

Greater Vasa Parrots

Editor's note:

The Greater Vasa Parrot is a unique psittacine found on Madagascar and Comoro Islands. There are three subspecies. This large parrot is brownish-black to grey in coloration. Little is known about their breeding behavior in captivity. Two facilities, Tony Alexander's Bird Farm and The Lubee Foundation, reproduced this parrot successfully in 1988. Their hatching dates were a little over a month apart, but Tony Alexander's Bird Farm claimed the United States first breeding. Both facilities must be complimented on their efforts put into this species. With so few birds available to the U.S. aviculturist, we recommend those breeders with either the Greater Vasa or the Lesser Vasa (black) parrot to join the studbook put out by Dave Blynn. We encourage all those who work with this species to communicate their efforts and knowledge with each other so these species will not die out in captivity.

Stud Book for Greater and Lesser Parrots

(Coracopsis vasa and C. nigra)

by Dave Blynn, Norcross, Georgia

The *Coracopsis Vasa* (Greater Vasa), (Vasa) Parrot and the *Coracopsis Nigra* (Lesser Vasa) (black) parrot are becoming threatened and may soon be faced with extinction in their primary habitat, the island of Madagascar, due to the rapid destruction of their native forests. Approximately one thousand were imported in the early 1980s and distributed throughout the United States. Many of these unique parrots have been lost to PBFD and other diseases.

Successful breeding has been very limited. A Greater pair reproduced in the Philippines in early 1988, and two pair in the USA bred later in 1988. There are reports of a third United States pair breeding (1991) and two pairs raised babies in the United Kingdom in 1990. One pair in Alabama has been very consistent, producing 13 chicks since 1988. The Lessers have been bred in the USA since 1985, but I am only aware of

two pairs that have bred here. There certainly are more breeding Lessers in the USA and in other countries, but little has been reported.

I have started a Stud Book for both the Greater and the Lessers and plan to issue the registration numbers of these parrots in July or August. In addition, I will be sending out breeding reports, similar to the two in this *Watchbird*, and other information two or three times a year. Currently, three different parties are working on importing more of the Vasas. They can be exported from Madagascar, since over one hundred were imported into the UK about three months ago.

If you have Greater or Lessers and want to register them, or if you just want information, please write to me, Dave Blynn, 6727 Windfaire Drive, Norcross, GA 30093 — and I will send you the appropriate forms and/or information. ●

Reproduction of the Greater Vasa Parrot

by Dorothy Parsons, Curator of Birds, Gainesville, Florida

Of the three hundred and thirty two species of psittacines, aviculturists have, over the years, expressed least interest in the nondescript Greater Vasa (*Coracopsis vasa vasa*).

The Greater Vasa is indigenous to Madagascar and the Comoro Islands and introduced to Reunion and Mascarene Islands occasionally finds its way to the North American and European psittacine trade where it is met with scant appreciation.

Measuring 50 cm, the Greater Vasa, with its horn-grey bill, brown iris and brownish black to grey plumage, does not lend itself to the brilliant psittacine family.

In 1984, Lubee Foundation, Inc. grasped the opportunity and purchased a pair of Greater Vasas from the pet trade in California.

The Greater Vasas joined Lubee's existing aviary that housed over 20 species of psittacines including common vasas. The Greater Vasas were housed in an aviary containing 24 inside cages and 24 outside cages

with a cement wall dividing them. In the cement wall there is a PVC pipe with a diameter of six inches, this enables the birds access to both sides. All 48 cages measure 60" x 73 1/2" x 85". The Vasas' cage is situated between a pair of Military Macaws and a pair of Scarlet Macaws.

The diet at Lubee's aviary consisted of roasted peanuts, hulled oats, white millet, safflower, black oil sunflower, cracked corn, pigeon mix, buckwheat, flax, large choice pumpkin, whole sunflowers, red peppers and game bird mix. Also offered is a vegetable mix, consisting of apples, spinach, peas, broccoli, grapes, carrots, oranges, bell peppers, sweet potatoes, celery and plums. The produce vegetable mix is fed in the a.m. and the seed mix in the p.m.

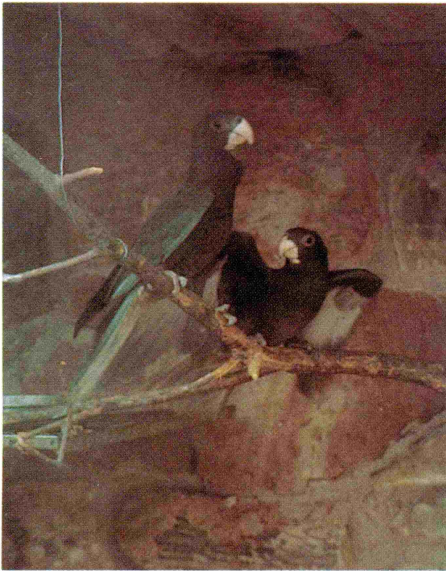
A metal nest box was offered. The box, measuring 16" x 16" x 24", was hung on the outside front of the indoor cage with the hole at the front of the box 5 1/2" from the top of the cage, 46 inches off the ground. The

box was lined with pine board and pine chip shavings were used as the nesting medium.

Being flighty and skittish, the Vasas' first use of the nest box was escape and hiding from daily keeper maintenance. However, in the male, cloacal swelling was noticed. Also noted was the feather condition of the female; all the feathers were lost on her head.

The great moment of truth came when the female laid the first of two eggs. Unfortunately, this clutch was infertile. With fingers crossed, the breeding season of 1988 approached and on June 28, 1988 the first of three eggs were laid. The second came on June 28, 1988 and the third on July 10, 1988.

All activities in that section of the aviary were suspended except for feeding. Not much of the Vasas was seen for the next 30 days. Incubation took approximately 30 days and on August 1, 1988 a baby was observed. However, only one egg hatched. Egg



This pair of Greater Vasa Parrots at the Chester Zoo in Chester, England are in their courtship display. The male's cloaca is distended about 1-1/2 to 2 inches. The female is in a display like a tom turkey, trying to get the male to feed her. Her wings are dropped to the sides and she will bob rapidly and repeatedly for attention. The Chester Zoo successfully works with both the Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrots. Much credit must be given to Dave Wilkerson, Bird Curator at the Chester Zoo.

one and two were infertile. Both parents nursed the baby to fledgling stage which took almost 10 weeks. On the 8th of October, the baby emerged out of the nest box.

The parents continued feeding the baby on a less regular scale for the next ten days during which the baby occasionally picked out of the feed dish soft bits and pieces of bananas and grapes. By the 20th of October the baby was eating on its own.

On December 12, 1990, Dr. Kollias of the University of Florida surgically sexed the young bird and found it to be an immature female.

Lubee Foundation, inc, is a non-profit organization set up in Gainesville, Florida. Lubee's motto and aims are conservation through protective breeding of endangered species. Apart from the aviary, Lubee houses many species of hoofstock, primates and macro chiroptera. ●



The Greater Vasa Parrots at The Lubee Foundation were first reproduced successfully on August 1, 1988. They are housed in large flights.

Photo courtesy of the Lubee Foundation

This photo shows the beautiful conditions of the aviaries found at the facilities of The Lubee Foundation located in Florida.



Photo courtesy of the Lubee Foundation