

Breeding the Turquoise Tanager

by Maarten de Ruiter
Cambron Casteau, Belgium

The Turquoise Tanager *Tanagra mexicana* is distributed from Venezuela over western Amazonia to southeast Brazil. It is *not* found in Mexico as its scientific name suggests. It lives up to 500 meters (1600 feet) in elevation and is seen in small groups of up to six individual birds. There are five subspecies of Turquoise Tanager, *T. m. mexicana*, *T. m. vieilloti*, *T. m. media*, *T. m. bolivicina* and *T. m. brasiliensis*.

In Europe the Turquoise Tanager is frequently available and the subspecies most commonly offered is *Tanagra m. mexicana* from the Guyanas.

In 1990 a friend of mine obtained a single Turquoise Tanager. Its sex was not known as this species is not sexually dimorphic. It was also in very poor condition with scarcely a feather on it. This poor creature was placed in an all wire mesh cage that measured 0.5 meter (19½ in.) in cube form so it could not come into contact with its own droppings. By observing the feces, many worm eggs were found and the bird was treated with 0.2 milliliters of Panacur 2.5%. A heat lamp was placed above its cage keeping the interior of the cage around 25° Celcius (85°F). A wide variety of fruit was offered along with live insects (mealworms and small crickets). Within three months this bird recovered and was a real beauty!

Around a year later, a second Turquoise Tanager was obtained and again the sex of this bird was unknown. Although this bird looked in good condition, it still was isolated during a six week quarantine period. This was to make sure it was in healthy condition.

These two birds were placed together in a well planted aviary at the beginning of the next spring. Connected to this aviary was an indoor

enclosure that could be heated. The artificial light source within the indoor enclosure was turned on from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Along with the Turquoise Tanagers were a pair of Pekin Robins and two Bay-headed Tanagers.

The two Turquoise Tanagers were observed together most of the time and in the early part of June two eggs were found in a small nest box. The nest box measured 7 cm x 7 cm x 15 cm high (2¾ in. x 2¾ in. x 6 in.). The tanagers had used coconut fiber and dry grass as nesting material. The eggs were blue-green in coloration and had some red-brown spots on them. Both parent birds shared in the incubation duties and after 14 days both eggs hatched. The skin of the young was almost black and they were covered with some whitish down feathers. At seven days of age, the first real feathers began to grow and seven days later the young had left the nest.

Further breeding attempts were not made by the pair but this could have been because the juveniles were left with the parents. Even at two months of age, the young birds were observed begging from the parents. As mentioned above, these birds were fed a wide variety of fruit and insect food. But shortly before this pair of Turquoise Tanagers began to breed, they were fed some egg-food which was mixed with the insect food. During the baby rearing period, the birds also received large amounts of ant-pupa and the parent birds were also observed searching regularly throughout the enclosure (especially the corners) for spiders, flies and other invertebrates.

Breeding results of tanagers are still uncommon and I hope this article has given some useful information for future breeders of tanagers. ➤

The Collared Aracari

by Jerry Jennings
Fallbrook, California

The Collared Aracari *Pteroglossus torquatus* is a colorful native of Central America, ranging from southern Mexico south all the way to Colombia, and as such is the most common of the Central American toucans to be encountered in the wild.

Though the Collared Aracari is common in the wild, it has been quite rare in captivity until the Fall of 1994, when a few dozen birds were imported from Nicaragua. Prior to these importations, less than a dozen individuals were known to exist in the U.S., and in just two collections, where they were reproducing in small numbers.

The Collared Aracari is a small toucan slightly larger than an Emerald Toucanet, with a comparatively long beak. They are monomorphic, requiring surgical sexing to distinguish males from females, though adult birds show some differentiation in beak length, with the male sporting the longer bill. The breast is a bright yellow, with a horizontal red and black stripe across the middle.

Between the stripe and the black feathers on the throat there is a black spot, which varies in size among individuals from very large to very small, and in some individuals it is non-existent. The yellow breast feathers are suffused with red, and the amount increases as the size of the spot declines.

The head and neck of the Collared is black, the back, wings, and tail dark green. Separating the black neck feathers from the green back is a brown ring or "collar", that runs from ear to ear and gives the species its name. Some writers have suggested that the size, thickness, or shade of brown is determinative of sex, though this is definitely not the case.

The beak of the Collared is black at the tip changing to silver along the sides then becoming red at the base. The eyeskin is deep red, contrasted against a bright yellow iris. The rump is red, and the legs blue-gray.

While the Collared is a small toucan,