

A Blue-fronted Amazon Experiment

by Michele Bauguess, Paso Robles, CA

I believe in experimentation. This is the only way we can learn what our birds are capable of, willing to do, or put up with. This is also what aviculture is all about. Without experimentation, aviculture would be at a stand still. There are a few things in the following story that may surprise some of you but I don't hold back. I will try anything at least once.

In 1994 we moved from a house in town with a small back yard to a house in the country with two acres. The birds made up one complete truck load. Poicephalus, Pionus, conures macaws and one pair of Blue-fronted Amazons.

Within three months I had two pair and two single Blue-fronts. Of the two pair one had never produced. I will call them Male A and Hen B. These, I assume, were wild caught birds as no history is available.

The other pair (Male C and Female D) had one infertile egg in five years. Male C was supposed to be a quarantine handfed bird that I rescued from a bad home at approximately six months old in 1990. Hen D, approximately 12 years old, was obtained from a pet shop in 1990.

The single birds included Hen E gotten from a pet shop where she was laying eggs in the cage, age unknown and probably wild caught.

The Male F was an incubator-hatched handfed baby of the 1991 hatch.

I realized something drastic had to be done if I was to get productive

birds.

We had a 10 x 10 foot octagon shaped wrought iron cage in the back yard. I placed all six birds in there together. It was fall and there were no nest boxes available to cause fighting. Everything was fine until December then things went terribly wrong. Male A chose to bond with Female E. His mate, Hen B, was unwilling to give up her long time mate and continued to pursue him. This caused a lot of bickering between the birds. I removed the newly bonded pair and placed them on the other side of the yard. Hen B

somehow managed to escape from the cage and flew to her old mate. To this day I have been unable to find out how she escaped. And no other birds were able to get out. The fight that ensued was horrific. Hen B was unable to get to her mate but the two birds on the inside of the cage viciously chewed at her feet. Her feet were terribly mangled by the time we were able to rescue her.

Stumpy (as we began to call her) spent several days in the hospital and ran up a several hundred dollar vet bill. I was very dismayed when all but one of the toes the vet tried so hard to



Photo by Michele Bauguess

Even with toes on one foot missing, this Blue-fronted Amazon bred and hatched out two offspring and fostered a Yellow-naped baby to boot.

save fell off. She is now left with only one full toe, the rest are little stumps. She has a lot of trouble perching on round branches, so I gave her 2X4s on end and side by side about 1-2 inches apart. She can climb on the wire ok, but perching is very difficult for her. She could not cope hearing her old mate close by and continually called to him. She always appeared to be sad.

Male A and Hen E have been sold, and if they have become productive I am not aware of it.

Hen B's (Stumpy) new mate (Male F) who doesn't care about her handicap, loves her dearly, and protects her with a vengeance. I knew I would never be able to sell her in that condition so I was resigned to keeping her. Mating would be extremely difficult if not impossible for her.

Male C and Hen D remained closely bonded, and are still together, and unproductive at this time.

When I put Male F and Stumpy in their flight it was almost winter time, and I hate having birds out during the winter without the opportunity of allowing them a box for warmth. The only nest box I had available was a two-holed, metal, wood-lined cockatoo box so up it went.

Stumpy and her mate have been out in my aviary now for two years. The first egg she laid was from the perch and it was broken beyond repair. A few days she was not visible in their flight so I peeked in the nest box and lo and behold, EGGS!!! I couldn't believe my eyes. So much for Amazon boxes. When I candled the eggs, two were fertile. The one that was not was discarded.

I am absolutely amazed. I don't know how they accomplished it but I am so proud of them I could just burst. He is so funny when I check the nest box he runs back and forth along the bottom of the cage shouting at me (in English) "GET OUT OF HERE, GET OUT, GET OUT OF HERE." The eyes are flashing and he is puffed up so big and proud of his accomplishment. I keep telling them how proud of them I am. And she has never looked happier and more content.

In the incubator I had two Yellow-naped eggs the same age as Stumpy's so I put them under her. If I don't have

to feed day one babies I would rather not. The Nape eggs were marked with an X.

Stumpy sat on her eggs so tight I couldn't even get a peek. After 10 days I couldn't stand it any more, so with ladle in hand I carefully opened the box. She wasn't happy with this, but I slowly eased the ladle under her and carefully pulled out each egg. Three of them looked just fine, and were carefully placed back under her.

The fourth, a Blue-front egg, had a dent and cracks that resembled a spider's web or the spokes of a wheel. I was dismayed, but I never give up. I took it into the house and carefully covered the cracked area with Elmer's glue. I put two layers of glue and allowed it to dry in the incubator for about 10 minutes after which I placed it back under her. She continued to sit tight. I did not check the box again until hatch time.

On June 28th at feeding time (I feed in the evening due to the heat) I ventured a peek. A baby!! I could see the other eggs, two had Xs on them so I knew the baby was a Blue-front. Two days later another baby. This time one egg left had an X and the other did not. This meant one Blue-front and one Yellow-naped had hatched. Three days later there was one Nape and two Blue-fronts. You guessed it the cracked egg hatched.

All the babies' crops were stuffed full and they all looked very healthy and huge. Stumpy's mate rushed into the box and looked out the inspection hole at me, and said very quietly, "Get out of here, get out!" I followed his advice and closed the door. I spent the rest of the afternoon calling all my friends and telling them the exciting news.

Two weeks later it was time to pull the babies for handfeeding and banding. Stumpy, never, I mean never leaves that nest. I tried everything to get her out. Well I was much to persistent and she finally got very angry and to my dismay bit one of the babies. The bite didn't seem to be too bad so I left them alone.

The following day I fed them very early in the morning, left the food for one hour and then removed it. I went back at about 3:00 P.M., and offered them another bowl of food.

This time she came out of the box. I quickly snatched the three babies out of the nest. The baby she had bitten was the oldest. The bite was on the left side of the face, cheek, nares and under the mandible. The face was red and swollen. I put some antibiotic ointment on it and said a prayer. The next day the redness and swelling were gone.

Feeding was difficult for a couple of days, but things are normal now. Now at age six weeks the beak is slightly deviated to one side. I am doing physical therapy on it when I feed. This seems to help some but it is still a little crooked, but I don't think this will be much of a problem as the baby gets older.

Against all odds, Stumpy was able to produce and hatch not only her own eggs, but an egg of another bird. The second Yellow-nape egg never hatched. I think I will hang a medal on her box. You can bet your life I will not sell this pair of birds. They will be with me for as long as they live. And if they stop producing, I will just let them live a life of ease together, as I think they deserve it, don't you?

I think the moral of this story is: Never give up on your handicapped birds. They will surprise you when least expected. Also let's all keep trying new things with our birds. Don't stop fostering, and gluing eggs. You may be very surprised at the results, I was. ➤



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