

Keeping Toucans as Pets

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Everybody loves to see a toucan up close. Kids relate to the "Fruit Loop Bird" and "Tuki Tuki" from George of the Jungle. Adults are amazed at their sheer beauty and uniqueness. As with most birds, you can purchase a hand-raised baby which will give you years of pleasure.

Living in the Midwest, not a lot of us keep large softbills due to the cold winter conditions which force us to keep them indoors. Because they are frugivores, their fruit and vegetable droppings attract gnats and flies. If you can live with this, we urge you to consider a toucan, toucanette, or aracari for a fun pet bird. They have curious personalities and are very entertaining and fun to watch hop around and interact with people.

Toucans, like parrots, love to do their routines. Mine go on the road with me to do shows with other birds, and anxiously hop in their travel carrier to and perform without fail. They are easily trained to catch grapes and to hop up to your waiting arm. Some species are more affectionate than others, especially when they are hand

raised. Do your homework on them to learn which variety would best suit your personality.

Because my toucans do shows outdoors and we live in the city where you cannot safely free-fly birds, we clip their wings a little bit, but you must be cautioned on doing this. If a toucan's wings are clipped too severely, it will crash to the floor and bash its large beak on the ground which can lead to severe head trauma. Plan on clipping a couple feathers at a time. Toucans are easily restrained by holding the beak or neck while you trim each wing feather, and you do not need to hold them *too* firmly which can lead to irritation or suffocation. Be sure to avoid cutting blood feathers. I prefer to leave two outer primaries intact so you can see the shape of the true wing feathers while the bird is sitting still. Do not to cut nails too severely – especially if the bird's wings are clipped short – as this may cause it to fall if it can't keep a good grip. We suggest just taking the tips off the nails if they get too sharp.

Branches are especially important for keeping softbills, as they love to hop around. If you are going to house them in a cage, be certain to have branches securely placed on each end of the cage so they can hop from side to side, with plenty of room for exercise. You cannot have "too big" a cage for any bird. You should definitely have a grate between the floor of the

cage and the bird, to preclude the bird continuously stepping in its moist droppings. As you would do for any bird, you should provide different sized branches to prevent callouses from forming on its feet.

I've kept five different varieties of toucans the past 23 years. I am especially fond of the Tocos (the largest members of the toucan family) because of their loving nature. We also currently are working with a little Green Aracari who has as big a personality and is as outgoing and friendly to other children and adults as the Toco is.

Because many softbilled species are prone to hemochromatosis (excess iron storage disease), we test their blood levels annually. Avoid feeding green and yellow foods which are often high in iron content. Many foods contain iron, but we don't need to contribute to a possible hereditary disease, or create one. There are no symptoms to hemochromatosis, you just find your bird dead. And just because a blood report may show a high iron level in their blood, does not indicate they have the disease.

Hemochromatosis should always be monitored and managed through proper diet. To avoid misdiagnosing or completely misreading the bloodwork of a softbilled bird, we strongly urge you to find a qualified avian vet familiar with softbills, as softbills are completely different to deal with than parrots or other groups of birds.

If your vet is not up on softbills, he or she can draw the blood and fax the test results to a qualified softbill vet. Veterinarians are happy to work with each other for a small nominal fee, and you will learn much more by doing this, as will your veterinarian.

To learn more about the toucan family, visit The Emerald Bird Forest Gardens website at:

<http://www.emeraldforestbirds.com/>


You can send e-mail questions, or place a phone call. Owner, Jerry Jennings, is very good to work with, patient, and full of information about these wonderfully fun birds. You won't find a more knowledgeable source on raising, keeping, shipping, and ensuring as long a life as possible for your bird. 

Photo by Dale Perry



Yvonne Patterson and her favorite softbills, Pinnocchio and Tiki Toco Toucan, pose as the toucan plays with her earring.