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too many toucans

by David and Betty Iwinski
Phoenix, Arizona

Raising four baby red-breasted toucans in Phoenix during the summer was a challenging pursuit and we were determined to allow the parents the opportunity to try as far as possible.

For our birds, a natural setting was a priority and the aviary provided for this. The male toucan, when guarding the palm log nest would fly in long swooping patterns throughout the 9' x 12' x 10' high aviary room. A full acacia tree growing within the aviary, two large perching logs and a saguaro cactus skeleton provided plenty of perching space. The roof of our toucan room was one quarter translucent skylight. To cool and water the environment, a water mist was on continuously day and night. Sliding glass doors on three walls presented problems with toucan privacy, which we tried to observe. When we were lax in closing the curtains, the parents would come to the windows and tap on them with their beaks until we again closed the curtains. With this arrangement, however, we could not observe their activity, that was solved by covering the windows with sunscreen.

A palm log nest, similar to that used by the Phoenix Zoo (see article Feb.-Mar. '82 AFA) was provided in early spring. After several weeks of wary interest, the log was explored by the male and soon thereafter, daily attempts at mating took

place. Within a few weeks the female had laid 4 eggs, one on the ground, one on a chair, 2 in the nest, one was broken.

An interesting altercation then took place. In an attempted robbery, during a nighttime break-in through the skylight, the male toucan escaped.

The female toucan could not sit on the remaining egg and guard the nest both, so soon gave up nesting altogether. She spent most of the days moping about eating poorly, apparently lonely.

Following a week of frequent but no-luck phone call responses to our numerous advertisements, the male toucan was located and a live trap with the female was set. Although quick to approach the female, he would not enter the trap. At nightfall however, he roosted in a tree near the female and after several unsuccessful attempts at capture and chase, was at last caught, with bare hands.

This week of separation had a profoundly stimulating effect on the toucan relationship. Mating took place the following day and for two more days thereafter. In five days the first two eggs were laid, with two more about three days later. This time, all were laid in the nest and none were broken.

Care in incubation was noticeably improved. Within 14 days all four were

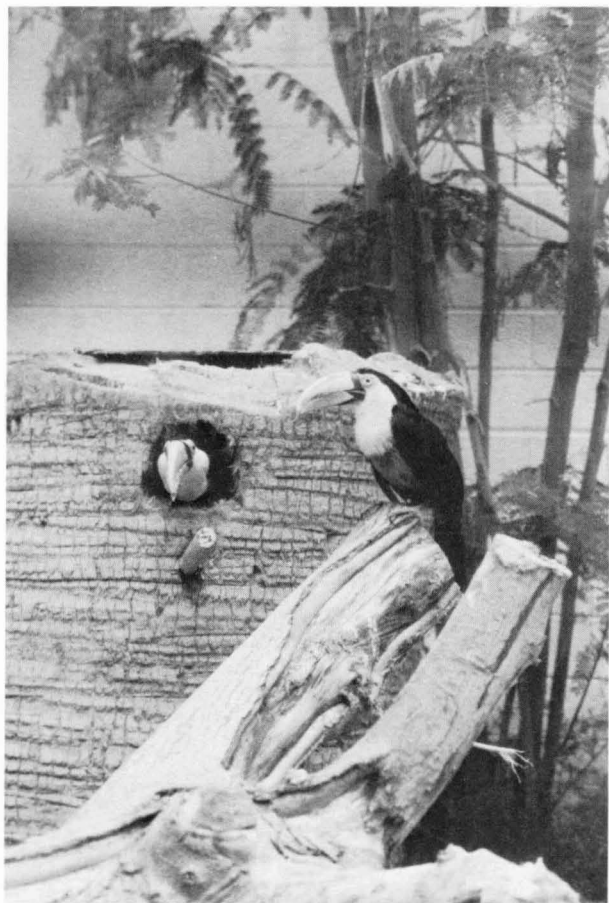


Photo by David and Betty Iwinski, Phoenix, AZ

Preparing the nest log.

hatched and required frequent feedings. The male would relieve the female for short times in the mornings and evenings for eating and bathing. Even so, within a week of hatching, the female was increasingly reluctant to continue the frequent feeding schedule. Although the male would feed and nest, he was not prepared to do so alone, apparently, as he would attack the female whenever she would try to stay out of the nest for a time of more than 15 minutes. We were anxious at this time as to whether or not the parents would care for the babies during this critical period and were constantly looking for any babies which might be tossed out of the nest.

By the time the babies were three to four weeks old they were only eating three or four times a day and the parents were off the nest all day, although sleeping on it at night.

Since the temperatures in June were over 100 °F during the day, and we had been aware of problems encountered at the Phoenix Zoo with their red-breasted toucan babies, we vented evaporative cooled air into the aviary on three sides and utilized a small box fan as well. A large thermometer was attached to the nest to determine relative temperature, since the inside of the nest was usually 5°-10° warmer. We noted that even when outside temperatures were 105 °F,

the aviary maintained at 80 °F or less.

Now that feeding was not so demanding, the parents began to bathe daily, as they had throughout the year. Food was offered twice a day and consisted of Purina Hi-Protein dog chow, chosen due to its size and configuration. This was covered with vegetable oil and mixed with Avia vitamin powder. Varied fruits were offered but the most readily accepted were grapes, cherries, and mulberries. The structure of these also allowed for hypodermic injection of vitamin solution and each was injected. During the first two to three weeks these were torn into smaller pieces by the parents for feeding. However, by three to four weeks, the babies were able to eat whole grapes and dog food. Interestingly also fed were shells of chicken eggs, occasionally taken, and more frequently, bits of acacia leaves or alfalfa pellets. Sparrows were a great toucan delicacy and often they consumed two a day. Chicken livers were also well received.

Boredom in the nest during the day was alleviated by curious babies who took turns peeping out of the nest entrance. Their curiosity soon overcame their fear, with increased strength, by six weeks old, they ventured forth. The first week was spent in improving their natural flying skills. By two weeks out they were flying almost as well as the

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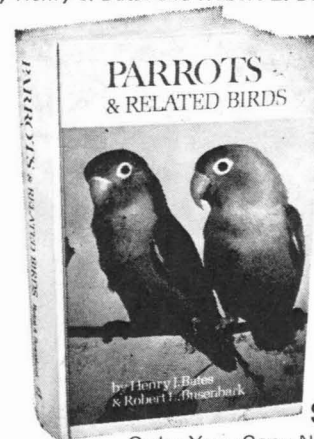
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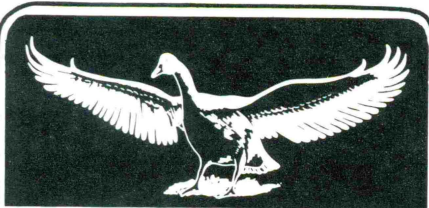


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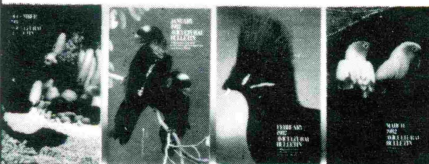
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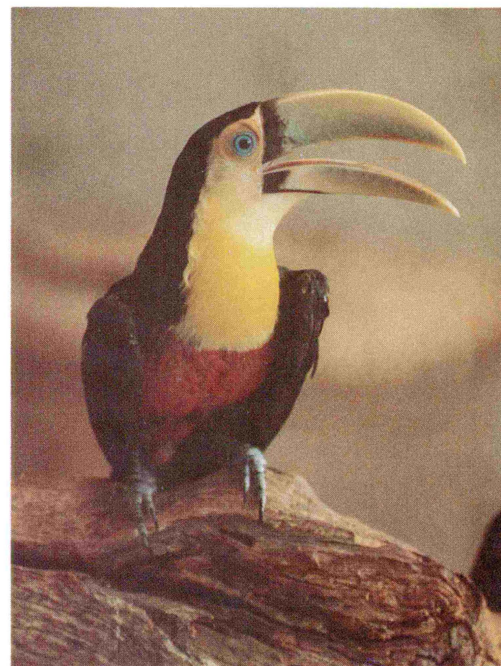


The thermometer near the nest log.

parents. During this time, they continued to be fed by the parents. It was not until ten weeks of age that they were entirely self-feeding.

Now that they are almost mature, the brilliant chest color has developed, the characteristic black beak stripe is almost complete and their orange eye rings are beginning to feather. Their "personality" types are emerging also. Two of the larger, presumably male birds spend most of their hours in mock aggressive battles with each other and posturing as the older male does. A more quiet and shy, smaller bird, apparently female, spends most of her time next to her mother, sitting and watching but always avoiding such encounters.

It has been most enjoyable living with six toucans in the atrium in the center of our house, we hope that they make this an annual habit and increase the U.S. toucan population. ●



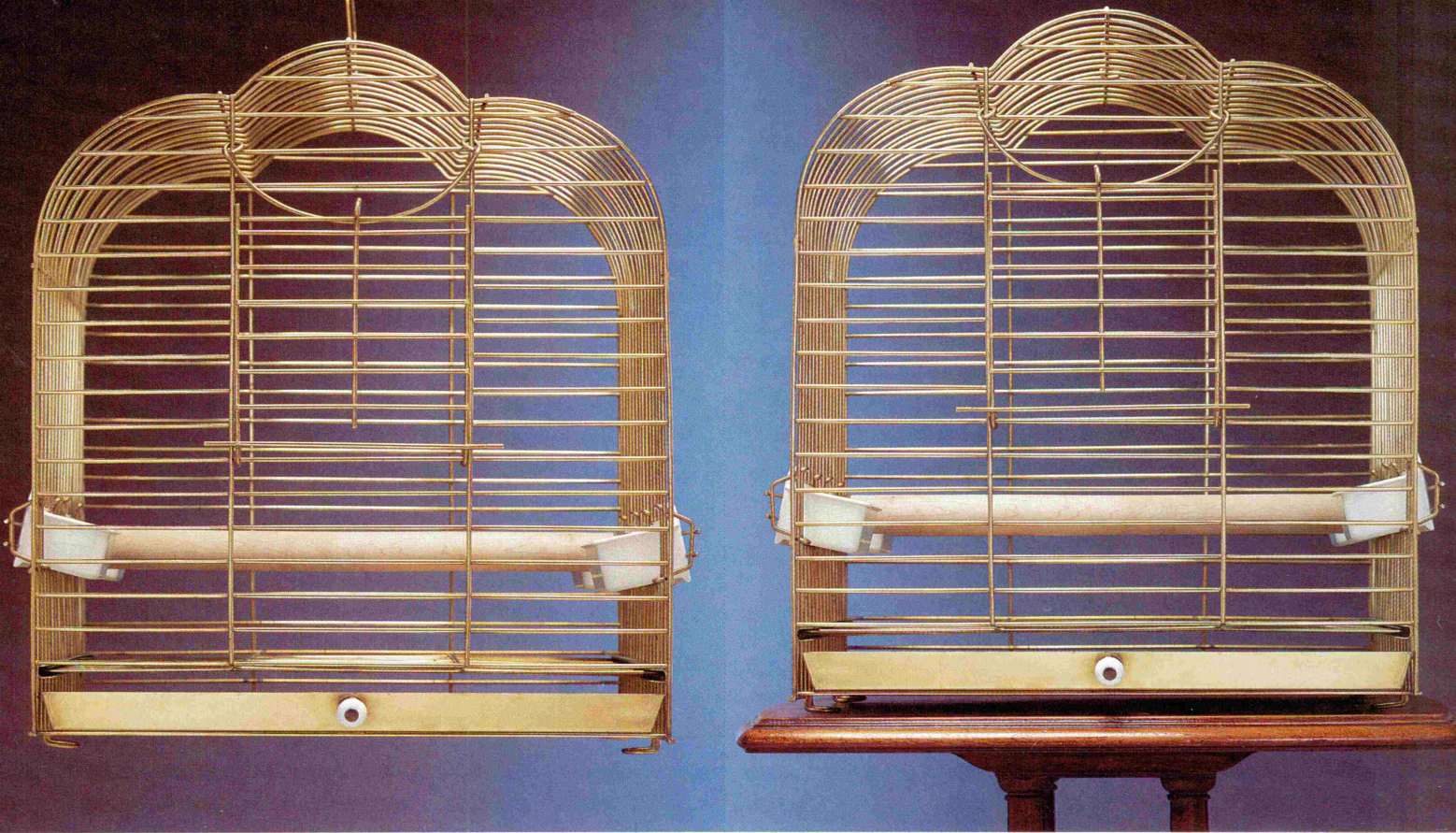
A twelve-week-old baby.

Too many toucans.



Photos by David and Betty Iwinski, Phoenix, AZ

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