

# First U.S. Breeding of the Blue-cheeked Amazon

## *(Amazona dufresniana)*

By Rick Jordan • Hill Country Aviaries, L.L.C. • Dripping Springs, Texas

The first Blue-cheeked Amazons to arrive in U.S. aviculture were probably imported during the early to mid 1980's. This species has always been rare in captivity and establishing it in the aviary has proven to be very difficult. Although imports were sparse, adequate pairs were formed and distributed across the U.S. If this species had proven to be as easy to breed as some amazon species, it would now be well established in the United States and across Europe. This is not the case and only two or three reports of successful breedings of this species has been reported worldwide since they were imported during the 80's.

Blue-cheeked Amazons originate from Venezuela, Surinam, and the Guyana's. It is a bird of the rainforest, cloud forests, and other wooded habitats. Because it is somewhat nomadic in nature, accurate counts of its status are difficult to obtain. It is now protected under Appendix II of the CITES convention and imports to the United States have been prohibited since 1992 except under very specific exceptions for cooperative breeding. Since this species has not done well in captivity it is doubtful that any permits will be issued to continue importation into the United States from the wild.

The Blue-cheeked Amazons housed at Hill Country Aviaries in Dripping Springs, Texas belong to Janet and Gary Lilienthal of Massachusetts. They were sent to Texas on a breeding loan along with various other birds. Because their stubbornness to breed in captivity was well known by the staff at Hill Country Aviaries, the birds were placed in a large flock cage when they arrived and were not provided with a nest box for several years. Originally the cage contained two pairs and two extra males, but later another pair was added. The dynamics of the small flock was very amicable and no fighting was ever noticed between the birds. Strangely enough there was no obvious pairing or dominance noticed as well. All birds seemed to eat together and sleep together without regard to which male sat with which female.

Eventually, in late 2005, some breeding cages adequate for amazons were available and two pairs of Blue-cheeked Amazons were moved to these cages. Pairs were chosen at random with out any regard to behavior, color or temperament. The winter of 2005



*This is the first Blue-cheeked Amazon that hatched in the United States. This photograph was taken when the chick was one day old*



*The chick at 7 days old*



*2 weeks old*

passed without any notice of behavioral changes in the two newly established pairs. In the spring of 2006, one pair began to act more aggressive toward the keepers. The male would ruffle his feathers and vocalize loudly. This activity had previously not been observed in any of the Blue-cheeked Amazons maintained on the property. Within a few weeks of this change in behavior, the female began to investigate the nest box and on April 23, 2006 the first egg was laid. The first egg disappeared from the box the next day and it was decided that the male may have been too aggressive and in his fervor to protect the nest, he would destroy the eggs. The hen laid two more eggs, four days apart, which were pulled for artificial incubation. Both eggs proved to be fertile, one died in shell and the other hatched after a 26 day incubation period on May 22, 2006.

The newly hatched Blue-cheeked Amazon chick looked like most other amazon chicks and no remarkable differences were noticed. The chick was reared on ZuPreem Embrace Plus® hand feeding formula and grew well over the course of the next twelve weeks. A size 14 closed leg band was applied and appears to be the proper size for this species.

Weaning began at about twelve weeks of age. The chick was offered different foods including sprouted sunflower seed, cooked corn, carrot, apple, spray millet, and ZuPreem Parrot and Conure Fruit Blend pelleted diet. The first choices seemed to be the pellets and the raw carrots.

This chick was weaned in a cage with other amazons approximately the same age, so that it would be socialized with birds of its own genus. It was the loudest chick in the cage, in fact, the loudest chick in the entire nursery, often screaming at the top of its lungs right before feeding time. Also noted was the fact that the neck feathers were raised during excitement similar in fashion to the way a hawk-headed parrot raises its neck feathers when it screams. The bird was very competitive for food, but was still very tame and gentle to the human caretakers.

On August 25, 2006, the baby Blue-cheeked Amazon was deemed “weaned” at the weight of 460 grams. It is similar in size to its parents, but the colors of the head and face were slightly duller.

Some credit for this breeding needs to be given to the staff of Hill Country Aviaries. Without their observations of behavior, nest intervention and knowledge of incubation, this breeding probably would not have taken place. So, a big thanks goes out to Scott Stringer, Cathi Graham and Mark Moore for an exciting breeding that they certainly worked hard to bring into reality.



*21 days old*



*4 weeks old*



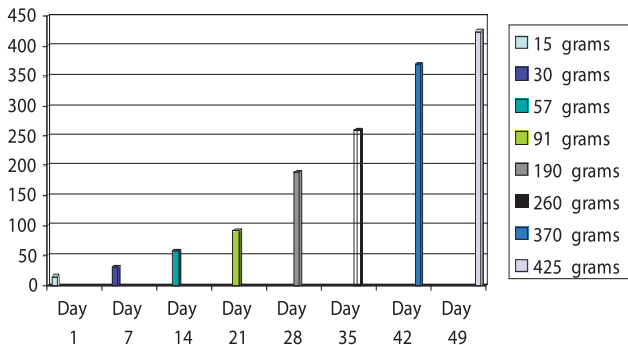
*35 days old*



42 days



49 days



Growth Chart shows steady, continuous weight gains

Editor's note: the preceeding is being considered for a First U.S. Breeding Award. If you know of any other claim as a US First Breeding of the Blue-cheeked Amazon or if you believe you qualify for a First US Breeding of another species, please contact the AFA Awards Chair. ♦

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