

Rare and Endangered Amazons

1981 Propagation Report
Caribbean Wildlife Research, Inc.

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Seffner, Florida

This report is submitted for the benefit of those interested in saving endangered and threatened species of psittacines. We at Life Fellowship have established a working captive breeding program and have proven such a program can be successful. Only at Life Fellowship are some of these parrots being captive bred. One subspecies, the Isle of Pines Amazon (*A. leucocephala palmarum*), is now extinct on its native island, making our captive breeding group the only hope for this parrot's survival. Several of the other species being captive bred here have dangerously low populations in their small island habitats making the continued success of our program imperative. If these parrots disappear from their native habitat, captive bred offspring may well supply the nucleus for future re-introduction. Such re-establishment can only be practical when man achieves a responsible degree of growth and maturity and exhibits a keen respect for and protection of his native avian fauna.

When a man is able to contact all forms of life pleasantly, with consideration, with the heart of a helper and with the mind of a student, he grows. Over the past decade, Aviculture has matured into a science. It is a study of the interrelationship between man and his environment, of man's love for and responsibility to avian life. As Henry David Thoreau noted over a century ago, "All things do exist in mutual relationship to one another." This interrelationship of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of aviculture has made it one of the most rewarding studies. For aviculture has ceased to be just an interest in birds or a whim of the wealthy who fancy something exotic. Rather it has grown to be a necessary means of saving many rare and en-

dangered species from total extinction. It was with this realization in mind that we instituted our program in 1966 with the hope of maintaining a reserve of these rare birds for future posterity's sake. To date, Life Fellowship has achieved six world first captive breedings of rare and endangered Amazons. Some have been captive bred into the second generation.

CUBAN AMAZON

Amazona leucocephala leucocephala

This beautiful parrot is now restricted to the mountain regions of Oriente Province in the eastern tip of Cuba. This year the zoo in Havana has asked for and received help from Life Fellowship to set up their own captive breeding program for their native parrot. We sincerely hope they will be successful. Our first specimens of old cage pets were obtained in 1966. Only one of the two pairs has so far bred, producing eleven offspring raised to maturity. We have two males on loan from the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service, and two other males on breeding loan from private individuals. Unfortunately, with the exception of one of the captive bred offspring, all are males, making future pairing difficult until more female offspring are reared.

ISLE OF PINES PARROT

Amazona leucocephala palmarum

This subspecies is now extinct on the Isle of Pines. Only at Life Fellowship are they being captive bred. We obtained our first pair in 1970 when both birds were past thirty years of age. They bred for us from 1975 through 1978 producing 17 eggs. Twelve hatched and eight were raised to maturity. Two of the 1976 offspring nested in 1979 producing one chick which died. In 1980, this pair again nested and hatched four chicks which were reared to maturity. One female hatched in 1977 was paired with an old feather picked, unrelated male. In March of this year they hatched three chicks which were raised thus giving us a total of seven grandchildren from the old original pair and a total of fifteen Isle of Pines Amazons reared to maturity in a six year period. We have three other old unrelated males waiting to be paired with the captive bred female offspring. This group of 21 specimens may be the only hope of survival of this subspecies whose native habitat has been completely destroyed.

GRAND CAYMAN PARROT

Amazona leucocephala caymanensis

In 1971, we imported eight juvenile Grand Cayman Island Amazons. Two of these bred for us in 1974 producing four chicks which were raised to maturity. From 1974 through 1981 this pair produc-

ed 30 eggs, 26 of which were fertile and hatched. Of these, 23 were raised to maturity. Another pair from the original eight proved out in 1977 and have to date produced eleven young that were raised to maturity. Two offspring from the 1974 hatch have produced second generation captive bred numbering eight young raised to maturity, making a total of 42 Grand Cayman Island Parrots raised at Life Fellowship in eight years.

CAYMAN BRAC PARROT

Amazona leucocephala hesternia

In 1974 and 1975 we imported eight of these extremely rare Amazons. The clutch of this parrot is small consisting of usually two eggs. We were fortunate in hatching and raising one this summer (1981). We hope this will become an annual occurrence for without captive breeding the Cayman Brac Parrot will soon disappear in its native habitat. There are an estimated 40 to 50 specimens left on the island, but current development of this ten-mile long strip of land will soon decimate this small population.

Summary of *Leucocephala*

To summarize our program with the leucocephala group, we have to date bred to maturity eleven of the Cuban nominate species, fifteen of the Isle of Pines subspecies, forty-two of the Grand Cayman subspecies and one of the Cayman Brac subspecies, making a grand total of sixty-nine of these beautiful endangered island Amazons reared to maturity. The Grand Cayman, the Cayman Brac and the Isle of Pines constitute world first captive breedings.

Other Island Amazons

HISPANIOLAN PARROT

Amazona ventralis

Found in Hispaniola and later introduced into Puerto Rico, this Amazon has been bred for eight years at Life Fellowship into the second generation captive breeding. To date, we have reared 19 of these Amazons to maturity. In all fairness, this parrot should be classified in with the leucocephala group, and it is interesting to note that Rosemary Low has done this in her forthcoming manuscript on Amazons.

JAMAICAN BLACK-BILLED PARROT

Amazona agilis

In 1977, we imported four Jamaican Black-Billed Amazons, three males and one female. In 1978, we succeeded in breeding one but the parent female was lost that year through an accident, and we are having to wait until the female offspring matures to pair her with one of the males. We are currently working with the



Yellow-shouldered Amazons, (*Amazona barbadensis barbadensis* - right, *A. barbadensis rothschildsi* - left). These birds are rare in aviculture. Their native lands are the Netherland Islands and the east coast of Venezuela. They are currently being bred at Life Fellowship, Seffner, Fl. (Caribbean Wildlife Research, Inc.)

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Hope Zoo in Jamaica to set up their Captive Breeding Program for *A. agilis* and *A. collaria*.

YELLOW-SHOULDERED AMAZON

Amazona barbadensis barbadensis
and
A. b. rothschildsi

In October 1979, we received our first specimen of Yellow-shouldered Amazon. Then began a search that eventually found us with twelve long term cage pets of this rare parrot from the Netherland Islands and the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, with the exception of two, all were sexed out as males. The last one received in January of this year (1981) was an old, decrepit female which we placed with a male purchased from Gladys Porter Zoo. This pair nested the latter part of June and the first of July. Three eggs comprised the clutch. Two proved fertile and were given to a foster parent for incubation. The pair began a second clutch with one egg being laid July 20th and another on the 27th. The two original fertile eggs were hatched on 26th and 27th of July.* It's hoped that if they are raised to maturity, they will be females to be paired with the excess males. The remaining old female has not, to date, nested and may be unable to do so, for when laparoscopically sexed she showed no sign of follicle development. Two males of this group are on loan to Life Fellowship from the San Diego Zoo and the Ellen Trout Zoo making a cooperative effort to captive breed these rare Amazons. If the two hatched are reared, this will be another world first captive breeding. *ED. NOTE: Chicks failed to be raised by their parents.

TUCUMAN AMAZON

Amazona tucumana

The heretofore seldom imported Tucuman Amazon from Bolivia is one of the most interesting of the Genus. Ours were among the first ever imported to the United States and arrived March, 1979. The picture of our original specimen was probably the first ever to appear of this rare Amazon. It has been widely used here and in Europe. Since then we have acquired 13, and this season saw the first world captive breeding of *tucumana* at Life Fellowship. This makes three world first captive breedings of Amazons for us this summer (1981).

Other Rare Amazons Being Worked With

YELLOW-BILLED AMAZON

Amazona collaria

There are seven pairs of this Jamaican Parrot at Life Fellowship. The females have this season reached four years of age and two pairs nested this season with three

eggs per nest. Due to immaturity on the part of the males, all were infertile. We should see this island Amazon being bred at Life Fellowship next year.

RED-BROWNED AMAZON

Amazona defresniana rhodocorytha

Originating from southern Brazil, this Amazon ranks among the most beautiful. Our pair deposited five infertile eggs for us this season. We hope for better results next year.

YELLOW-LORED AMAZON

Amazona xantholora

Found on the Bay Islands off Honduras and the Yucatan Peninsula, this small Amazon with its black ear coverts and black-edged green feathers designates it as a very close relation to the northern Caribbean Island Amazons. Two of our females deposited infertile eggs this season. Unfortunately, we have only one juvenile male and four adult females.

Other Rare Parrots Bred

The Brazilian Hawk-headed Parrot is regularly bred at Life Fellowship. The male of our breeding pair was captive bred in 1967 by Ralph Small at the Brookfield Zoo. The Buff-crowned variety from Guiana is regularly imported but for some reason, they seem reluctant to breed in captivity. We are fortunate in having a dependable pair that have annually bred for us since 1977.

The impressive Golden Conure is now being sufficiently captive bred by many aviculturists and zoos so that, though listed as endangered, it will be readily available for tomorrow's generations to see, despite the fact that it is no longer allowed to be imported.

This is our second year to breed the Hyacinth Macaw which until recently was never captive bred. In 1970, Ralph Small succeeded in first captive breeding this most sought after large Macaw. Recently though, there are increasing reports of beginners having success with the Hyacinth, and no doubt this is due to their obtaining laparoscopically sexed, mature pairs. We currently have five proven pairs of Eclectus, and have bred into the second generation. These are very sensitive birds to captive breed.

Reasons for Success

Since we innovated the suspended aviaries in 1969, we have achieved an increase in breeding success. This is partly due to the fact that this type aviary keeps the birds from acquiring parasites contacted on the ground and from the security and psychological well being experienced by the birds that soon learn they are protected from entry into their confined

world. Such security is exhibited by the fact that even wild caught birds soon tame down in the knowledge they are not going to be molested. We seldom remove a bird from its aviary more than once a year unless some emergency demands it. Today our styled aviaries are being used with much success by many leading aviculturists and zoos. All have reported increased breeding results and less parasite problems.

Diet is, of course, very important and we are constantly upgrading our nutrition program which regularly includes protein in the form of cheddar cheese, eggs and dog food. A good knowledge of vitamins and minerals and the use of living foods such as sprouts, greens, and fruits, in addition to an assortment of seeds, have played an important part in keeping the birds healthy and in breeding condition.

However, one of the primary reasons for continued breeding success is privacy. We simply do not allow visitors into our breeding area. The birds readily accept those they are familiar with but become noticeably irritated and upset when a stranger enters. Another necessary ingredient is humidity. Our aviaries are located in the remnants of an old Florida rain forest which supplies the required humidity and gives the birds the necessary natural environment conducive to breeding.

If many of the species common to aviculture today are to be seen by tomorrow's generation, we must justify the practice of aviculture with captive breeding success. Indeed, the aviculturist of today will no doubt be the conservationist of tomorrow, for without captive breeding, many species will be extinct by the year 2000. To those of us who have spent considerable time in the Caribbean Islands and Central and South America, it has become increasingly evident the only sure way to save many species of parrot-type birds will be through captive breeding programs. We can no longer permit some well meaning conservationists to indulge in romantic dreams of large flocks of parrots flying free on overpopulated islands and deforested continental regions. Such wishful thinking must be replaced by more practical methods.

Conservation by captive breeding is the only sure immediate solution to eventual extinction of endangered psittacines. We at Life Fellowship have proven a successful program of captive breeding can be implemented. There is no reason, short of closed mindedness, why these threatened birds cannot be saved if all concerned are willing to work together for the common goal of preservation. ●

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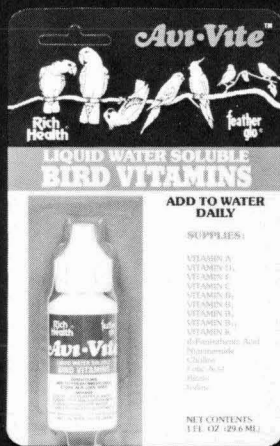
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