

## U.S. First Breeding of Three Special Amazons

by Ramon Noegel  
Seffner, Florida

Would you accept a pair of Puerto Rican Amazons for breeding? This offer was made to me by Janet Hohn, Director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Patuxent Division. It was March, 1986, and we had been chosen to host and act as an intermediary between the Department of Natural Resources of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in charge of the Puerto Rican Parrot preservation project. There were three heads of the P.R. Department of Natural Resources and five representatives of Patuxent as well as Greg Moss and I present. They were our guests at one of Tampa's finest Spanish restaurants. The purpose of the meeting was to decide if some of the offspring of *A. vittata* should be turned over to the Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico for a captive breeding program to be set up based on our approach and techniques used here at Life Fellowship Bird Sanctuary.

Much ground work had been prepared with Greg's and my visit to Puerto Rico in November, 1985. In turn, Dr. Jose Vivaldi and Don Pedro Campos, the main directors of the P.R. Department of Natural Resources, had visited us to see for themselves the feasibility of such a captive breeding project. They felt such a step would end the long stalemate the Puerto Rican parrot had been faced with, i.e., just keeping about the same number of birds in existence year after year. They realized the necessity of a fresh start. The stage was set. Tempers ran high as the pros and cons were discussed. I doubt anyone at the table appreciated the fine cuisine being served amid the hustle and bustle of serious Latin waiters who must have expected some melee to erupt at any moment.

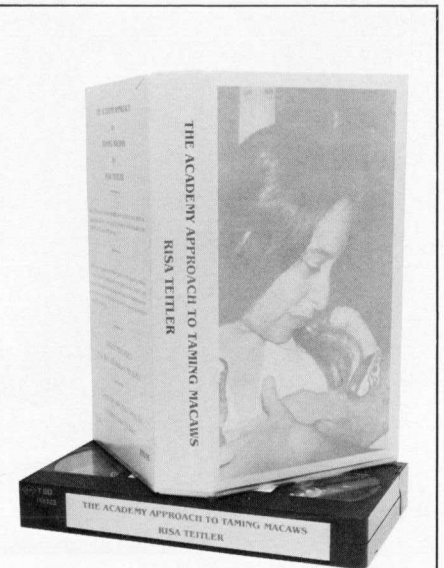
The final stroke came when the P.R. resident representative of the Patuxent project insisted more research was necessary before a captive breeding program could be ventured. Dr. Vivaldi was quick to respond with a statement I will never forget, "We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Men like Noegel and other aviculturists have already done it." Case closed. I paid the bill, went home, took some Mylanta, and was pleased with being the only person to ever be offered a legal pair of Puerto Rican parrots, and had the almost smug satisfaction of saying no

to such a generous gift. As it so happened, all worked out for both parties; but that's another story. Maybe some day I will write just to keep the records straight on the ongoing Puerto Rican parrot saga, about which some writers seem confused. Certainly the wheel of aviculture has already been invented, but not by me. The few building blocks I have contributed were laid on a foundation already prepared decades ago by British and American aviculturists in the forties and fifties. How quickly they have been forgotten by today's novices greedy for recognition. When I hear of something *new*, I smile and think of a Rudkin, Hart, Boosey, Clear, Moon and a galaxy of names too numerous to mention, who taught me these "new ideas" when I was in my early twenties. They succeeded before the advancements we are blessed or plagued with today, depending on how one looks at it. Now that the philosophy lesson is finished, let's examine the forementioned title.

### I. The Red-crowned Amazon

(*Amazona dufresniana rhodocorytha*)

Certainly one of the most beautiful of all continental Amazons, it exudes a soft splashing of colors that would excite the finest artists. How its distant relative *d. dufresniana* became the

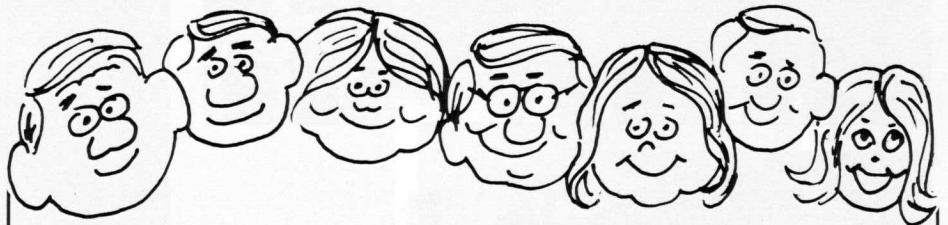


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An adult pair of *A. o. parvipes*.

A young *A. o. parvipes* hatched in 1984.



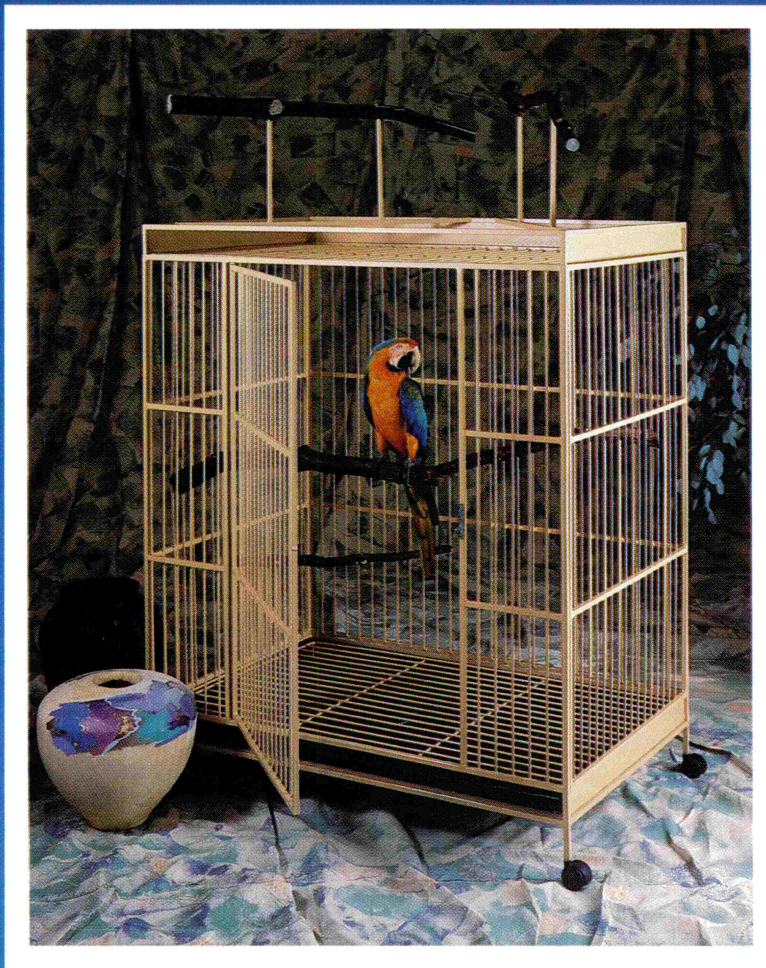
A breeding pair of *A. xantholora*; note the sexual dimorphism.

*A. xantholora* hatched in 1984 and 18 months old at the time of the photo.



Two *rhodocorytha* chicks aged eight weeks.

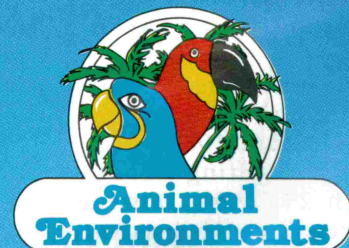
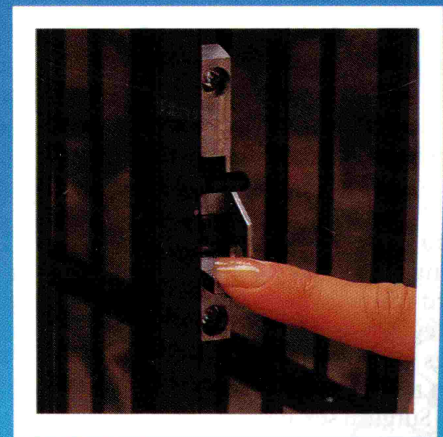
An adult *A. d. rhodocorytha*.



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nominate species can only be surmised. Obviously, those left with such a great task in a day of impossible travel must have met the blue-cheeked Amazon first and then somehow considered the red-crowned to be closest in relation. But having both in our collection, I wonder if they are, after all, that close. If so, then *brasiliensis*, which is slightly smaller and no more striking in color, must be as close in relationship. We have a *rhodocorytha* with such purple cheeks and neck that it is quite often mistaken for a *brasiliensis* by authorities not familiar with both parrots. Be that as it may, the first red-crowned Amazon that took my breath away was at Busch Gardens in 1960. Two of these attention-getters were in one of the arbor cages and could be approached at close range. Such unusual large, dark eyes and evenly defined coloration cannot be related in words or photos and Cooper's painting in Forshaw's book does not well resemble the actual Amazon. But we can excuse this as there have never been many living specimens for any artist to see. Of the nine unrelated ones we have here, no two are alike. Add to this the fact that the red on the crown becomes a vibrant scarlet during breeding season and the cheek and throat yellow, almost golden, confusion is excusable.

When we chanced to receive a lone specimen from Busch Gardens in 1978, little did we ever expect to see another, but there is never just one of a species to the avid breeder. Most of these Amazons arrived in the United States as pets brought back by U.S. telephone workers in Brazil. Slowly we gathered them together. What appeared a pair with the dominant one copulating on the older Busch Garden's bird resulted in two seasons of infertile eggs before the "cock" laid three eggs along with the proven hen. We began to suspect something peculiar afoot. Surgical sexing had not at this time been too prevalent and, too, we were cautious to try it on so rare a prize.

At last a male was secured in trade at the cost of a pair of vinaceous Amazons. In 1982 and 1983 we again saw clear eggs resulting from this union. March 25, 1984, however, revealed four fertile eggs being closely guarded by the hen. It was not until the 12th of April we succeeded in another box check which disclosed two chicks. Four days later the other two eggs hatched. Since the first two were by this time much larger, we realized the

two smaller chicks would never survive. These we placed under a reliable *tresmarias* pair whose eggs had just begun to hatch. They were removed after nine days to alleviate the strain on the foster parents. After a week of hand feeding our standard formula, which was being given to about twenty-five other various age groups of baby Amazons, these began to fail to empty their crops. With the injection of Lactated Ringers and regularly emptying their crops, Greg Moss prolonged their lives for another week before they finally succumbed. Meanwhile, the two left with their parents thrived. Necropsy of the two dead showed nothing that could have caused the food to simply stop passing from the crop to the gizzard.

After a month with the parents we removed the remaining two and finished hand rearing them with no recurring forementioned problems. Since this initial success we have annually bred this Amazon from the single pair. Though we have two other pairs set up for breeding, no eggs have been forthcoming, though copulation is witnessed each breeding season. This is a first U.S. breeding and the only ones so far, apart from a pair or two regularly bred in England.

## II. Yellow-lored Amazon (*Amazona xantholora*)

It is often put forth that the various *leucocephala* species and four subspecies descended from this smallest of all Amazons. Due to its limited habitat, I rather think it the other way around. That it is related there can be no doubt. It is far more sharp in color than *albifrons* with which it has been confused in many instances. Having distinct black ear coverts as well as sharply defined black edging on the head and neck feathers coupled with the white on the male's crown which extends past the eyes, the yellow patch on the lores and an over-active energy in a good flight makes this a very desirable addition to any collection. It is the most dimorphic of the genus. Only the males have the white crowns. The hens with a bluish wash on the forecrown make them appear drab in the company of their mates. Both birds reflect a turquoise sheen on the green parts that is nearly absent in specimens of *albifrons*.

Though we kept three pairs of this parrot for several seasons, fertile eggs consisting of three in the clutch did not materialize until May, 1984. All three hatched beginning June 15. One of these was reared to maturity as were

five others in the following two seasons of 1985 and 1986. The offspring of this species and the others mentioned in this article were observed by the many visitors we had in August from the AFA Orlando Convention, among whom were Rosemary Low, Robert Berry and many other responsible ornithologists who can attest to all these captive breedings. This represents another first U.S. breeding.

## III. The Parvipes Amazon

### (*Amazona ochrocephala parvipes*)

Unfortunately, many aviculturists confuse this distinct subspecies with a common yellow-nape in which some individuals have a small patch of yellow on their foreheads. In contrast, *parvipes* has a very large crown of yellow extending from the cere well past the eyes. In some specimens the yellow almost covers the head and runs down the neck into the nape yellow. Its mandibles are identical to a double yellow-head in color, lacking the ever present black in the true napes. This parrot is slightly smaller and the red on the bend of the wing more pronounced than in the napes. This subspecies is more rare than collectors think. During our three month's stay (December, 1978 - February, 1979) in Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala, inspecting shipments of young Amazons destined for the States, we found *parvipes* quite rare. We saw several thousand yellow napes being shipped to Japan, Europe and elsewhere. I doubt there were a hundred of this subspecies in the lot.

We managed to keep about ten of those encountered. Three pairs were sent to John Stoodley and his partner (then) David Spilsbury, the latter of whom had at the time bred several Amazon species when we visited him in 1980. Stoodley had just begun to breed Amazons and was glad to receive these as they brought him a world first breeding, being well pair-bonded and aggressive when we shipped. It was not until the following year of 1984 that we succeeded in rearing one of the two chicks that hatched about March 30, 1984. This first U.S. captive bred offspring went to Joe Carte in Houston, Texas. The pair produced and reared two more and weaned them in 1985. They are a more free breeder than the napes that have exasperated the best of aviculturists. They remind me more of the freedom with which *A. o. ochrocephala* breeds in captivity and are just as dependable. They seem to lie somewhere between *panamensis* and *auro-*

*palliata* but like *panamensis* have a more dependable disposition but lack the talking ability of either the Panama or the nape. None of the ten we had ever uttered more than a "hello."

*Parvipes'* habitat is rather limited now to isolated spots along the eastern coast of Nicaragua and Honduras. We were privileged to see a flock of about twenty birds in the San Pedro Sula area of Honduras. The Mayan Indians who collect "pichones" (Amazon chicks) for the exporters told us this subspecies was rare but they slipped it in with napes in order to get a higher price as it was, due to its pure cream colored upper mandible, often mistaken for a sick nape. There is considerable color variation in the nape patch which, as in *auropalliata*, may consist of a few yellow feathers to an extensive area almost encircling the throat as well as the nape.

In closing, my deep appreciation to all who have worked with Greg Moss and me since my heart attack in May, 1985.

Dying and being brought back to life changes one's values on many subjects. There's really not much you can do to top the experience of death. Having gone through it causes one to look at most endeavors with a sense of humor toward those who take themselves so seriously. It also made me realize how much I still wanted to accomplish with birds and other endangered species such as the Galapagos tortoise, of which we hatched 19 this year, making us the fifth organization to do so in fifty years of endeavor. We also hatched over 40 extremely rare Caribbean Island iguanas (*Cyclura*) of several species. We have also accomplished several more first U.S. breedings of *Amazona* which we shall be reporting.

Let me encourage all of you under fifty to do the things you really feel important NOW, especially where captive breeding of rare and endangered species is concerned. With habitat destruction occurring at an alarming rate even common species will soon become rare. I've seen many changes in forty years as an aviculturist. It has been a pleasure to work with and breed some of the rarest psittacines and other endangered wildlife as well and to leave even so small a mark on the history of aviculture. What a rewarding avocation it has been and continues to be. Aviculture has greatly enriched my life while often depleting my wallet. But I wouldn't change a thing. The thrill and excitement still lives within. f

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