



by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear  
San Antonio, Texas

## White-fronted (spectacled) Amazon

Photo by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear



*Amazona albifrons nana*, the Central American race of the white-fronted Amazon.

I never fully realized the difference in coloration between the sexes in the white-fronted Amazon until a pair "screched past" one day last March. I was bird watching (rather, parrot watching) in the mountain pine ridge of Belize when a pair turned in front of me, like miniature jets, exposing their backs and full wings to view. The female was on top and appeared to be a streak of green. The male, however, just a foot or so below the female boasted a large "splash" of red. Within a period of ten minutes I noted about twenty parrots in pairs or trios passing. Unlike the yellow-crowned Amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*) that silently flies past, generally quite some height above the tree line, the white-fronts flew only short distances then landed vocalizing loudly all the time. According to an article by Stewart Levinson (published in the Proceedings of the ICBP Parrot Working Group Meeting,

St. Lucia, 1980) titled "The social behavior of the white-fronted Amazon (*Amazona albifrons*)," all the squawking serves to increase and maintain social excitement. A high level of such seems, according to Levinson, to function in increasing group cohesion during critical social periods of daily activity. When perched, two behavioral displays called the "shake display" and "wing-shrug display" have similar functions.

Levinson noted pair-bonded birds held the highest ranking in captivity and that such pair-bonds were evident year-round. Several behaviors serve to establish and maintain such pair-bonds. They include: allopreening, courtship feeding, pair participation in agonistic interactions, and close spatial association. Preening each other (allopreening) was stated as appearing to be "the strongest behavioral device for actual maintenance of the pair-bond throughout the year." Captive birds were noted to have laid two eggs on consecutive days with the female incubating immediately without relief from the male.

The white-front continues to be imported into the United States despite the curtailing of exports from Mexico. In a period between October 1979 and June 1980 over 2,376 white-fronts were imported. While it might seem like a lot of birds it only represented 2.5% of the parrots (94,000 total) imported into the U.S. during this period. Since the Mexican populations are no longer being traded, birds arrive from Honduras and Nicaragua. While records are rather loosely maintained in Honduras, they do have a quota system allowing 2,000 to 2,500 white-fronts to be exported annually. Recent discussions have been considering the closing of exportations in both these countries. Should this come about, the only birds entering the U.S. would be those smuggled across the U.S. and California border (I have seen few at the Texas border).

With imports changing their origins one should be aware of the fact that three races have been noted in the species. The northernmost race being *A.a. saltuensis* represented by birds mainly being smuggled into the U.S. *A.a. albifrons* is the west and south central Mexican race that was most heavily traded when Mexico exported large numbers of parrots. The final race is *A.a. nana* and is currently being made available from Honduras while some exports to Europe from Nicaragua are also being observed. While I am by no means an expert on the subject, it

would appear difficult to distinguish between birds from centralwest Mexico and northwest Mexico. Mention is made of the amount of blue coloration being more extensive in the northwest race but the sample size being stated by Forshaw is only five females and eleven males. The Central American race, however, appears to be greatly reduced in size with birds of the *A.a. nana* race being 10% smaller than *A.a. albifrons* (*A.a. nana* female wing length 163.0 mm, *A.a. albifrons* 173.4; *A.a. nana* male wing length 167.3 mm, *A.a. albifrons* 183.6 mm).



As can be noted from the range map, the white-front occurs from northwestern Mexico south to western Costa Rica. It appears to be a bird of high secondary forest, tropical forest edges, pinelands and open country with scattered trees. In the Yucatan of Mexico and the northern pineforest of Belize it can be encountered in mixed flocks with *A. xantholora*. The latter species, however, is easily distinguished by its dark ear coverts. In Belize this has given rise to its common name "whiskers." Throughout its range the species is rather common with its veering flight, like that of an *Aratinga* conure, being an indicator of dry tropical forest. Due to its adaptability to secondary forest, its numbers may well be increasing although I have no knowledge of such being documented. In my travels throughout the species range I have seldom encountered it being kept as a pet in villages. Generally its range is shared with one of the larger *Amazona* species that is much greater preferred as a pet.

Due to its abundance and sexual dimorphism (as well as small size) it would appear to be an excellent species for aviculture. At present, however, it is not being bred in large numbers in captivity. This trend must change if we are to have continued representation of this unique parrot in captivity for future generations of aviculturists. ●

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