

introducing  
**ZARTHA,**  
the incubated and  
hand-reared  
double yellow headed Amazon

by Pat Light  
Morrison, Colorado

We purchased a mated pair of double yellow heads in February 1983; they had been together for fourteen years with the male fourteen years old and the female sixteen. They had laid seven eggs in two clutches in 1982 but none hatched.

These birds had been fed a diet of mostly sunflower but had been given fruit, vegetables and meat as supplements. We feed a mix of small seeds with vegetables every morning and fruits every evening with meat and meat exchanges added. We also feed Super Preen vitamins mixed into the seed. Jake and Herbie (the two Amazons) switched to this diet very readily, almost greedily.

In March we moved them into a wrought iron cage 5' by 3' by 3' with a metal nestbox attached. The nestbox is 18" by 18" with a hinged top for inspection. We offered corn cob, moss, pine shavings and newspapers as nesting materials. They threw out everything but the newspapers.

Jake (the male) has a full head of yellow, down onto the nape and onto the crop with a large amount of red on bend of wing. Herbie, though not as extensively colored or as brilliantly, is still quite pretty, with yellow to the back of the head and almost a "V" of yellow in the middle of her back.

The hen began laying on the 30th of March, one egg every third day to a total of three eggs. Twenty-two days into the incubation period, Herbie killed the three chicks in the shell by stabbing her beak through them and then trampling them with her feet.

Herbie laid again on the twenty-third of May, again every third day for a clutch of three eggs. We had decided not to lose another clutch of eggs to Herbie so we took the eggs on the 2nd of June and put them in an incubator at 102 degrees. It is an older Marsh Farms incubator without an automatic turner or humidity control. We turned the eggs six times a day and sprayed them with water at least six times a day.

After five or six days it was apparent by candling that only one of the eggs

was fertile. We kept turning and spraying six times a day, turn and spray, turn and spray until I felt like someone should turn and spray me. On Friday the seventh of June, the turning finally came to an end, but not the spraying. The chick pipped that morning and I began spraying and praying like crazy. Having never hatched a larger bird before I wasn't sure what to expect but by Friday afternoon I saw large cracks leading in both directions around the egg from the pip hole.

By Saturday morning the hole was very large and the chick could be seen to be moving very strongly. By late Saturday the chick had about a third of the shell separated. At that point I felt like I was being hatched. Late Saturday when I checked there was one fat little leg completely out of the shell, madly pushing against thin air. It dawned on me later that she was not getting any farther towards hatching because she had nothing to push against with that leg. Deciding to try and help her the rest of the way out of the shell, I carefully paintbrushed the edges of the shell with warm water and toothpicked the shell a little farther off, a little at a time. I kept putting the chick back into the incubator for heat supposedly (but it was really to give me a break and a chance to let my hands quit shaking). Soon, sooner than I thought it would be, I was holding a fat, wet chick in my hand. Having read many times how important heat is, I popped her quickly into the heated brooder on a bed of hemmed, warmed flannel.

She was definitely something only a mother could love. She was so beautiful and ugly at the same time. She weighed 15 and 7/10 grams and was almost an inch long but mostly she was big purplish eyes, with a few strings of longish down, which quickly dried into a small amount of off-white down, mostly on the neck.

After about 10 hours we fed this little bird for the first time. We started with a mixture of Pro-so-bee baby formula, water, Gerber mixed cereal and Super Preen vitamins. We made this very thin and watery to begin with, feeding her through a syringe or with a small paintbrush at first and keeping up those feedings every hour and a half. It became obvious that we were feeding too often so we stretched the space between feedings out to every two hours and added some homemade apple-sauce, with no preservatives or sugar.

We weighed her every day in the theory that if she wasn't gaining she was losing. She gained 4.2 grams in the first

two days. At four days old we named her Zartha (which means beautiful). At one week we gave her yogurt to begin establishing a crop culture. She weighed 32.1 grams at one week and we had gradually begun thickening her food to keep up with her rapidly growing little body. We continued feeding her with a paint brush and a syringe approximately every three hours for what seemed like forever. At two weeks we added Gerber's Beef For Babies to her food.

At fifteen days her tongue, toenails and beak began to darken and she was showing feather follicles in an arrow-like pattern from her legs toward her tail. Her eyes began to open at 16 days and were fully open at 28 days. When her down began to come in she looked like someone suffering from terminal blackheads but it was, thank heavens, down. She was almost completely covered in down at one month with primary flights just beginning to show by about a third of an inch. We were feeding her with a much larger paint brush at one month which allowed her to pump her food without injuring her soft tissues or her soft beak. And we were now beginning to get some sleep as she was doing quite well with a feeding every six hours.

As she grew we increased the size of the box she was in and as she grew more feathers we decreased the heat level of the brooder a degree at a time. I think you should be very careful not to cut the heat too much at a time on a feathering chick. As she grew faster it began to seem like a road race to find boxes clean enough and large enough to hold her for more than two or three days.

We began to wean her by adding boiled seed to her baby food and eventually making plain seed available to her in the cage once we moved her into it. She began to eat out of a bowl of baby food on her own at about two months with a call for food going on all of the time.

At three months she weighed 450 grams and was talking by only 40 days old. She said "hello" and "Phillip, get up" and mumbled several phrases so badly we couldn't tell what they were.

I hope perhaps reading about Zartha may encourage someone else to try breeding or incubating and hand raising a chick. It's a lot of work but worth it. We have raised another incubated chick (also a double yellow) and she didn't follow the same timetable as Zartha, which leads me to believe that each one may, like all other children, develop differently to some extent. ●