

# From Pets To Parents

By R. Florence Gale  
Glendale, California

Our Buffon's macaws (*Ara a. am-  
bigua*), Max and Floyd, were brought to  
the United States from Panama in 1975,  
by Nathan B. Gale, D.V.M. Natives had  
removed them from their tree nests at  
approximately fifty days of age; and  
subsequently, Dr. Gale took on their  
parenting until they were about six  
months old, at which time the two birds  
came to my sons as pets. Max has since  
remained in California, while Floyd  
resided in Utah until the spring of 1981.  
Max somewhat tamed and warmed to  
members of the family even to the point  
of following my son in puppy-like  
fashion. Floyd, on the other hand, while  
controllable, was not as friendly.

After being reunited in 1981, a  
fiberglass home was built for them in a  
partially enclosed area surrounded by  
plants and complete with a pair of scarlet  
macaws for neighbors. However, prob-  
lems with predators necessitated the  
enclosure of the entire living area. Thus,  
their 6 ft. by 4 ft. home has steel  
framework and is enclosed with cyclone  
fencing, as Max and Floyd enjoy tearing  
apart anything else. Manzanita branches  
serve as perches but do require frequent  
replacing. Max and Floyd moved into  
their new home in June, 1981.

In August, 1981, endoscopies were  
performed which determined that Max  
was female and Floyd was male. They  
were six years old at this time. In  
January, 1982, we had a barrel prepared  
as a nest. It is 27 in. long and 15 in. in  
diameter and was fixed with a welded  
edge which covered one third of the  
opening and hung from the top of the  
cage, resulting in an entrance not easily  
accessible for viewing. Cedar shavings,  
peat moss, and potting soil were tried as  
nesting material; however, we now use  
only pine and cedar shavings.

While cleaning the cage on March 28,  
1982, we noticed that the birds were act-  
ing out of character. Max, who usually  
responded quickly to commands refused  
to move from the food dish. Floyd was  
quite aggressive, even to the point of try-  
ing to bite me. On further investigation,  
I found one egg in the nest and then  
recalled that recently they had been  
more attentive toward each other and

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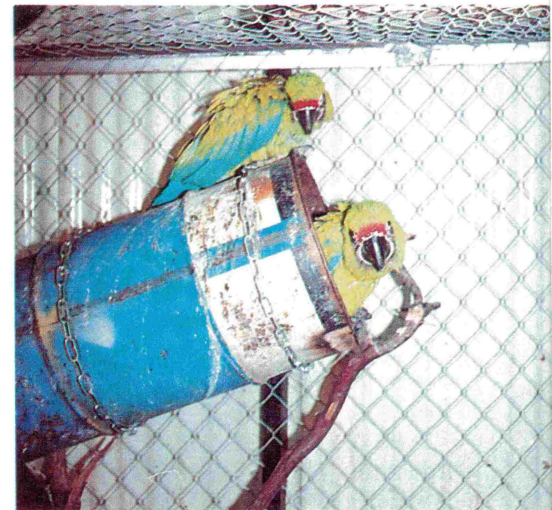
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had ceased responding to my talking and petting. Then on April 1, another egg was observed.

Max spent most of her time in the nest, frequently not even coming out at feeding time. On occasion, Floyd would assist in the nest. Both were very aggressive, ruffling their neck and head feathers while being fed and attacking the spoon and each other while the food was being given. They would follow and attack us when the nest was being checked. They became secretive in their actions if they became aware of being watched and would stop their own activities and view their observer(s). Often Max would come out only for a quick bite to eat and return immediately to her eggs.



Rudh on top of nest, Calen in it at 96 days.

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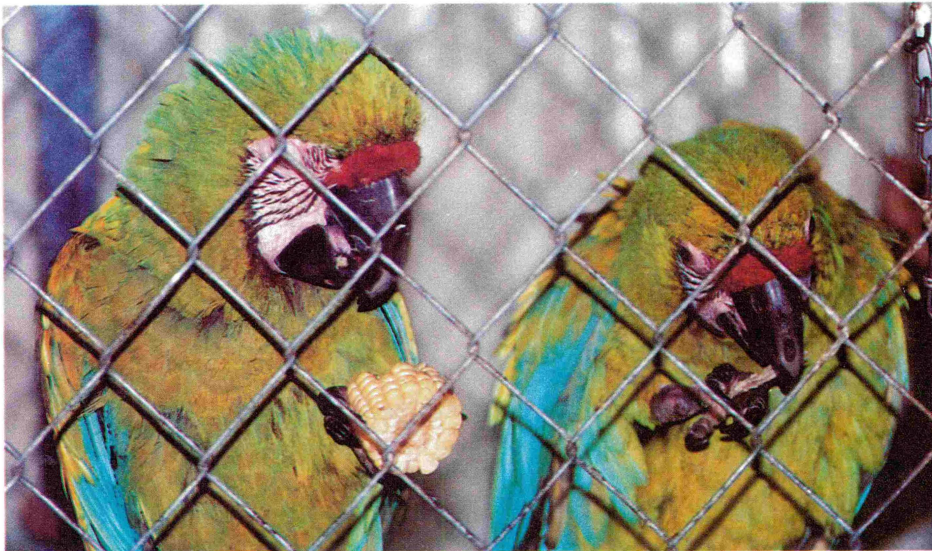
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These eggs were removed after thirty-two days and were candled; they were determined to be infertile. Each egg was chalk white and resembled a small chicken egg. Egg A measured 5.5 cm. in length, 4.5 cm. in diameter, and 12 cm. in circumference. Egg B measured 4.6 cm. in length, 3.8 cm. in diameter, and 11.2 cm. in circumference. For six days following the removal of the eggs, the aggressive behavior continued but only toward each other, not toward the feeding spoon or toward me.

On April 22, a second clutch started with a second egg arriving on April 24. Again the birds became aggressive; but in addition, they became visibly nervous when people were present. Two weeks later there were four eggs in the nest. Max incubated the eggs throughout with Floyd giving a wing in the evenings.

Finally, on June 19, 1982, twenty-nine days from the observation of the first egg, two eggs hatched. The third and fourth eggs were broken, and it is assumed that they were infertile. For the first ten days, the new hatchlings sound-



Floyd (left) and Max munching to feed their young.

ed very much like new-born kittens; and they remained huddled together making little sound and lifting their heads only in reaction to the light which was used to observe them.

Max and Floyd were attentive parents, assisting in the feeding of Calen (meaning *green*) and Rudh (meaning *bald*) as the "kids" were to be named. In seven days they appeared to double in size. Their eyes were partially open by the 19th day and completely open by the 22nd day. Feathers began on the 18th day, and the pin feathers were very noticeable on the 20th day. At one month both chicks had developed tail feathers. At six weeks the primary and secondary feathers were showing, and the little ones let us know much squawking and raising to their feet. At seven weeks Calen, the larger chick, had well developed wing and forehead feathers and the beginnings of pin feathers on the upper back. Both

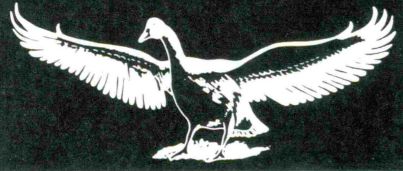
Calen in the foreground at one year of age.



chicks were moving about the nest much more, and Calen was lunging toward the nest front when observed.

The eighth week was rather traumatic for Rudh as he had all his feathers plucked from head and forehead. This continued for the next week with more feathers being plucked. No injuries were noted, and the parents were still feeding both chicks. During this time, feathers were developing on the sides of the abdomen.

Investigation of the larger world began at two months with Calen and Rudh perched at the front of the nest to watch the adults feed. Four days later Rudh had taken his first large step and ended up on the cage floor. No injuries were noted; he was very active and noisy; and Max came down to feed him. By now his head feathers were coming back again. Two days later he started moving about the cage bottom more and more. At the end of the eleventh week, Rudh was on



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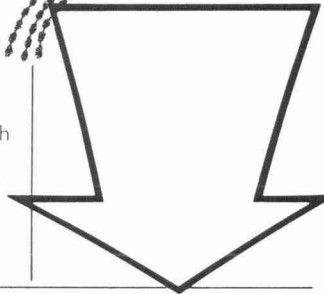
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the top of the nest playing with Calen and was able to coax Calen to venture to the ledge of the nest.

During the twelfth week, Rudh visited the food dishes but still did not eat on his own. Calen finally emerged this week which prompted Rudh to return to the cage floor. By the end of the week Calen was feeding on his own — trying milk toast, a chicken wing, and corn on the cob. Rudh was still fed by the parents until the beginning of the next week when he too started feeding himself.

Calen and Rudh remained with their parents until December when they were moved into their own home near their parents. At the time of this writing they are one year old, about the size of Max and doing well.

The family diet consists of a mixture of chicken scratch, rice and parrot mix. Fruits and vegetables are given according to the season. Toast, soaked in non-fat milk, is enjoyed; and baked chicken wings are devoured at least twice a week.

Mixture recipe: 4 cups chicken scratch  
4 cups rice  
8 cups water

Bring to a boil. Then simmer about 45 minutes or until all the water is removed. Allow to cool. Then add:

2 heaping table-  
spoons vitamins

¼ cup dark Karo  
syrup

16 oz. bag frozen  
corn

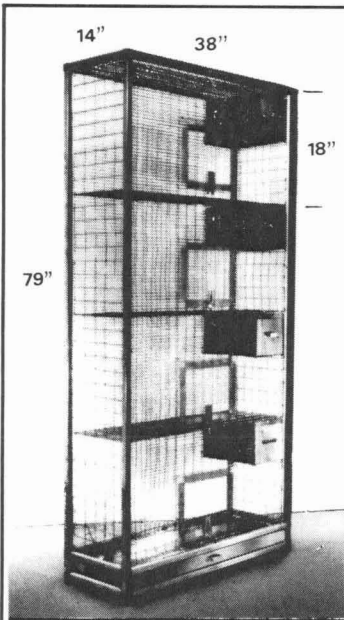
16 oz. bag frozen  
mixed vegetables

6 cups parrot mix  
(optional — 4 cups  
small dry dog food or  
monkey chow)

At intervals Brewers' yeast, bone meal and cod liver oil are added. Refrigerate. This generally lasts three to four days for ten macaws.

At this writing, Max has a fourth clutch with three eggs in the nest. The first egg was laid on June 10, 1983. She is much more aggressive this year, going to the entrance of the nest and spreading her wings. Max and Floyd are attacking each other much more at this time. Occasionally, Floyd has not allowed Max at the feeding dishes while he is there.

The following pictures show the development and growth of Calen and Rudh. The pictures were generally taken twice a week with my daughter acting as photographer. The birds are cared for by myself with a short vacation supervision by my daughter. Technical advise and "helpful hints" were gratefully accepted from Dr. N.B. Gale and my son, Jon. ●



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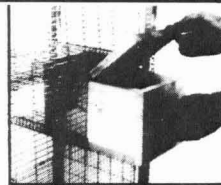
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