



Gray-headed social weavers—adults with one chick.

## Gray-headed Social Weavers a first U.S. breeding?

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*Editor's Note: This breeding of the grey-headed social weaver (*Psuedonigrita a. arnaudi*) may be a first U.S. captive breeding. If any of you have data regarding a prior breeding of this species, please refer your data to Dale Thompson, Avy Awards Committee, via the A.F.A. Home Office.*

In 1978 I was given the chance to purchase some finches, which were described to me as some sort of weaver. At the time I was offered the birds I was primarily interested in other types of finches, but after seeing these strangers, even though the birds were what I considered rather drab, they did have that certain appeal and combination of subtle coloring and personality which intrigues the finch breeder. Not knowing which type of weaver I had obtained, research was called for. Finally,

volume II of Macworth/Prad on *Birds of Eastern and Central Africa* seemed to have the answer — gray-headed social weaver (*Psuedonigrita a. arnaudi*).

Now that I was convinced that this was the mystery bird, I had to decide what type of housing was proper. Since my aviaries were not completed at the time, the new birds were housed with birds I considered more aggressive or too large for some of the rarer African and Australian finches that I keep. Birds that shared the aviary included, gray peacock pheasant, Nicobar pigeon, red-collared wydah, melba finches and speckled-fronted weavers.

The three social weavers seemed to adjust quite well to the aviary which is heavily planted in African sitaria grass (commonly known as elephant grass), various other bushes, and a Christmas tree from the year prior.

Upon being released into the aviary they made it quite apparent that insects are number one on their list of food preferences. Finch mix and parakeet mix are eagerly taken as well as some apple and assorted soft food. But the insects seemed to be the trick, the weavers would search every nook and cranny for moths, flies, spiders as well as the old favorite mealworms.

Although the diet seemed quite simple to make up, sexing these new birds proved to be more difficult. There seemed to be no visual difference in them. Their calls were quite distinctive but most confusing at times, but since I had three birds, I figured the chances of having at least one pair were good — until one bird died. At this point most of my enthusiasm went down the drain. Never-the-less, I still had the two birds and knowing the availability of any other birds was probably nil, I decided to keep working with what I had.

Although many nests were built, it wasn't until June of 1981 that I felt the birds were a true pair. Two cream colored eggs with dark rust splotching were discovered in one of the multi-chambered social weaver nests. My feeling were validated when two chicks hatched on 21 of June. Then the insects really began to disappear, as many as 200 a day.

Also at this time, a menage-et-trois had formed between the pair of social weavers and a single speckled fronted weaver. The speckled fronted's duties included not only feeding but also brooding and guarding the nest from other curious birds in the aviary.

After a twenty-one day period the first chick appeared on the perch on the 27th of July looking quite like a smaller version of an adult, except for being a bit short in the tail and having a beak colored in black and white. The second chick left the nest a few days later, on the 29th of July.

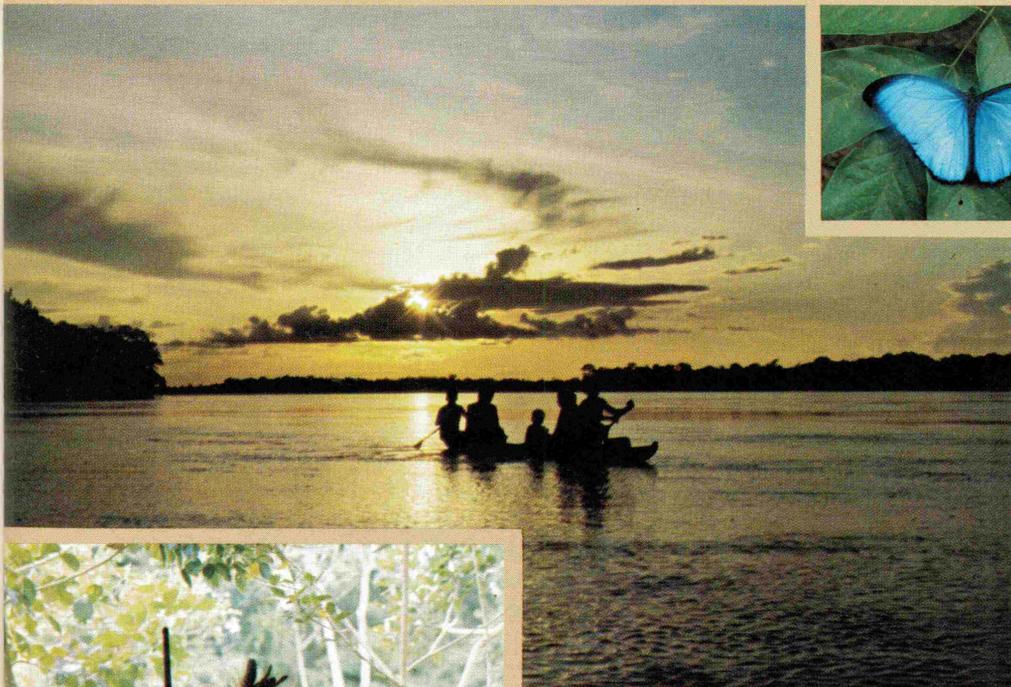
The major problem at this time seemed to be giving the birds enough insects to satisfy their voracious appetites which had increased two-fold. So, for the time being, I had to occupy myself with feeding them their insects twice a day — once in the morning before work and again in the afternoon after work.

Fortunately it all worked out very well since both of the chicks are doing fine and the menage-et-trois has relined the nest again and the female social has laid two more eggs. I have been most encouraged by this breeding and the bird's interest in returning to nest, menage-et-trois or not. I believe this to be a first captive breeding, and the start of another species available for other aviculturists to come. ●

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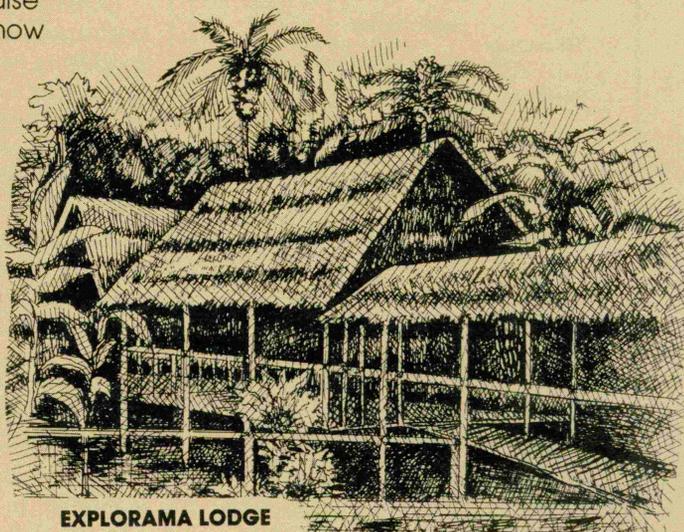
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