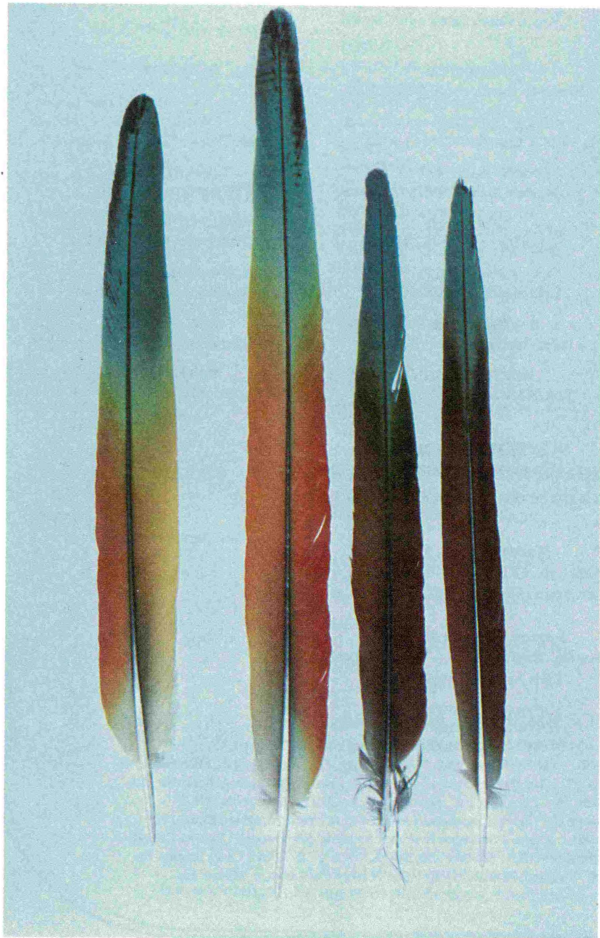




*Surgically sexed male
Buffon's macaw.*



Surgically sexed male Buffon's macaw.



*Tail feathers of the Buffon's macaw show much
more color and brightness than the dark
maroon and blue of the military macaw tail feathers.*

Buffon's Macaw

(*Ara ambigua*)

by Joanne Abramson
Fort Bragg, California

This article has been written in an attempt to clarify the differences between the Buffon's macaw and the military macaw. Both species are very distinct in their habits, social behavior and in their physical appearance. In my opinion, the Buffon's should be classified as a separate species from the military. The Buffon's and the military are as distinct as the greenwing and the scarlet macaw. Both may be basically green, but the similarity stops there.

The first of the problems encountered with the Buffon's macaw (*Ara ambigua*) is the varied names it has been given. They have been called great green macaws, grand green macaws, grand military (Buffon's) macaws [Low] and Ecuadorian (Chapman's Green) *Ara militaris quayaguilensis* macaws [Low]. I would like to call for a moratorium on new names for *Ara ambigua*, after all, how many names can one bird tolerate. Throughout this article the before mentioned bird will be called Buffon's macaw.

Description: The Buffon's length is 85 cm (34 in.). The military length is 70 cm (28 in.).

Weight: The Buffon's weights range from 1,264 grams (2 lbs. 13 oz.) to 1,587 grams (3 lbs. 8 oz.). The military weights range from 650 grams [McDonald pers. comm.] to 1,051 grams [Galvin pers. comm.].

The Buffon's weigh up to 454 grams (1 lb.) heavier in size.* As with all of the large macaws, it can take up to two years for Buffon's to reach their full size and weight.

Head: The Buffon's head is much larger than the military with a darker near-red facial patch that easily darkens when excited. The beak is also much larger than the military, giving an appearance similar to a greenwing macaw.

Body Coloration: The Buffon's has a lighter, lime green overall color. The military has a darker green, frequently with a bluish-tinged head.

Tail: Here is where the most out-

standing color difference occurs. The Buffon's central and lateral tail feathers show a brilliant rainbow of color. The feather portion close to the quill tip is bathed in red-orange, then orange, then a greenish-yellow, ending in a turquoise tip. The lateral feathers, in addition, have a bright gold area on the median portion. The size of the Buffon's feathers in both length and width are larger, in proportion to the bird's size. The military's feathers are a deep reddish-brown, tipped in deep turquoise.

If you compare one tail feather with the photos, you should be able to verify if you own a Buffon's or a military.



Distribution range of the Buffon's macaw.



Distribution range of the military macaw.

Distribution: Included in the following are excerpts from a report published by *Traffic (USA)* 1980 and based



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on a report by Robert S. Ridgely, for the World Wildlife Fund (1977). The full report is available through *Traffic (USA)*.

Buffon's: The northern portion of the range is said to be southern Honduras. However, Monroe (1068) considers this to be hypothetical due to the fact that no actual specimens were taken of the birds there. More likely, according to Ridgely (1977), is that the range starts in Nicaragua. Ridgely felt that the Nicaragua portion of the Buffon's range was likely the most sizable of any other single country. He found them to be a, "rather solitary species — I have never seen more than six at once." He also notes that the scarlet as well as the Buffon's occur sympatrically in parts of eastern Nicaragua, as well as a small area on Panama's pacific slope. He felt that the larger bill of the Buffon's was probably responsible for the lack of competition with the scarlet for food and territory. Not surprisingly, as with all the macaws, deforestation looms as the single most significant threat to the Buffon's survival. Ridgely felt that if a portion of their range could be preserved that there was a chance that they could continue to do well in the wild. However, since his report, the current conflicts in Nicaragua are not conducive to bird sanctuaries. They also range into Costa Rica, Panama, Columbia, and a small isolated population in Ecuador given the separate subspecies name of *Ara ambigua quayaquilensis*. Forshaw states that this subspecies has "a smaller, narrower bill, undersides of tail and flight feathers more greenish." Only two females were examined, no males were examined. I have had several people tell me that there is a smaller subspecies of *ambigua*, which they refer to as the *quayaquilensis* subspecies, but to date I have found no literature that states the body size is smaller, only that the *bill* size is smaller. It is possible that the smaller birds could be immatures, but those that I have been shown have been, unfortunately, militarys. The Buffon's favor tropical rain forests, although they have been seen in clearings and semi-open country.

The militarys, by comparison, range throughout much of Mexico, then are next found in northern Colombia, northern Venezuela, eastern Ecuador, portions of Peru, Bolivia and northwestern Argentina (Ridgely). According to Ridgely, the species does not occur in Central America, which is where the majority of the Buffon's range occurs. The military prefers tropical and deciduous forest near rivers in Mexico, and

more humid forests in South America (Ridgely). Ridgely saw a morning flight consisting of 80 birds in Columbia in 1977.

Breeding: Neither of these birds has been bred in adequate numbers. Considering the amount of militarys that have been brought into the U.S. there should be far more producing. The first breeding in the U.S. of Buffon's was accomplished by Florence Gale in June 1982 (see A.F.A. *Watchbird* Oct/Nov 1983). Ms. Gale did a remarkable job of record keeping on the breeding of the Buffon's and is to be commended for allowing the parent birds to raise their own young.

Over the past several years there have been attempts to interbreed the Buffon's with militarys and other large macaws. I feel very strongly that the Buffon's and all the macaws should not be hybridized. With a little help from ads and a willingness to purchase other breeders' babies for future breeding stock, we should be able to get a productive captive breeding program going. I do not advocate selling any of the baby Buffon's as pets. Their wild population is so threatened that CITES placed them on the Appendix I list on Oct. 28, 1976.

Purchasing Buffon's: I urge anyone interested in buying Buffon's for breeding to attempt to see the bird first in order to verify its authenticity. And, as always, buy only from reputable people.

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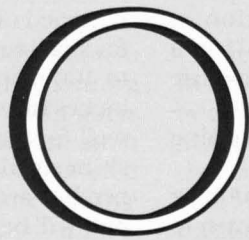
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Notes and Acknowledgments

*Dale R. Thompson at Behavioral Study of Birds, Ltd. states that the average weight of mature, surgically sexed Buffon's macaws is 1310.5 grams for males and 1264.7 grams for females based on weighing six males and six females at their facility.

My thanks are extended to the following individuals for their help in gathering data on the weights of Buffon's macaws: Chuck Galvin, D.V.M.; Scott McDonald, D.V.M.; Dale Thompson; and to Jeffrey Miller for feather collecting. ●

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