

# Breeding the Greater Vasa Parrot

(*Coracopsis vasa*)

by Judy Atkins  
Grand Bay, Alabama

Graceful weeping willows trail their fingers into a quiet pond. Ducks of brilliant colors paddle in small groups. Swans colored snowy white and inky black float in serene silence. Three emus can be seen cavorting on the sand or bathing in the shallow end of the pond. The Red-necked Ostrich struts and spreads his tail and wings, then kneels in the corner of his pen to court the three young females in the next pen. Whistles, words and shrill cries sound from the bright plumaged parrots in the two long aviaries. This is Tony Alexander's Bird Farm.

It is located just west of Mobile, Alabama in Theodore, ten miles north of the Gulf of Mexico. The year-round mild weather offers perfect conditions for an outside aviary.

Tony raises a wide variety of ducks, swans, pheasants, quail, ratites, doves, pigeons, and parrots.

Early in 1988, Tony bought a collection of birds, which included a pair of Greater Vasa Parrots. Their age and place of importation and past history was unknown. The Greater Vasas were set up in the outside aviary.

The aviary consists of two 70' x 20' x 8' three sided buildings. The front half of the buildings is chain link fencing, while the back and half the sides and roof are sheet metal. The floor is sand. Each building is divided into seven sections by chain link. In each section on the left side is an 8' x 8' x 12' welded wire cage of 1" x 2" grids. On the right side of each section is a 24" x 24" x 48" welded wire cage of 1" x 2" grids. Both these cages are up off the floor. Each has a nest box attached to the back side of the cage. All these cages have continuous flowing water.

This "cage in a cage" arrangement protects against escape and loss while the ground birds housed in each section clean up dropped food. The sand floor and raised cages allow for easy clean up.

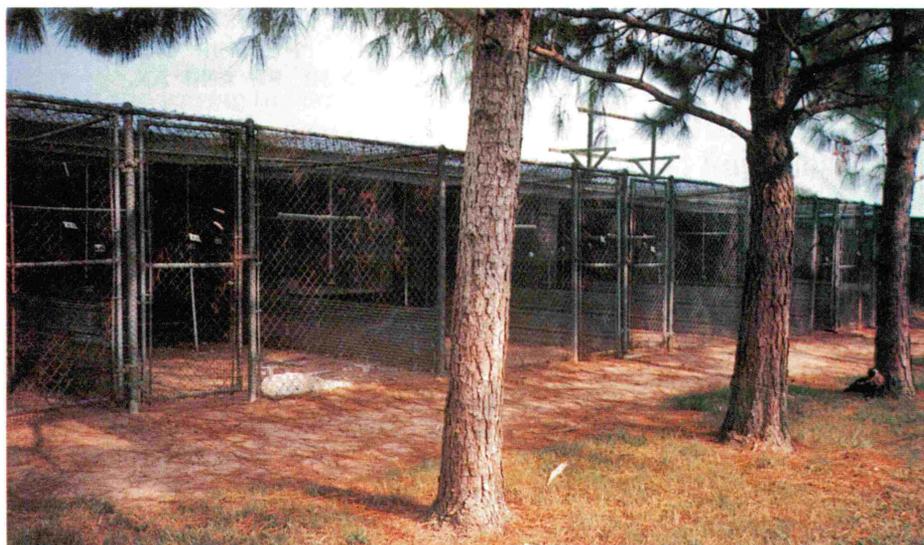
The Greater Vasas were placed in the second section of the first building in the right hand cage. The nest



*This young Greater Vasa Parrot is approximately one week of age. Note the unique protrusions appearing at the forward end of the upper mandible. These fleshy nodules disappear in juvenile birds.*

*The Greater Vasa Parrots were bred in a 24" wide x 36" high x 48" long cage suspended above the ground.*

*The aviaries which house the Greater Vasa Parrots are outdoors in a long line which is shaded by pine trees.*



Photos courtesy of Tony Alexander's Bird Farm

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box attached to this cage is made of 1/2" plywood, 12" x 16" x 24" deep, with a 4" diameter entry hole. There are two 1 1/2" dowel perches in their cage.

Sun Conures are in the section with the Greater Vasas. They are in the left hand cage, with white peafowl and golden pheasants kept on the ground.

The Greater Vasas are fed the same diet as the other parrots, which is a special mixture of fortified seed mix, chows, and supplements. A variety of fruits and vegetables are fed daily.

There are four regular employees who care for the birds. The birds are not handled except in an emergency or a maintenance need. The basic rules for the aviary are: keep the birds fed, watered and undisturbed.

In general appearance, both birds are charcoal gray with lighter color under the tail and under the wings. The female, which spends most of her time in the nest box, is usually bald on her head with bright yellow showing around the eyes and beak. In the spring, the male displays this same yellow pattern, and the skin of the anus drops down to form a tube.

This pair of Greater Vasas has reproduced for the last three years. On June 28 and 31, 1988, two babies were hatched. In 1989, three babies were hatched by the parents. In 1990, four eggs were artificially incubated in hopes of promoting a second clutch, but they did not lay again.

The babies were all hand fed Dr. D's Hand Feeding Formula by Avi-Sci. The formula was fed as is with fresh fruit blended into it. All the babies were eager eaters, gaining weight and growing at about the same rate as an Amazon. Pin feathers first appeared at about 2-1/2 weeks. At six weeks the birds were covered, picking at fruit and seeds and standing on low perches. Between eight to ten weeks all the babies were eating on their own.

One feature of the babies that was notable was a round knob on each side of the beak. Perhaps this was to aid the parents in feeding the newly hatched babies. The knobs gradually disappeared and were gone by four weeks of age.

I do not know why this pair has bred while many other pairs I have heard about have not. Perhaps we just have the right pair at the right place at the right time.

I wish those who are trying to breed the Greater Vasa Parrot much success and patience. ●