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Breeding the Pied Barbet at the North Carolina Zoological Park

by Ron Morris
Curator of Birds

The barbets, Family Capitonidae, are comprised of 81 species of 13 genera, distributed through the African, Asian, and South American tropics. They are related to woodpeckers, toucans, jacanas, and other members of the Order Piciformes.

43 species of seven genera of barbets are found in Africa. One of these is the pied barbet, *Tricholaema leucomelan*. The pied barbet is primarily black and white as the name suggests. The upper parts and wings are black with yellow flecks in the mantle and wing coverts and yellow edges of the flight feathers. The forehead is red, the underparts white with a black bib. Young birds resemble adults but lack the red forehead. This species is distributed throughout South Africa.

The North Carolina Zoological Park acquired three pied barbets in December, 1985. After a routine quarantine, the birds were introduced into the zoo's tropical forest exhibit, the R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary. This exhibit is a 13,000 square foot, glass-enclosed, walk-through with over 2,000 tropical plants that range from ground-covers and bromeliads to 30 foot fig trees. The diverse bird collection includes among its 55 species, another African barbet, the crested (*Trachyphonus vaillantii*) which has inhabited the exhibit since it opened in August, 1982. Several palm logs were supplied for the crested and they have used them well, rearing 34 progeny in five years.

Two of the pied barbets paired off

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's closest state coordinator. There is a state coordinator listing with phone numbers elsewhere in this publication.



Adult pied barbet

and, after a few months, began to show interest in nestboxes. They would take up residence in a box, visiting, and inspecting it frequently, and often roosting in it during the day, only to abandon it after a few days.

In April of 1986 they began to occupy a new nestbox and eventually produced three eggs. The fresh weight of two of the eggs was 2.8 g each \pm 0.1 g. The eggs were well attended, but the bare, flat-bottomed nestbox seemed to have made it difficult to cover them properly. The hen sat tight during one nestbox inspection but she had only one egg under her while the other two had rolled to a corner. The eggs were candled on May 14, and all showed signs of early embryonic development, but by May 26 the nestbox was abandoned and all the eggs had disappeared.

In the ensuing months, modifications were made to several palm logs in an effort to persuade the birds to use a more natural nest site. Nest cavities excavated by the crested barbets were altered to permit use by the pied barbets while excluding the much larger and more aggressive crested. By February 1987 the birds had chosen one of these sites and the male was observed taking food to the cavity and feeding the female. As before, however, these encouraging signs lasted only a few days before the birds abandoned this site to renew their search.

Finally in July, 1987, the male was observed taking food to a previously



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TABLE I
Comparison of incubation by male vs. female pied barbet

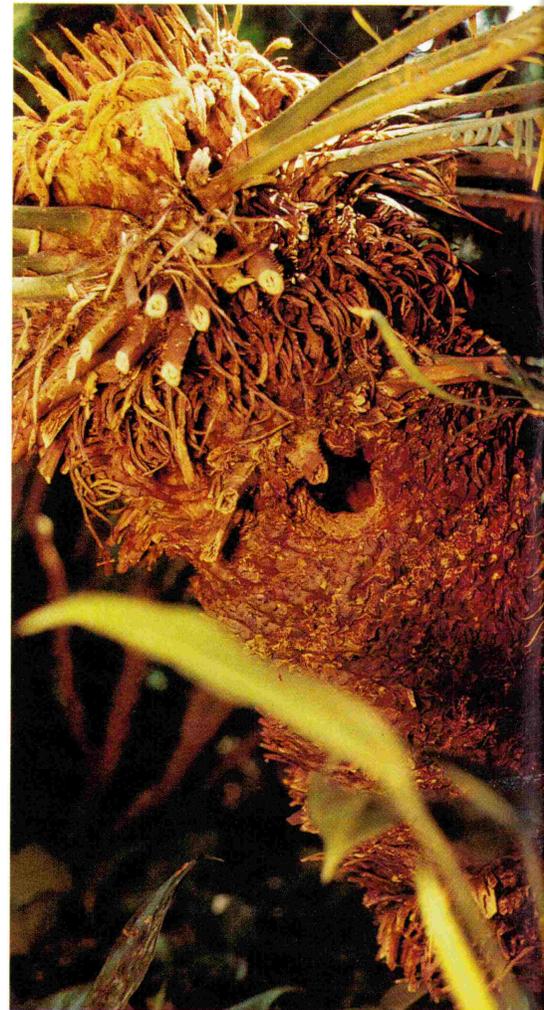
	Incubation no. sessions observed	Range in minutes of inc. sessions	Average no. min. on eggs	Total min. on eggs	%
Female	6	1-30	13.5	81	49.4
Male	9	3-15	9.4	70	42.7
Unk.	1	13	13.0	13	7.9
Total	16	1-30	11.9	164	

TABLE II
Comparison of incubation vs. inattentiveness

	Number Sessions	Range in min.	Average No. mins.	Total minutes	%
Either male or female on eggs	16	1-30	11.9	164	48%
Neither on eggs	16	1-28	11.0	178	52%

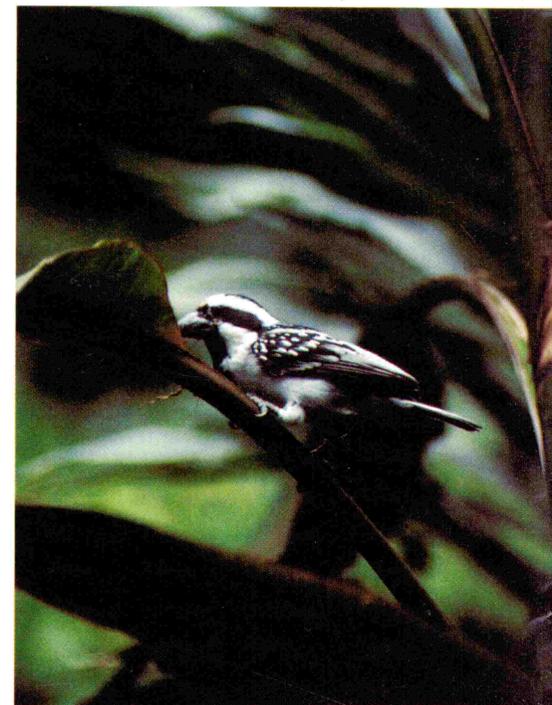
undiscovered nest cavity. The nest had been excavated by the pied barbets in a live sago palm that measured only 42" tall and 10" in diameter. The cavity itself measured 8" deep with a 2-1/8" diameter entrance located just 22" above the ground. The entrance was well con-

cealed just below the lowest fronds of the palm. The single nestling (distinguishable from the parents only by its lack of a red forehead) was peering out of the nest entrance on August 3, and fledged the following day. The fledgling was removed from the exhibit immedi-



Pied barbet nest cavity in sago palm.

Photos by Ron Morris, Asheboro, NC



Adult pied barbet.

Aviculture is Conservation too...

Name: Nene Goose
Branta sandvicensis

Range: Island of Hawaii

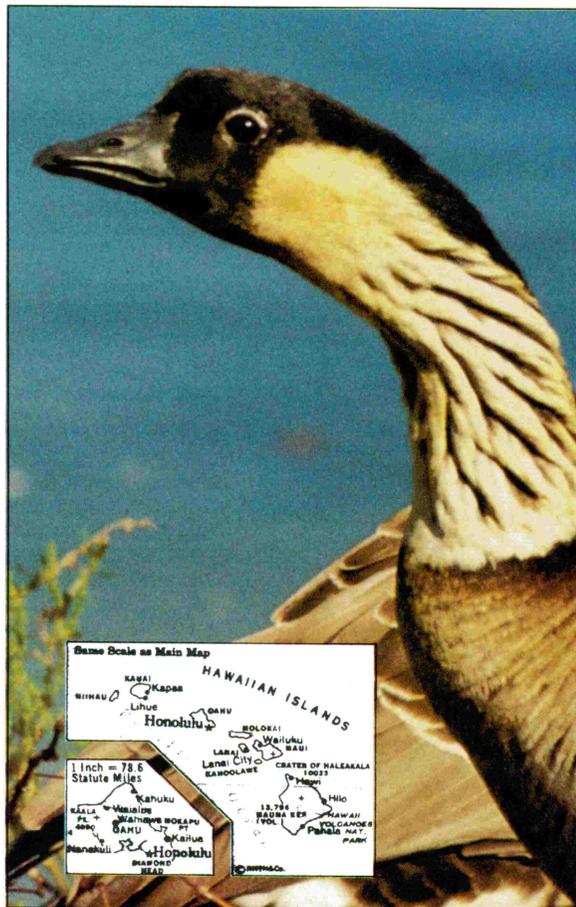
Status in the Wild:
Reduced to only 30 birds in 1952. ENDANGERED.

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ately and was self-feeding within 48 hours.

The parents began to recycle almost immediately and by August 17, just two weeks after the removal of the fledgling, had produced a complete clutch of three eggs. On September 2, two of the eggs had hatched and are presumed to have conformed to the incubation period of 14 to 15 days as stated in McLachlan and Liversidge — *Roberts Birds of South Africa*.

During the incubation and nestling phases of the nesting cycle, zookeepers Celia Lewis, Tracy Warren, Gary Hanson, and Cher Kinison, undertook observation of the behavior of the breeding pair on ten occasions in particular. All observations took place between 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., and varied from 23 to 150 minutes in duration with a total of eight hours and 45 minutes observation time. The observations confirm that in this species, as with other barbet species, both male and female participate in the incubation of the eggs (Table 1) and the feeding of the young.

Table II shows that, during nearly six hours of observations on ten occasions, the adult birds incubated the eggs less than 50% of the time. These results, however, may simply reflect the high ambient temperature of the Aviary at the time of the observations, i.e., 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in August and September, the hottest part of the day at the hottest time of the year.

Observations were carried out on six dates during the nestling period during which 40 feedings were noted, 19 by the female, 16 by the male, and five of which the identity of the parent was unknown. The time between feedings ranged from one to 15 minutes with an average rate of one feeding every 5.1 minutes.

The two nestlings fledged on October 1, approximately* 29 days after hatching and weighted 30.1 and 34.2 grams respectively. Both were removed from the exhibit and were self-feeding within 48 hours just as their predecessor had been.

The fledging and continued health of a pied barbet in August 1987 represents the first breeding of the species at the North Carolina Zoological Park and, to our knowledge, in the United States.

**Although the precise date of hatching is not known, the nestlings appeared to have been no more than a day or two old when first observed on September 2, a 29 day nestling period conflicts, however, with the 35 days listed in McLachlan and Liversidge.*



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