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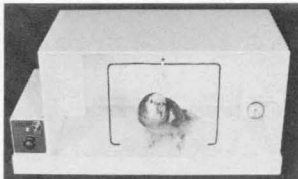


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AFA Research Report (preliminary results)

Breeding Biology of the

Bahama Parrot

by Rosemarie Gnam
Flushing, New York

The endangered Bahama Amazon (*Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*) persists today on the islands of Abaco and Great Inagua at the northern and southern limits of its former range in the Bahamas. Historically, the Bahama Amazon was recorded on Abaco, New Providence, San Salvador, Long, Crooked, Acklins and Great Inagua islands. A subspecies of the Cuban Amazon, the Bahama Amazon is the only naturally-occurring psittacid in the Bahamas. A large proportion of the Inagua population is protected in a park operated by the Bahamas National Trust; the Abaco population inhabits the southern portion of Abaco, below Crossing Rock.

Since 1966, the Bahama Amazon has been recognized as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and by the United States Department of the Interior since 1970. The reasons for its decline in population numbers are a loss and destruction of habitat, hunting pressures and capture for pets. Although habitat alteration for development has been significant on some islands, one cannot disregard the effects of hunting for parrots as food and their capture as pets. These factors would further stress low levels of local populations, increasing their vulnerability to habitat loss and natural catastrophes, such as hurricanes.

Today, the Bahama parrot is protected by a \$1,000.00 fine. Bahamians respect this law and few parrots are hunted or taken as pets. The Bahama National Trust, a Bahamian conservation agency, is supporting the establishment of a parrot preserve on Abaco, protecting its

habitat, and a captive-breeding program is being undertaken by the Trust in Nassau. It is hoped that parrots produced by the captive-breeding program can be used to reintroduce the Bahama Amazon on islands in its former range.

As part of my doctoral research at the City University of New York, I have been studying the breeding biology of the Bahama Amazon and its current status in the wild. Financial support for this research has been provided by the American Federation of Aviculture, Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, and Wildlife Conservation International of the New York Zoological Society. My field assistant, Linda De Lay and I arrived on Abaco May 3, 1985 and remained there for the duration of the breeding season til mid-September. Following are some of the preliminary findings from this research.

Results

The Abaco population is recorded as the northernmost breeding population of any species in the genus, *Amazona*. Abaco is the second-largest island (1,681 km.) in the Bahamas and is located 200 miles east of Miami, Florida, and 75 miles north of Nassau. Like the rest of the Bahamas, Abaco is relatively flat and composed of limestone. The island's climate is subtropical and fairly dry.

Bahama Amazons on Abaco, unlike any other New World psittacid, are subterranean nesters, nesting in natural limestone solution cavities beneath the ground. Fourteen parrot nests were found in a nesting area south of Crossing Rock. The primary vegetation in this area is yellow pine (*Pinus caribaea*) with a shrub understudy of

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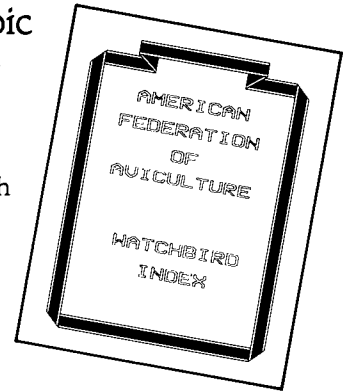
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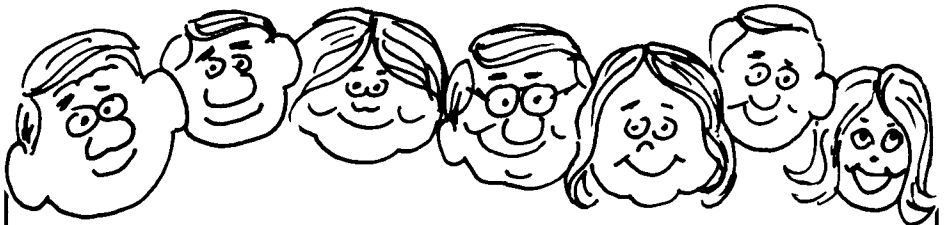
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poisonwood (*Metopium toxiferum*), chicken toe (*Tabebuia bahamensis*) and pond top palm (*Sabal palmetto*). All fourteen nests were located in limestone solution cavities beneath the ground, which ranged in depth from 91 to 299 cm, with an average depth of 136 cm. Many of these cavities contained ledges or overhangs within them and eggs were placed under these obstructions, concealing them from view.

Egg laying occurred in early June, and clutch size in the Bahama Amazon is two to three eggs, somewhat smaller than that recorded in other species of *Amazona*. Unsuccessful nests were lost within a week prior to hatching and possible causes of nest failure appear to be related to (a) physical, environmental factors such as rain and nest cavity dimensions, (b) predations, and (c) infertility of eggs and/or immature breeding pairs.

The incubation period averaged 28 days and eggs were presumably incubated by the female. During egg laying and incubation, female Bahama Amazons remained secluded in the nest cavity, leaving the nest three to six times a day to be fed by the male. Males rarely entered the nest during this period to feed the females. They called their mates out of the nest hole by characteristic high-squawk attraction calls which were given from a nearby shrub or pine. Upon exiting the hole, the female joins the male, and together they give take-off squawks and fly to a nearby pine, where the male feeds the female. Preliminary data suggests that these calls play a significant role in the individual recognition of parrots.

Continued on page 60



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In our study area, the Bahama parrot appears to have a low rate of reproductive success — only seven of the fourteen nests (50%) produced live chicks. Of these seven nests, six hatched two chicks, while the remaining nest hatched its entire clutch of three eggs. Hatching was asynchronous. Bahama Amazon chicks are altricial, hatching blind, helpless and naked, with only a few wisps of white down feathers on their bodies.

Both sexes care for the young, and

ten to fourteen days after hatching, the female gradually begins to leave the nest to forage with the male. Pairs return to the nest five to seven times a day to feed their chicks. By the time the chicks are twenty-one days old, the female remains out of the nest completely, roosting with the male at night and only enters the nest to feed the chicks.

Chicks fledged the end of August and early September, approximately eight weeks after hatching. Chicks within a nest fledged asynchronously (24 to 72

hours apart) and usually in the early morning or late evening. Prior to fledging, parents spend more time in the nest area but may not enter the nest to feed their chicks. Six of the fourteen nests (43%) in our study area successfully fledged chicks, and a chick flew off with its parents after leaving the nest.

Allofeeding and allopreening behavior appear to play a major role during the nesting cycle, maintaining the pair bond. Allopreening was observed throughout the nesting cycle, whereas allofeeding was rarely observed two weeks after hatching, which seems to correlate with the observed pattern of parental care. In the post-hatching period, males feed the chicks directly and as the nesting cycle progresses, males assume a greater role in feeding the chicks. In this behavior, as with other behaviors we observed, there exists much individual variation.

A major component of the Bahama Amazon's diet during the breeding season appears to be the seeds extracted from green, unripe pine cones of yellow pine. Parrots also feed upon flowers of chicken toe and the fruit of poisonwood, wild guave (*Tetrazygia bicolor*), pigeon berry (*Duranta repens*), fowl berry *Petitia dominicensis*, pond top palm, and various other fruiting shrubs.

Predation of nests by the large Bahamian land crab (*Cardisoma guanabumi*) was observed. In addition, feral cats and rats were observed in the nesting area and may be significant nest predators. Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) attacks on flocks of adult Bahama Amazons were observed. The appearance of a red-tailed hawk always elicited alarm calls from a pair or flock of Bahama Amazons.

Field research into this subspecies' behavior and ecology will continue for the next two years and, hopefully, additional nesting areas will be found. I look forward to reporting back to AFA readers as I learn more about this subspecies' unique reproductive habits. The long-term objective of this research is to assist in the planning of species management and conservation of the Bahama Amazon.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance during the course of my research, Al Burchsted, Claire Carrier, Linda De Lay, and Dr. James Wiley. A special appreciation is extended to my Bahamian friends, Marc and Carol Boyles, Michael Lightbourn, John Roberts, and Carroll Albury of Marsh Harbour Auto Parts who through his excellent service of our truck, kept us running and in the field. The Bahamas government, through its Department of

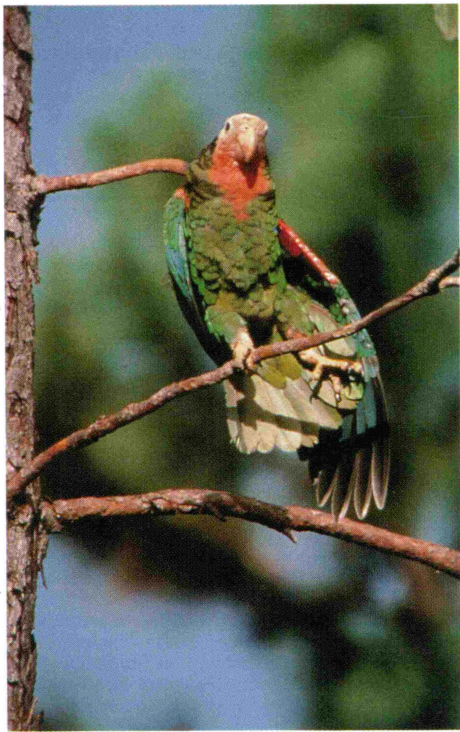
Photos by Rosemarie Gnam, Flushing, New York



Often Bahama Amazon chicks appear at the nest lip, investigating their surroundings, two to three days before fledging occurs. (Note: parent is on right.)



Prior to fledging, adults spend considerable time in the nest area, perched in a pine or shrub above the nest and mumbling to the chicks.



Typical posture of a Babama Amazon as it stretches its wing.

Agriculture and Fisheries, gave us permission to study the parrots on Abaco. Minolta Camera Corporation kindly loaned this investigator the equipment which was used in taking field photographs. Financial assistance from the American Federation of Aviculture, Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust, and Wildlife Conservation International of the New York Zoological Society, is gratefully acknowledged. The Leopold Schupp Foundation kindly provided this investigator with grant funding during the academic year. ●



Allopreening between mates occurs throughout the nesting period. During this behavior, head, facial and neck areas are preened most frequently.

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FOR SALE: blue & gold babies \$950, military babies \$650, scarlet babies \$1,800, harlequin babies \$1,700, triton babies \$1,800. Call (301) 678-5100 Maryland.

INDIAN RINGNECK PARAKEETS for sale — white, blue split lutino, blue, lutino split blue, double splits and splits. Barbara Greenberg, (818) 345-4411, So. Calif. area.

NEST BARRELS — 50 gal. solid oak wine barrels ideal for macaws, reinforced entrance, \$90. PALM LOGS — ideal for toucans, parrots, and other cavity nesting softbills, logs hollowed out and ready for use, available in diameters: 8"10" for \$25 per foot; 11"13" for \$27 per foot; 14"18" for \$35 per foot. Call or write: Jerry Jennings, P.O. Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Phone (818) 884-5476.

CLOSED BAND HANDFED BABIES: macaws: severes \$449, blue & golds \$899, Catalina \$1495, military \$899, scarlets \$1695, camolots \$2900. Cockatoos: Goffin's \$495, citrons \$995. Congo greys \$699. Sexed pairs dropped from a very reputable source. Ask about other babies. Call after 6 p.m. weekdays, (803) 559-9072. SEA-ISLAND AVIARIES, 4124 Blue Cross Lane, Johns Island, South Carolina 29455.

AFRICAN GREY BREEDERS — extra large s/s Congo African Greys, excellent feather, sexually mature, price to sell, call Pam (217) 245-5476. (Illinois)

HOMEBRED, HANDRAISED — close banded cockatiels, sun conures, Bourkes', blue head and dusky pionus, Congo greys, Moluccan, umbrella and bare eyed cockatoos. Clara (312) 349-8687 (IL)

DISCOUNT PET SUPPLY — Save up to 50%. Full product line for birds, cats, dogs, fish and small animals. All prices include shipping. Send \$3.00 (refundable) to: SUNOL PET SUPPLY, P.O. Box 281, SUNOL, CA 94586.

SUPERTAME, domestic, hand-fed babies. Large blue and golds, militarys, green wings and Hahn's macaws. African greys (congos), blue head pionus, Amboina kings and Senegal parrots. Derbyans, moustaches, Alexandrines, crimson wings, and Indian ringneck parakeets (normals, lutinos, blues and split-to-blue). Half-moon conures. Call Al or Char. (602) 973-2852. Arizona.

BABY HANDFED CONGO African greys and blue & gold, Catalina macaws hatched in our aviary and handfed to assure you a superior pet. John Gibson, Hilltop Aviaries, Oregon, (503) 825-3230.

REDUCING OUR BREEDING STOCK! We have a good selection of high quality birds to offer: COCKATIELS only: extra heavy pided, pided, cinnamon pided, cinnamon pearls, pearly-pied, lutinos, lutino pearls, and normal grey splits. Also have about 25 handfed babies ready for pets. Call collect for prices. Barbara, (813) 299-6232, Winter Haven, Florida.

SACRIFICE PRICES, pairs and singles — macaws, cockatoos, Congo greys, Amazons, and babies. T & T BIRD LAND, Tulsa, OK. Call (918) 224-8126.

BREEDER SELLING OUT! Over 400 top quality cages complete with nest box, feeders and water tubes. Ideal for breeding finches, canaries, lovebirds, parakeets. Call for further details and description of this proven, unique breeding system. All cages made of PVC material with plastic-covered wire on front. Call Rudi Rudloff, (619) 234-1221, southern California.

FINCHES, QUAIL, PARROTS, ornamental waterfowl, exotic pheasants, cranes, hornbills, touracos, jays, ratties, tinamous, plus many more. Send S.A.S.E. to Laura's Birds, 5693 Happy Valley Road, Anderson, CA 96007. Call (916) 357-3100.

DOMESTICALLY BRED — CONURES: suns, jendays, gold capped, gold crowned, australs, slender-bills, halfmoons, painted, souancei, green cheeked, maroon-bellied. PIONUS: bronze winged, dusky, white capped. LORIES: iris, blacks, goldies, yellow streaked and others. Congo greys, large and miniature macaws, several species of cockatoos, red-sided eclectus, Alexandrine, mustache, plumhead and Indian ringnecks in lutino, blue and splits. References gladly given. Stan or Fay, (602) 983-3028. Arizona.

ABYSSINIAN LOVEBIRDS. Breeder selling '86 hatched babies. Also breeding pair of plum headed parakeets \$350. Young pair green cheeked conures \$200. Lynn Rasoletti, (312) 874-4018, Chicago area.

CONURES: SURGICALLY SEXED MATURE PAIRS cherry heads \$130 pair. Maroon bellies \$130 pair. Mitreds \$150 pair. Peach fronts \$170 pair. White eyes \$130 pair. Nandays \$110 pair. Blue crowns \$130 pair. Red fronts \$160 pair. Quakers \$90 pair. Senegals \$110 pair. Orange wing Amazons \$270 pair. BUY ANY COMBINATION 5 pair, get 5% discount! 10 pair, 10% discount! 15 pair, 15% discount! We ship. Coleman's Aviaries, FL, (904) 682-0819.

SWEET, LOVABLE BABIES — domestic, handfed Congo greys, double yellow heads, yellow crowns, blue fronts, Mexican red heads, blue & golds, scarlets, militarys, green wings, umbrellas, bare-eyed, citrons, sulfur, dwarf macaws, sun conures and others. Surgically sexed birds also available. The Parrot Perch, 4241 Veterans Blvd., Metairie, Louisiana 70006. Call (504) 454-BIRD.

RUBBER STAMPS — from Amazon to toucan. Personalized address stamp with bird designs. For brochure, send SASE: One-Stop Bird Shop, P.O. Box 17416, San Diego, CA 92117-0416.

BIRD LAW — Bird problems, neighbor complaints, importation permits, interstate transfers, contracts: Law offices of Jerry Jennings, attorney at law, 22130 Clarendon St., Woodland Hills, CA 91367. Call (818) 992-7785.

WANTED: male parvipes yellow naped Amazon (horn colored beak); female yellow collared macaw; male rose breasted cockatoo (*R. assimilis*). Susan, Colorado. Call (303) 229-2662 weekdays or (303) 223-2452 other.

PROVEN RECIPES for egg food, molting cake, soft food diet, mineral blocks, nestling formula, hand feeding formula, fruit and vegetables nutrition chart, breeding formula. Send \$300 and S.A.S.E. to: Tres Brisas Aviaries, P.O. Box 2402, Camp Verde, AZ 86322.

GOULDIANS: aviary raised, normals, white breast starting at \$50 each. CUTTLEBONE: large 6" to 13" \$350 lb. pre-paid, shipped freight collect. SPRAY MILLET: 10" and larger, fresh, clean, shipped pre-paid in U.S.A., 5 lb. for \$15, 10 lb. for \$29. SUPPLIES: cages, nest boxes, etc. Send for free catalog. H & H Aviaries, Inc., 6225 Weyers Road, Kaukauna, WI 54130. Call (414) 788-9291.

'86 BLUE & SPLIT blue ringnecks, barnards, plumheads, black swans. S. Dingle, P.O. Box 340, Norco, CA 91760. Call (714) 734-7448.

INCUBATOR HATCHED. Hand raised baby parrots, breeding stock consists of: tritons, Moluccans, umbrellas, rose breasted, bare eyed, goffins, hyacinths, scarlets, yellow napes, yellow heads, blue fronts, Eclectus and cockatiels. The young are sold at 4-6 weeks and weaned (11-16 wks.). Very competitive pricing. FOB-LAX. Avian vet checks and references available. Feather Hollow Ranch, P.O. Box 6391, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Call (818) 340-5086.

FREE — FULL COLOR CATALOG filled with over 100 colorful gift items. PLANNED PARROTHOOD, P.O. Box 437-W, Highland Mills, NY 10930.

MOVING TO NEW LOCATION. MUST SELL the following breeding stock: 10 pairs Australian crimson wings \$525 per pair, also '86 babies. 12 pairs Turquoisines \$150 per pair, extra male \$75. 1 pair Adelaide rosellas \$450. 5 pairs citron cockatoos \$1,100 per pair. Will ship. Ralph Lima, call (818) 709-0707, Los Angeles, CA.

WE SELL ONLY HANDFED BABIES raised on our farm. All are either incubated or removed from the nest at 10 days old. Species available: Alexandrine, moustache, crimson winged and Derbyan parakeets. Sun, maroon bellied, peach fronted and mitred conures. Chattering and dusky lories. Yellow crown, blue front and double yellow headed Amazons, African grey, napes and grand eclectus parrots. Blue & gold, scarlet, Buffon's military, red front, green winged, hyacinth, severe and yellow collared macaws. Umbrella, citron, sulfur crested and Moluccan cockatoos. DMC FARMS, Rt. 25, Box 6950, Ft. Myers, FL 33921. Call (813) 936-1627.

WHOLESALE — cockatoos, macaws, conures, parrots, Amazons. All types of birds. Call or write for price list. Grant's Enterprises, Route 4, Box 394, Lexington, NC 27292. Call (704) 787-5291.

HANDFED DOMESTIC BABIES — COCKATOOS: triton, Moluccan, medium sulphur, umbrella, Goffin's. Macaws: blue & gold, military, green winged, yellow collared, Hahn's. AMAZONS: blue fronted, yellow headed, red headed. CONURES: all types. Lories, greys, pionus, Alexandrines, lutino ringnecks, rosellas, cockatiels. Call for price and availability. The Parrot Co., Tucson, Arizona. Call (602) 749-1286.

PARAKEETS — healthy, young, rare, normals, breeders. Ship weekly, year around large and small lots, cage bred. Bob Tufts, 6179 31st Ave. S.E., Salem, Oregon 97301 (503) 363-8443.

CONURES — HANDFED DOMESTIC BABIES OUR SPECIALTY. Suns, jendays, gold caps, peach front, slender-bills, Australs, mitred, cherry head, green cheek, red throat. The Parrot Co., Tucson, AZ. Call (602) 749-1286.

SECURITY PROBLEM? ALLEN AVIARIES recommends a professionally trained German Shepard import, Police K9 or Schutzhund. Protection/attack dogs are very dependable and affectionate animals. They make loyal companions and possess tremendous courage. Domestically bred puppies from titled German import working bloodlines also available. Trained dogs from \$2,500; puppies from \$500. Ron Allen — ALLEN AVIARIES, collectors and breeders of rare cockatoos. Call (408) 297-9969.

