

Breeding Dwarf Yellow-collared Macaws

by Kate Sturgen Kobelak
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Michaeleen Rogers of Fremont, Ohio and I are two very lucky breeders since we both frequent the same terrific avian veterinarian — Dr. Jamie Lindstrom, Animal Clinic Northview, North Ridgeville, Ohio. Because we had both found out to our chagrin that we each had same sex pairs, Dr. Lindstrom suggested we consider trading. In due course we met, traded one of my females for one of Michaeleen's males, and we each ended up with a true pair.

None of these four birds are domestic bred. These small macaws came from the central portion of South America, where their habitat ranges from dry savannas and river valleys to virgin forest areas. The range in which they are predominantly found is almost egg-shaped with the main portion in Brazil and the balance in Bolivia, Paraguay and the northernmost tip of Argentina. While their dietary preference seems to be fruit and nuts, they forage constantly and enjoy a varied cuisine. They flock together, sometimes in very large groups, but breeding pairs will separate from the flock during breeding season, which usually starts around November and continues into January. This is the rainy season, when food is more plentiful for hungry hatchlings.

Michaeleen's two birds were the first to successfully hatch three babies. Neither parent knew what the strange creatures were that came out of their carefully incubated eggs, so the babies were all hand-fed, primarily on AVN, and have since moved on to new homes. Her birds are housed in a cage 36" long x 24" high x 22" wide, with a nesting box 18" high x 12" wide side to side, and 11" long front to back. The cage is suspended with an open wire floor for easy sanitation, and the area is lit with Vita-Light twist lamps. The birds are fed AVN plus a dish of mixed fruit and

vegetables containing at a minimum one part of cooked rice or pasta, one part cooked wheat berries, one part of at least two vegetables (carrots, broccoli, peas, cooked spaghetti or other squash, corn), and one part fruit (apples, bananas, cherries, figs, raisins, dates, cranberries, peaches, peppers, melons, etc.). As nightly treats, the birds are fed seeds and nuts (walnuts, pecans, etc.).

My pair then hatched three babies, the oldest of which survived to 16 days. Necropsy did not show what caused the deaths, but muscle tone was not up to par. The babies had to be pulled because the parents did not feed them, and they were hand-fed on a mixture of AVN and Roudybush. Eventually, the parents laid four more eggs (one of which was damaged during incubation) and hatched another three babies, two of which were pulled at ages four weeks and three weeks, respectively, as the middle baby died. Necropsy proved Psitta-

cosis. Eventually the male parent bird was shown to have been the carrier and all the birds, including the babies, were treated for same and they are now happy and healthy and back to being pests.

Weights from oldest (#1)
to youngest (#4)

Age (Days)	Bird #1	Bird #2	Bird #3	Bird #4
6				42
9			75	
12		90		95
15	124		137	130
18		145	170	155
21	184	170	192	
24	210	190		
27	230			240
31			265	259
34		249	270	285
37	270	265	298	280
41	274	265	300	275
45	280	262	290	
48	270	250		
51	255			

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Author Kate Sturgen Kobelak with Midget on her shoulder. Pita, the Lilac-crowned Amazon, sits in the background.

Photo courtesy of Kate Sturgen Kobelak



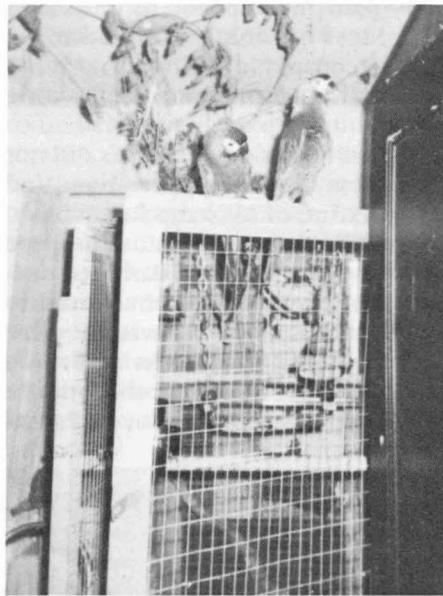
Munchkin and Midget keep their eyes on author from a lofty door top.

The birds have since successfully hatched five babies (one was injured during the hatching and did not survive) and the other four are doing beautifully and have since gone on to new homes after being given clean bills of health by Dr. Lindstrom. Preceding is a table of weight statistics (hatch dates are June 27, 30 and July 3 in the afternoon, and July 6 in the early morning hours).

The babies rapidly gained weight, as the above shows, averaging approximately seven to eight grams per day. The parents did the primary feeding, although the babies were hand-fed when pulled for weighing, pictures, etc. The parents were not too happy with having their babies disturbed, but tolerated the situation. The beaks even by day six were already turning the distinctive charcoal with a white stripe of the adults. By day nine, the babies' feet were beginning to turn dark gray, and by day 15 the feet were almost solidly gray. Pin feathers became prominent by day 12 and by day 15 the eyes were slightly open. The babies were close banded when they were 14 to 15 days old. By the fourth week, the babies were showing color from the pin feathers, and evincing more interest in the outside world.

The females do the incubating, while the males stand guard and feed the females for the first several weeks after the eggs hatch. My pair are happily nesting in a standard parrot nesting box (14" x 14" x 15"), with a base of pine shavings, and a few pieces of pine 2x4s for chewing which, in turn, is housed in a 2½' x 5' x 6' flight pen.

My earlier babies (Smidgen and Skiffers) were hand-fed on Lake's Parrot Buffet and did well with it. They proved easy to wean, but love their snacks (fresh fruit, vegetables, whatever people food they can steal, etc.). They are also given a small amount of a homemade seed mixture (sunflower, pumpkin, safflower, oats, barley, wheat, millet, buckwheat, hemp, corn, peanuts, dried peppers and egg biscuit), and unshelled peanuts, walnuts and almonds. They have a constant supply of Lake's Parrot Buffet and AVN in their cage and there is absolutely no problem with them enjoying their pellets. They are especially fond of meat, and will go to great lengths to steal bones so they can crack them open and eat the marrow. The unshelled almonds, in addition to the protein and calcium they provide, also help to keep the beak in prime condition and limits their attempts at destructive chewing.

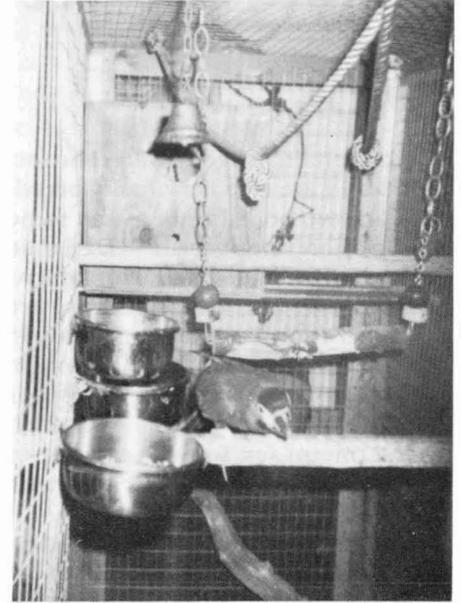


Midget (left) and Munchkin enjoy the freedom of perching on the outside top side of their large cage door.

The first two babies, when pulled, were old enough to be fed only five times daily and were sleeping most of the night. By the time the youngest was ten weeks old, the babies were pretty much weaned, but still demanding to be fed thrice daily. They occasionally still ask for handouts if another baby is being hand-fed.

They are extremely curious and gregarious and both have about 30 different identifiable sounds. Although the parent birds both speak English phrases, the babies have not picked up on this as yet.

My parent birds do not seem to have any seasonal preference for laying eggs, no matter what the books say about time and size of clutch. They have laid eggs in October, January, April and July, and the clutch has ranged from three to five eggs. Michaeleen's birds had their first clutch of three in the spring. All birds



Midget fiercely guards her nest when nestlings are inside. Yellow-collared Macaws can adapt quite well to human surroundings as seen in these photos.

are getting calcium supplements, together with their normal vitamin/mineral supplement, plus fresh fruits and vegetables, a fortified seed mixture, and unshelled nuts and almonds on a daily basis. As of this writing, my pair have hatched another five eggs, and all five babies are doing well, although the last two had to be pulled for hand-feeding as five proved to be two too many for the birds to successfully handle. The older siblings were shoving aside the younger and getting the majority of the food, although the younger birds were not being totally ignored.

Michaeleen and I intend to build up a solid base stock of these noisy, pesty, adorable "minis", as their native habitat is disappearing at a rapid pace and soon the birds may only survive by virtue of captive breeding. There are many pros and cons to captive breeding but, in our book, the pros of having the birds for future generations and perhaps for restocking their native habitat far outweigh the cons of losing the birds completely via extinction at the hands of man. ●