

First Captive Breeding of the Collared Aracari

The Collared Aracari (*Pteroglossus torquatus torquatus*) is a commonly encountered aracari of the rain forests and tropical dry forests of Central America, where it ranges from southern Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. It is a lowland species that has adapted fairly well to the heavily disturbed habitat, and may be frequently seen along roadsides and in farmers' fields, where it is fairly fearless of humans, unlike the larger toucans, which are often hunted for food. Collareds are usually encountered in small groups of four to a dozen birds, who fly from tree to tree, often single file, and engage in enthusiastic croaking and antic movements of their beaks up, down, and sideways.

The Collared Aracari is divided into six subspecies, two of which are clinal. One clinal subspecies is found in the smaller Yucatan Peninsula population. Only one other true subspecies is found in Central America, the Fiery-billed Aracari (*Pt. frantzii*) which occurs in the Pacific lowlands of Costa Rica and westernmost Panama. The remaining subspecies occur in South America.

The Collared Aracari has only recently been available in the United States, with the first imports dating back to late 1987. The Collared Aracari has frequently been mislabeled as the banded aracari, the Pale-mandibled Aracari, and by several less familiar names. The name "banded aracari" is erroneous, there being no such bird. The Pale-mandibled Aracari, on the other hand, is a separate species of the Collared from South America, which is different in appearance, and which has also suffered the misnomer of "banded aracari." Taxonomists disagree on the subspecies status of the Pale Mandible, with some considering it a full species (*P. erythropygius*).

The Collared Aracari exhibits typical aracari coloration in that its head is black and the back, wings, and tail are olive green, and the rump is red. Aracaris differ primarily in the pattern of stripes and/or spots overlying their yellow breasts, and in the color of their beaks and eyes. The Collared has a yellow breast overlaid by a horizontal black stripe approximately one-half inch in width. The stripe is

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California

Photos by Jerry Jennings



Female Collared Aracari at the nest entrance.



A contented Collared Aracari chick has just been fed.

midway between the throat and vent and above the "belly stripe" is a roundish black spot. The yellow breast feathers are further diffused with red flecks. The Collared's beak is tipped in black, with a silver upper mandible, red at its base. The ridge of the upper mandible and the sides of the lower mandible are also black. The eyeskin is bright red and the iris of the eye is bright yellow.

The name "Collared Aracari" derives from a brown ring or nuchal collar approximately three-eighths inch wide that extends around the nape separating the black color of the head from the olive green of the back. This collar is found in four of the six subspecies but not in the Pale-mandibled. Haffer indicates the existence of sexual dimorphism in the color of the collar (dark in females, light in males), but this is not supported by data resulting from surgical sexings.

Throughout 1988, a small number of Collared Aracaris was imported into the United States from Honduras. Eleven of these birds, from several sources, were acquired at Walnut Acres. These birds were surgically sexed, the results indicating six males and five females. Five pairs were set up individually in flights either 8' x 12' x 7' or 4' x 12' x 7'. The eight foot wide flights were planted, whereas the four foot wide flights were not. Each pair was provided a nest log made from a four foot section of palm tree, hollowed out by chainsaw to a depth of 18 inches and an inside diameter of six inches.

In the spring of 1989, two pairs began to work their nests — one pair in each of the two different styles of flights. Sometimes it is easy to confuse nesting activity with roosting activity, since Collared Aracaris routinely roost in their nest log at night throughout the year. On or about June 25, 1989, the only pair of Collareds in a planted flight began to lay and, by the 30th, had completed a clutch of four eggs. On July 15th, two of the chicks hatched, and a third hatched the following day. As the nesting cycle progressed, the parents became increasingly aggressive. By the time the chicks were a few days old, the female would fearlessly attack anyone entering the flight, thus making nest inspections hazardous

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and unpleasant.

A few days after hatching, one of the chicks disappeared, prompting concern that it had been cannibalized by one of the parents. Nest inspections were made daily, and occasionally more frequently, until it appeared the parents were, in fact, providing good care.

On September 9, 1989, one of the two chicks fledged the nest and sat quietly in a tree, while the remaining chick sat in the nest entrance. On the following day, the second chick was also found sitting in a tree in the flight.

Offspring are very similar in appearance to the adults except, most noticeably, the eyeskin is green. The iris is a pale blue-grey, and the beak lacks the adult coloration. The young are approximately two-thirds the size of their parents on fledging and remain dependent on them for approximately ten to 14 days.

During the nesting cycle, the parents were offered a fruit mix consisting of diced apples, papaya, canteloupes, and destemmed grapes. They were provided with fresh soaked dog kibble (Science Diet Canine Maintenance) and live crickets daily. As soon as the young fledged the nest, the soaked kibble was replaced with dry kibble, which is the manner in which it is served to adult birds.

The young Collareds have been allowed to remain with their parents and all four birds share their log as a roost at night. In the wild, offspring from the first nest usually assist their parents in the rearing of a second nest. This "helping" behavior is typical of aracarids and is indicative of their non-aggressive behavior towards their offspring and siblings, in contrast with other species of ramphastids.

The readiness with which the Collareds went to nest is a hopeful indication that this species will do well in captivity.

It should be noted that the International Zoo Yearbook, on three separate occasions in 1981, 1983, and 1984, indicated that the Collared Aracari reproduced at the San Diego Zoo. The birds in question were incorrectly identified and were, in fact, Pale-mandibled Aracarids, two individuals of which were acquired by the author. The first breeding of the Pale-mandibled Aracari took place at the Los Angeles Zoo in the early seventies. ●



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