

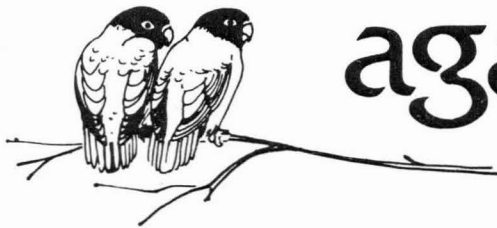
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agapornis acres

by Lee Horton

THE ABYSSINIAN AND MADAGASCAR LOVEBIRDS

AGAPORNIS TARANTA – CANA



Lee Horton

These birds are seen only on occasion and are rare in collections most probably because they do not breed as freely as the other Agapornis. Both are dymorphic thus easy to sex.

Our experience and those of friends indicate that the Madagascar (cana) breeds more readily than the Abyssinian (taranta). Our "Abys" are almost always single brooded and some hens even skip a year, which certainly makes progress slow if not impossible. We have bred them to four or more generations so far but with a few losses. We will need additional new blood to establish them.

We have thought of fostering the young which would encourage the parents to take another nest. The problem here is Abyssinians take fifty days after hatching to leave the nest, considerably longer than other Agapornis. So the problem is where to foster? I am sure a Peach-face would kick them out of the nest way too soon. I guess hand feeding is the only alternative.

The Abyssinian is a lovely bird. The body color is viridian green, paler on the upper tail coverts, rump and underparts, but very rich in hue, almost iridescent.

In the male the forehead, lores and a small ring of feathers around the eye are carmine red, the head areas being sharply defined. The flight feathers, secondary and primary coverts are black. The underlying coverts are also black. The tail is green, crossed by a wide black band

towards the tip. The bill is deep red and the lower mandible paler. The feet are blackish grey. They are slightly larger than the other Agapornis. The hen lacks the red of the head and eye area. The young resemble the hen. Difference in the sexes is noticeable within the first month.

"Abys" are quiet birds and slower moving than others in the family. They live in high elevations 6,000 to 10,000 feet. They travel to lower areas to feed on fig trees (*Ficus sycamorus*). They rarely travel in parties of more than ten to twenty birds.

The first pair imported to Europe was in 1910. The male was lost and the next importation did not take place until 1926. At this time two breeders achieved success almost simultaneously.

I would not advise disturbing a breeding pair by looking in the nest as they are very nervous at first. We have been able to inspect nests and even close band the young but it takes time to build tolerance with the adults. So at first leave them alone.

Abyssinians should be provided the regular small seeds – millet, canary, safflower, and oat groats. Also a little sunflower (which is not given to the other Agapornis) can be provided. They love sweet apple and other fruit. Also give them carrots, the usual green food, seedling grasses, soaked seed, etc.

Colony breeding has been tried but our experience shows a single pair is much safer as they will kill each other during nesting time.

Our "Abys" almost always nest during the rainy season starting at the end of December or first of January. Our friend John Bigg's Abyssinians seem to prefer the summer months. Ours build no nest



NOTICE!

Sheldon Dingle has accepted the position of Editor for the Watchbird

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except for a few body feathers that are placed in the bottom of the nest cavity. We are told some build a small pad.

To my knowledge no mutations have occurred to date probably because not many generations have been bred in aviaries. According to older publications hybrids have occurred but none to my knowledge have been bred in recent years.

Visualize what beautiful possibilities could result with Peach-face hybrids; not only new colors but a possible improvement in willingness to breed.

The Madagascar (*Agapornis cana*) is also a very quiet bird with a song similar to that of the parakeet family. It is a very shy bird but fortunately double or even triple brooded. Although not easy to breed, this makes them much easier to establish than the Abyssinian.

This *Agapornis* is also dymorphic. The male is pearl grey on the head, back of neck and breast. The body color is green, darker on the back and wings, paler on the rump and upper tail coverts. The flight feathers are black and underwing coverts are black. The lower breast, abdomen and undertail coverts are pale green. The tail is green with black sub-terminal band extending to the center feathers. The bill is a whitish-grey. The feet are pale grey. The Madagascar is smallest of the family except for the Nyassaland. The hen differs from the male by being green on the head and having green underwing coverts.

These birds are drab in color compared to others in the family but have a certain charm that make them well worth keeping. If, in keeping birds, noise is a problem, as it is with many today, both Aby-

ssinian and Madagascar Lovebirds are excellent choices.

Agapornis cana looks somewhat like a "budgie" in build but with a short tail. It is not surprising coming from the Island of Madagascar that they are so dissimilar from others in the clan. In their native land they travel in large colonies of up to a hundred or more. At one time this was the most common of all Lovebirds.

In England and Europe they were kept as long as one hundred and twenty years ago. It is surprising that they are not established in captivity at this time.

Again I would not advise keeping more than one pair per pen as they are very aggressive at breeding time. The hen seems to always bully the male, poor guy!

I find these birds hard to encourage to eat a well balanced diet. Their mainstay is small millets (finch mix). We also provide white millet, canary and oat groats. They also will eat a little green food, carrot and apple.

The nest is a small pad built by the hen. She usually lays five eggs. No mutations are known probably because a sufficient number have not been bred in aviaries. Old rumors of hybrids between the Budgerigar and Madagascars have been told but I rather doubt they are true.

I have thought of fostering to try to produce more young per season. They are so much smaller than the other *Agapornis*, only the Nyassas could do a proper job. Maybe next season we will try this as we now have Nyassalands raised by Blue Masked. The maiden hens would be more likely to accept the "foster children".

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