considerations, housing and nutrition to reproduction, natural and artificial incubation, and pediatric material just to mention a few, this book is an absolute must for the macaw breeder whether they are a beginner or very experienced.

This is a large formatted book measuring 9 by 12 inches. The color photography is outstanding and is shown not only for beauty but for information.

Much of the written material has a color photograph explaining it. This is great for identification of macaw subspecies to showing babies in many stages from hatching to weaning. The photography of macaws in the field whether at a nest or through the field, researcher's eyes, is both spectacular and informative. There are 350 color photographs in this book and many of them are one of a kind. Each chapter is begun with a full page color photograph depicting its contents. There are also a few spectacular surprise photographs. Not surprising as over 6,000 photographs were received from photographers around the world to assist the making of this book. This number was reduced to the 350 color photographs used in the book and they were taken by 77 photographers. Being a wildlife photographer myself, I can truly appreciate the photography in this book.

One of the unique chapters in this book is on anatomy and physiology. Joanne Abramson has broken new ground in this area. Every conceivable part of the anatomy of a macaw is superbly illustrated by Marsha Mello, from details of feathers to the bones in the feet, wings and many other parts of the skeletal structure. Most unique are the skull and cranium illustrations taken directly from the different macaw species showing their differences. In both juvenile and adult macaws these illustrations show exactly where cartilage and the bones are formed in each skull. Both internal (respiratory, avian egg structure, etc.) and external (eye, ear, preen gland, hatching macaw, etc.) areas of a macaw are shown. One unusual illustration is the hyoid apparatus or the bones of the tongue. Much of this work has not been done before. Marsha Mello has produced over 70 illustrations throughout this book, but her attention to detail and accuracy is best shown in

the anatomy and physiology chapter.

The book, *The Large MACAWS: their Care, Breeding and Conservation*, has been the brain child of Joanne Abramson for several long years. I have personally been aware of the concept and beginnings of this book from the beginning. As is true with most of life's endeavors, a beginning concept is changed many times over during the process. So it has been with this book.

Joanne Abramson has dedicated her life's work to the large macaws. The main thrust of her work has been towards reproducing these magnificent creatures in captivity. But with Joanne, it wasn't simply a matter of acquiring these large parrots to reproduce, but to learn every aspect and detail about them that there was to learn. She is a keen observer and has the intuitiveness to allow her birds to teach her a thing or two. Through their behavior, Joanne has learned so much about them, but most of her knowledge has come from plain hard work. As aviculturists, we know that good management of our aviaries and birds is instrumental to our success. This Joanne has done to a high degree, but she has expanded her knowledge through poring over many books, journals and magazines and through many hours of communications with other experts in their fields. She branched out to many other fields including the medical needs of captive macaws and their solutions, their diet and nutrition needs, and field conservation of macaws in the wild, to mention only a few. The readers of the *Watchbird Journal* are very aware of her articles on the nutritional analysis of almost all foods (vegetables, fruits, legumes, selected seeds and nuts) that are fed to large macaws.

Joanne Abramson has compiled all of this extensive information and has spent over five years writing this book. Not only has she placed her own knowledge and experiences in this book, but she has included data from many experts in other fields that encompass the large macaws. Not only other aviculturists, but veterinarians and other medical minds, museum personnel, and a host of biologists and conservationists that are the experts in their fields. Twenty international experts and 17 collaborators have contributed to the material found in this book. Although this is a combined effort on the part of many people, the co-authors

Joanne Abramson, Brian L. Speer, DVM, and Jorgen Thomsen have dedicated much of their time and effort into making this book what it is. The great driving force behind this book on large macaws, however, has been Joanne Abramson. Certainly a perfectionist, Joanne has strived so hard to make this book as accurate as possible. No one will know the effort and frustration that has gone into this book, but in my opinion, no one else could ever have done such an excellent job on all the many aspects surrounding the large macaws.

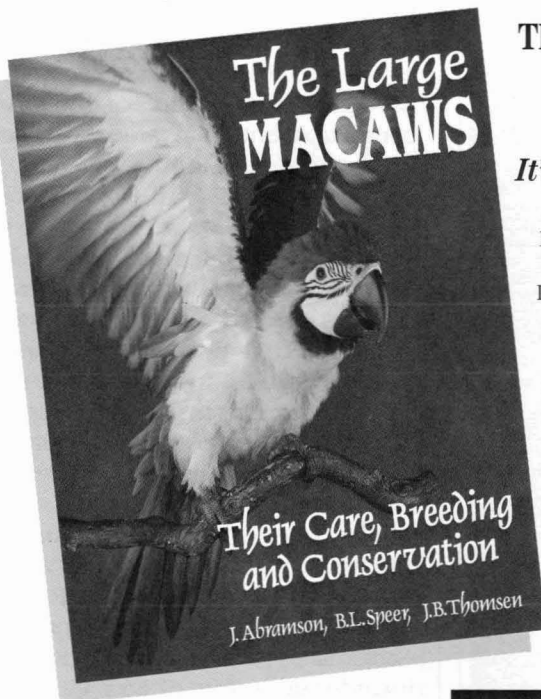
This book of 552 pages is broken into four parts: 1) Aviculture, 2) Veterinary Medicine, 3) Conservation and 4) Anthropology. The Aviculture part consists of 12 chapters including: Identification and Profiles, the wonderful chapter on Anatomy and Physiology, Chromosome Analysis, Acquisition, Housing, Nutritional Requirements, Breeding, Incubation, Pediatrics, Emergency Evacuation, Mortality, and Aviculture for Conservation. The Veterinary Medicine part consists of six chapters including: Closed Aviary Concepts, The Normal Macaw, Infectious Diseases, Non-infectious Diseases,

Breeder Medical Management, and Pediatric Medical Management. The Conservation part consists of six chapters including: Problems and Options in Macaw Conservation, Hyacinth Macaws in the Pantanal, Manu and Tambopata, Scarlet Macaws in Carara, The Lear's Macaw, and International Trade. The Anthropology part includes a very interesting chapter called: The Sacred Bird (The Scarlet Macaw Among Puebloan Peoples). Although detailed and long, this book is very readable, understandable and educational. Technical in parts, it is certainly not over the heads of most aviculturists. One might think that the veterinary medicine part might be too technical but this is not true with this book. Brian Speer, DVM, who authored this part is a veterinarian in private practice who has specialized only in avian medicine. Dr. Speer has stated the technical parts of this area very clearly in terms and concepts understood by the aviculturist, both professional and non-professional. He pulls no punches in what is needed to maintain a healthy, clean aviary. What is so good about this part is that it is not on reactive medicine, meaning how to react to

medical problems in the aviary. Although Dr. Speer goes into both infectious and non-infectious diseases in detail, his main emphasis is on how best to prevent problems from occurring. His chapters on breeder and pediatric medical management should be read and followed by anyone interested in breeding birds. The concepts found in these chapters are equally useful and needed by the pet owner. Brian Speer is an active member of AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians) and currently chairs its Avicultural Committee and is on its board of scientific editors. He is also widely published in many veterinary journals and proceedings.

Jorgen Thomsen has great input into this book. Born in Denmark, he was with the CITES office on the Danish Ministry of the Environment before moving to the US where he held a position with TRAFFIC, USA, one of the offices of the international TRAFFIC Network. These organizations are part of a joint trade monitoring of wildlife throughout the world. This is done through WWF, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature and IUCN (The World Conservation Union). Through these channels Jorgen was

## The Most Comprehensive Book Ever Written On Macaws



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able to work directly with many field biologists and conservation organizations. He participated in field and policy research programs on parrots and the parrot trade. Jorgen Thomsen has been instrumental in the conservation portion of this book on large macaws. He definitely has the qualifications. In fact he participated in a field assessment of the Hyacinth Macaw in Brazil and Bolivia in 1987. He has spent many hours coordinating and reviewing the conservation portion of this book. This is in addition to writing a portion of the

conservation part. Jorgen Thomsen is now the Executive Director of TRAFFIC International, based out of Cambridge, England.

It is of interest that this book, *The Large MACAWS: their Care, Breeding and Conservation*, may have been written when information is at its greatest. It may be a sad fact, but we could easily be at the apex of knowledge concerning the large macaws. Certainly this could be true with the field knowledge or the conservation of large macaws in the wild. With the increas-

ing habitat destruction by man in Central and South America along with the legal and illegal trade, the days when the large macaws were simply in balance with nature are now gone. Certainly it is past for the Hyacinth, Lear's and Spix's Macaw. The field conservation information found in this book may stand alone as it may only be a glimpse of what it might have been. Future conservation efforts may be only a reaction to continual habitat destruction. Hopefully this will not be true. The conservation portion of this book is superb reading and is a not so gentle reminder that we must do our part to support those conservation efforts that are now going on.

The use of the wild-caught macaw for breeding is now closed. Hopefully the future removal of macaws from the wild will end completely, certainly the illegal trade. As aviculturists, we will soon be reproducing future breeding stock and pet birds from macaws that have been captive reared. When our breeders that were originally wild-caught die out, the future depends upon how we have reared the young macaws we hatch now in our aviaries. Questions on whether we should be artificially incubating our macaw eggs and hand rearing from day one must be addressed. Are the stunted macaw babies now being raised (mostly out of ignorance) going to be included in our future gene pool? Is it time we parent-rear some of our macaws so that they can retain some of the instinctual nature of their wild-caught parents. Now is the time to make these decisions.

*The Large MACAWS: their Care, Breeding and Conservation* is a very needed book. I personally feel it will be the most comprehensive book on large macaws ever to be written. Its timing is perfect as it gives us a great opportunity to begin to understand the needs of these magnificent parrots. This book should be in everyone's collection and a book that should be read. It's very well worth it and you'll enjoy it.

The price of this book is \$170.00 plus \$10.00 (shipping & handling) and can be obtained through Raintree Publications, P.O. Box 1338, Fort Bragg, California 95437. California residents must include Sales Tax of \$12.33 (7.25%). Checks and Money Orders are accepted. Credit Card orders (Visa/MasterCard) may be arranged by calling 1-800-422-5963 or by Fax (707) 964-1868. Include card number and expiration date. ➤



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