



The Illiger's Macaw in South African Aviculture

(*Ara maracana*)

by Carine Lavril
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Description

Although the Illiger's Macaw, (*Ara maracana*), is described accurately in Rosemary Low's book, "Parrots — Their Care and Breeding" and in Joseph Forshaw's "Parrots of the World", I will briefly say that it is the most beautiful of the seven species of dwarf macaws existing today. They include the Red-fronted (*A. rubrogenys*), the Noble (*A. nobilis*), the Yellow-collared (*A. auricollis*), the Red-bellied (*A. manilata*), the Chestnut-fronted or Severe (*A. severa*) and the Blue-headed (*A. couloni*).

It is mainly olive green with blue primary feathers and its distinctive markings are patches of red-orange on the forehead, the lower back and the middle abdomen between the legs. The total length is 16.9 inches. Crown and cheeks are bluish, the bill is black, the iris red and the legs pinkish. Immatures have less extensive and duller coloration markings. Although it has been fairly common up to now in its original habitat (forests of eastern Brazil and Paraguay), these birds suffer loss of habitat as much as many other species of neo-tropical parrots. Deforestation is the main reason for its recent decline.

The Illiger's Macaw was imported in small numbers into the U.S.A. in the late 1970s and again in the late 1980s. It was listed on CITES I in 1989. It is one of the rarest dwarf macaws in aviculture and is not often found as a pet. There is very little information about it in avian magazines worldwide.

Breeding

Due to the rarity of the Illiger's Macaw in captivity, aviculturists keeping these exquisite parrots should be concerned about inbreeding and make every effort to avoid breeding from related individuals.

At the Parrot Breeding Centre, this species is kept in suspended cages, seven feet long by three feet square with nesting boxes hooked on the

outside of the cage. Two of the breeding pairs have horizontal boxes and four have vertical ones.

The birds are offered a great variety of fruits and vegetables along with our mixture of sprouted seeds. They are very fond of Avi-plus which is given prior to the breeding season and the diet is highly supplemented with calcium powder at the same time of the year so the shells will not be brittle or show stress lines after two or three clutches.

Some pairs prove to be very prolific though others are difficult to establish in captivity. Out of the six pairs we acquired originally, three bred immediately. One of these pairs lays up to four clutches a year but unfortunately ignores the chicks once they are born. They will not harm them but refuse to feed them. They seem to think there is something wrong when creepy-crawlies come out of their eggs!

Two other pairs are wonderful breeders. They both lay three clutches from three to four eggs each and will raise whatever they are allowed to keep and will readily accept chicks from other nests. They also start breeding as early as July. Naturally, it is out of the question to leave the newborn babies in the boxes when the weather could prove fatal to them. A fourth pair has started to breed this season but gave us only one clutch.

The other two pairs should be mature enough to start breeding next season. These parrots enjoy the company of a mate and will sit for long periods of time together, occasionally preening.

At the start of the breeding season, pairs can be seen mating many times, careless of what may go on around them and the males will often feed their hens. They are very concerned about the well being of their family and will spend more and more time inside the box with the females, mainly during incubation, feeding them and the babies once hatched.

Incubation lasts for 26 days approximately. Chicks are ringed when they weigh about 160 gm (between 18 and 20 days of age) with 9.5 mm rings.

Hand Rearing

Hand rearing from the egg is quite easy and straight forward, using Avi-plus N1 for the first eight days, then gradually adding N2. Birth weights vary between 9.5 and 12.3 gm, the usual being around 10.5 grams.

Some pairs are very choosy about their food which leads to a lack of the B vitamins. It shows occasionally in chicks. Soon after hatching, they will show signs of a neurological disorder. The legs are stiff and consequently will not fold under the baby. It will find itself lying on its back or side. I have talked to different aviculturists keeping this species and they have had the same problem with some baby Illiger's. It is not a very serious condition if attended to early, as the following example shows.

This chick was hatched in our nursery, rather than in the nesting box. I decided to assist it when, from candling the egg, I noticed something was wrong. It was quite agitated so I opened the shell before the chick had a chance to pip. This is when I realized it was upside down. It finally hatched and weighed just below 6 gm at birth. Soon after this, the neurological disorder appeared.

The baby was kept in a small container with as little space as possible in order to keep it on its belly and force it to keep its weight on its legs so that they could fold in the normal position. It was checked very often and put back on its feet when needed. Vitamin B complex was administered, one drop in the morning feed every day for five days then three times the following week. This was repeated once after a month. No antibiotics were given since this condition is not a disease nor due to any infection. This chick improved dramatically and

started gaining weight regularly.

Chart for normal Illiger's Macaw baby

Day 0:	12
Day 2:	14
Day 4:	20
Day 6:	30
Day 10:	58
Day 15:	113
Day 20:	173
Day 25:	230
Day 30:	270
Day 35:	291
Day 38:	300

Chart for above mentioned example chick

Day 0:	5.9
Day 2:	7.5
Day 4:	11.5
Day 6:	14
Day 10:	24
Day 15:	50
Day 20:	94
Day 25:	160
Day 30:	187
Day 35:	226
Day 38:	258

A normal chick loses 15 to 20 percent of its weight just before weaning and regains only part of this loss during the following months. The weight gain of a sick baby will cover a longer period of time and if the condition was not too serious, the chick will come close to the normal weight but won't have a distinctive peak weight curve.

It is very important to keep accurate details of the whole process because if such a case happens again at a later stage, the notes are there to help remember what to do. This problem



Photo by Nancy Vigran

Illiger's Macaws

can be avoided if vitamin B complex is given to the breeding birds mixed with the food, prior to egg laying.

I have tried to find weight charts of hand fed Illiger's babies in avian pediatric publications, but there are none. The closest are charts for Yellow-

collared Macaws.

We have bred Illiger's very successfully and I am happy to say that 21 young were raised this season at the Parrot Breeding Centre, 15 of which were hand fed from the egg.

Hand fed babies are usually weaned earlier than parent-raised chicks but it depends upon the individual bird. Also, when feedings are cut down too soon, the babies will ignore the food they have in their cage and might become thin. So feedings will have to be resumed three times a day for longer than initially needed.

As A Pet

Hand raised chicks learn to talk before being weaned and do this with a funny nasal voice and will be proud to shout a, "Hello-Howaiou?" very fast and in a high pitched tone! As a pet, the Illiger's Macaw should be kept alone. If several birds live together inside a house or a flat, the noise becomes unbearable.

A single bird will learn a few words, will be able to perform some tricks and is a very active and affectionate member of the family. It loves to be handled and scratched around the head, neck and tummy, but its strong personality requires adults to be present when small children play with the parrot at first to make sure a good relationship and understanding develops between it and the children. The size makes it a more suitable pet than the larger macaws and it will be a happy fellow if allowed out of its cage often.

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