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Greater Vasa Parrot Breeding Survey

by Dave Blynn
Norcross, Georgia

Introduction

This article presents anecdotal information on the known successful breedings of the special Greater Vasa Parrot, *Coracopsis vasa*. My knowledge of these events is limited and the numbers too few to consider this a definitive study of their habits in captivity. I do hope that this information will encourage others to experiment with this unusual species so that we can preserve the bloodlines now existing within North America.

Unique Characteristics

Greater Vasa Parrots are unique birds, differing greatly from most other parrot species. They have long limbs (Silva), unlike any other living species, except for the Lesser Vasa Parrot, *Coracopsis nigra*. Cloacas extend in both females and males during breeding season. The skin of both sexes turns yellow-orange when in breeding condition. The females' beaks grow wider and they also lose their head feathers. Females probably will breed with more than one male, if available. They also develop a pouch under the lower mandible which fills with a clear fluid when feeding young. Their eggs hatch in 17 days and the babies' eyes open in eight days. If conditions are ideal, they will fledge in seven weeks.

Problems

Unfortunately, they are also marked by some not-so-unique problems. Their primary home range, Madagascar, is rapidly being deforested and shortly there will be no place for them to survive. Four or five hundred were imported into the U.S.A. in 1984/85 and, probably, 200 or less are still alive. Only a few dedicated aviculturists are interested in these birds. They are not very attractive to the eye and there is little or no commercial market for them as pets. Additional importation is unlikely, due to their low desirability, our new federal law and the difficulty of exporting from Madagascar.

Limited Time for Success

Thirty-three babies have hatched in the USA since 1988, 18 of those from one pair. The imported adult birds now in the USA must all be at least nine years old or older. While that may be old in the wild, one lived in captivity for 52 years. We should have at least another five to ten years to learn how to breed the Greater Vasa Parrot consistently if we want to save the bloodlines now residing here. Certainly, all of these imported birds are mature enough to reproduce. Domestically raised babies have shown breeding characteristics at three years of age, although none have yet reproduced in the USA.

Breeding Table

I have compiled a table of breedings showing some characteristics of the successful events. While the table strongly suggests what we have to do, please remember that I do not have information on all the unsuccessful breeding attempts. It is possible that most of the Greater Vasa Parrots, successful and unsuccessful, are set up in most common breeding conditions shown in the table. If true, that would invalidate the conclusions I draw from the information in the table.

Breeding Table Additional Information

All but one pair were fed a general parrot diet of seeds, fruits and vegetables. One pair was fed a pelleted diet and fruits and vegetables. Nest boxes reportedly ranged in size from a 15" x 15" to a 16" x 24" base, with heights from 24" to 36". "Large cage(s)" are at least 4' x 4' x 8' in size. "Outdoor cage(s)" were either all outdoor or combined indoor/outdoor cages. "Others nearby" refers to other Great or Lesser Vasa Parrots within sight or hearing distance. "Years bred" shows a single year, inclusive years, or first year (further success being unknown).



This fully feathered Greater Vasa Parrot is seven weeks of age and is ready to fly.



This six month old Greater Vasa Parrot was parent reared in England. The typical black triangle on its beak is the only real sign that it is a juvenile.



This adult hen with young shows a beak greatly widened, as much as three-eighths of an inch. A hen in non-breeding season has a narrower beak similar to the cock bird. One can beak-sex the hens when they are ready to breed. Note also the bald head and yellow skin which is typical of Greater Vasa hens when they are on eggs or young.

Breeding Table Conclusions

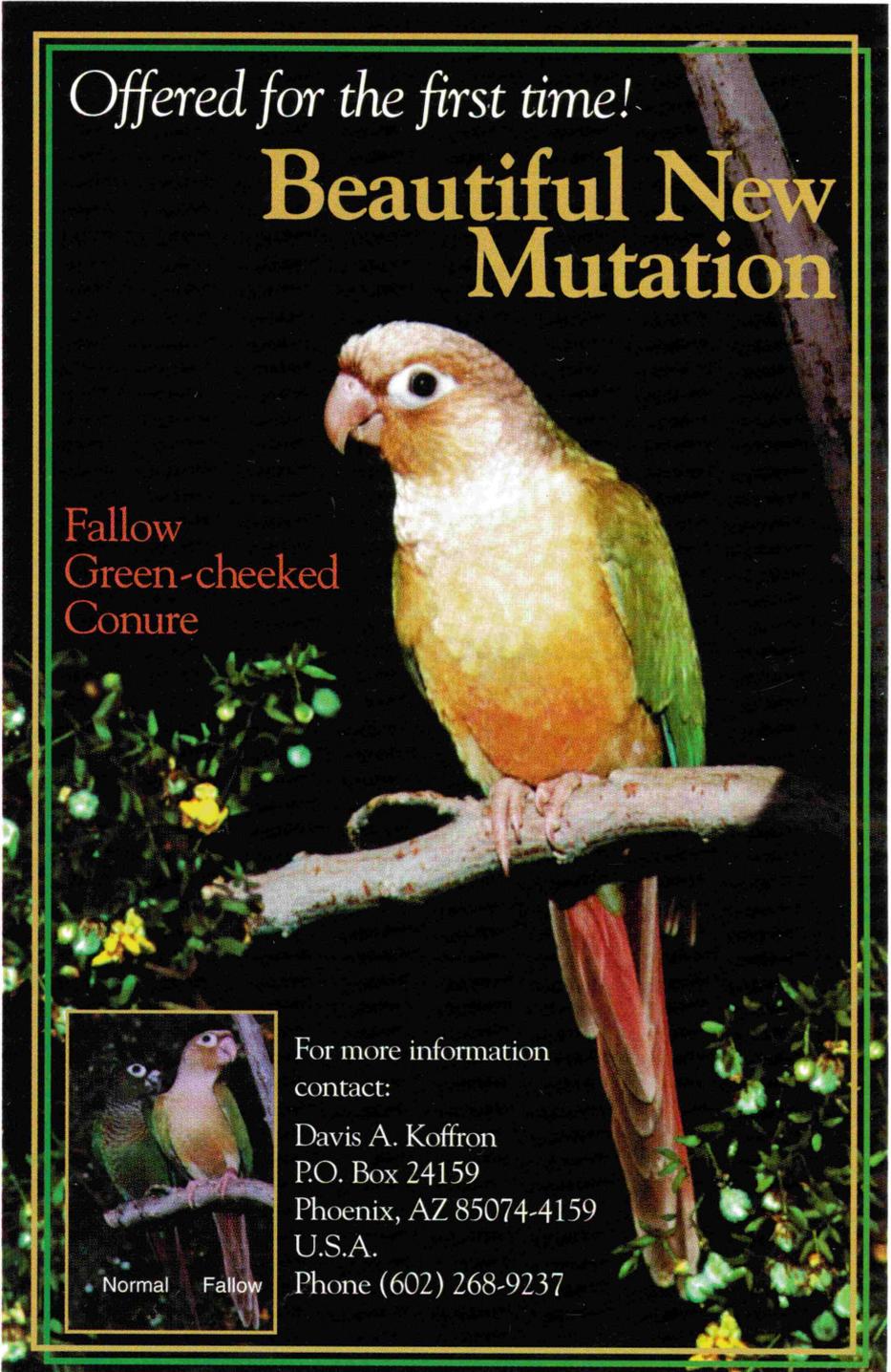
Most breeding successes were in large outdoor cages with other vasa parrots nearby or large outdoor cages with an additional male in the cage. Tony Alexander's pair is a glaring exception to the rule, since they are in a small outdoor cage with no other vasa parrots in the collection. This pair is perfectly matched, since they are the only pair that consistently reproduces in the USA.

Continued on page 58

Offered for the first time!

Beautiful New Mutation

Fallow
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For more information contact:

Davis A. Koffron
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Phoenix, AZ 85074-4159
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A '93 Success?

I have four Greater Vasa Parrot cages in one location with one female and one to three males in each cage (three of the males are young domestic birds). When the first hen came into breeding condition, all of the other birds (except the '92 baby male) also came into breeding condition. One female, with two adult males, laid four fertile eggs starting December 31, 1992. Three of the eggs pipped in the nest box, but none hatched due to cold weather. My daughter, Betsy Paul, finally pulled them after a wait of up to four days. She helped them hatch and she began hand feeding four babies. A second female became egg-bound. We removed her eggs, but, unfortunately, she died four days

later. A third hen laid two eggs, which Betsy found on the floor of the cage. This was probably due to the location of the nest box. I had placed it at the feeding end of the cage. This cage grouping, with the extra males and nest boxes at the far end of the cages, shows promise for the future.

Additional Baby Information Available

Arlene Chandler made extensive notes on her two babies, one incubator hatched and one parent reared to the age of four weeks. Betsy Paul is making thorough notes on the four babies she is feeding. By June '93, I will be able to provide copies of their notes to people who are hand feeding babies. These notes will be ten to 15

pages long, so please request them only if you need the notes for reference while rearing babies.

Lesser Vasa Breeding Information

The Lesser Vasa Parrot, *Coracopsis nigra* is also known as the Black Parrot. I have no Lesser Vasa Parrot breeding information now. Three USA breeders say that their birds breed well in pairs and normally produce every year. If the information becomes available, I will compile a similar table for the Lesser Vasa Parrots in the future.

Vasa Parrot Stud Books

Registration of the vasa parrots in the stud book is free. Your name and address will not be part of the stud book. That list is separate and not provided to other people. While over 160 greaters are in the books, less than 60 lessers are registered. Your participation may help save these distinct parrots for future generations of aviculturists.

Chart Notes

1. Dieter Meyer (then-East Germany) has first world breeding. No information is available.
2. Laid eggs while in group, fertile, did not hatch, parents too busy being aggressive. Separated the pair and they produced chicks.
3. Small outdoor cage inside large wire enclosure. Consistent producers.
4. Infertile eggs in '89, then the male escaped and was not recaptured.
5. Infertile eggs in earlier years, added extra males and they now produce yearly.
6. One greater female, two greater males and one lesser all placed in one cage in '90. Produced the first year.
7. Infertile eggs twice between '85 and '89 when only one male with hen. Pair moved to Georgia, placed outside with additional male near other vasa cages in August '91. Fertile eggs laid and broken in Feb. '91. Chicks produced in Jan. '93.

GREATER VASA (*Coracopsis vasa*) SUCCESSFUL BREEDINGS TABLE

Year	Place	Large Cage 4x4x8'	Small Cage (Less)	Indoor Cage	Outdoor Cage or I/O	Others Nearby G or L	Extra Males in Cage	Years Bred	Notes
1987	GER	UNK		UNK		UNK	UNK	'87-?	1
1988	SWITZ	Yes			XXX	XXX	Yes/No	'88-?	2
1988	PHIL	XXX			XXX	XXX	XXX	'88-?	
1988	USA		XXX		XXX			'88-92'	3
1988	USA	XXX			XXX	XXX		'88	4
1990	UK	XXX			XXX		XXX	'90-'92	5
1990	UK	XXX			XXX		XXX	'90-?	6
1991	USA	XXX			XXX	XXX		'91	
1992	USA	XXX		XXX		XXX		'92	
1992	USA	XXX			XXX	XXX		'92	
1992	USA	XXX			XXX	XXX		'92	
1992	SPAIN	XXX			XXX	XXX	UNK	'92	
1993	USA	XXX			XXX	XXX	XXX	'93	7
TOTALS	12	1	1	1	11	9	4+?		

Attend the ' ' Big One' '
AFA Convention '93
 Salt Lake City, Utah
 August 4 - 8

See special insert for detailed information or call our
 Phoenix Office, (602) 484-0931.

I wish to express my gratitude to Judy Adkins (for Tony Alexander), The Lubee Foundation, Dr. Roger Wilkinson (Chester Zoo, UK), D. Grenville Roles (Tracy Aviary), Arlene Chandler, Jim Jackson, Nelson Blackmore and Betsy Paul for their information and observations. ●

Avian Trade Shows & Seminars

Gold Country Avicultural Society's 2nd Annual Summer Bird Mart June 13, 1993

Mother Lode Fairgrounds, Sonora, CA
For more information, call or write:
Rodney Silva (209) 533-3496,
Golden Country Avicultural Society
P.O. Box 3692, Sonora, CA 95370

Greater Memphis Bird Club's 9th Annual Sale June 19 & 20, 1993

State Tech, Nabor Auditorium
Memphis, Tennessee
Any questions, please call:
Mary Noland (901) 332-7258 (day)
and Debbie Thompson
(901) 373-6960 (night)

Pomona Bird Mart June 27, 1993

L.A. County Fairplex Bldg. #4
Pomona, California
9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Admission: \$4, Youths 5-15: \$1
Parking \$3
(use White Ave. parking lot (tram service
from parking lot to Building G)

Tennessee Valley Exotic Bird Club (host club for the National Convention of the American Federation of Aviculture in August, 1994)

invites you to our 1st Annual Fall Exotic Bird Fair August 21 & 22, 1993

Knoxville Convention Center,
World's Fair Park
For more information, contact:
Gary Reid (615) 690-0613
or John Rich (615) 694-7793,
or write to:
TVEBC, P.O. Box 51425,
Knoxville, TN 37950-1425

Birds Exotic All Bird Club's Summer '93 Bird Mart Extravaganza and Bird Sale

August 28 & 29, 1993
Washington County Fairgrounds
Hillsboro, Oregon
(Portland area)
For information, contact:
Ron Marks, manager
19235 SW Pilkington Road
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
or call (503) 684-3799

Central Alabama
Avicultural Society's
Annual Show & Fair
September 4 - 5, 1993
Governors House Hotel
2705 E. South Blvd.,
Montgomery, Alabama
For information, contact:
Charles Reaves (205) 892-2204
Lorene Clubb (205) 857-3817
Lisa Goode (205) 279-6829

Northwest Ohio Exotic Bird Club's Fourth Annual Bird Fair September 11, 1993

Saturday only, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Lucas County Rec. Center,
Maumee, Ohio
For more information, call:
Chris Schwind (419) 693-4956
3240 Stafford Dr.
or N.W.O.E.B.C.,
P.O. Box 167326,
Oregon, Ohio 43616

Palmetto Cage Bird Club Anderson, South Carolina hosts the

Carolina Classic Bird Show & Sale
September 11 - 12, 1993
ABS, NCS, NFS, SPBE
judging both days
For information, call:
Earl Owen (803) 855-3193

Avicultural Society of Puget Sound Bird Show September 25, 1993

Seattle Center Flag Pavillion
For information, contact:
Ann Jones (206) 868-7871 or
Carla Ritchie (206) 862-3358

Chester County Bird Breeders Combined NCS/ACS Bird Show now including

American Singers and Type Canaries
September 25, 1993
Valley Forge Convention Plaza
(Mezzanine level), 1200 First Avenue,
King of Prussia, PA 19406
For details, contact:
Lorraine LaBoyne (215) 269-6003
Art Granger (215) 272-2072
Dick and Kathy Freas (215) 644-9337

Rose City Hookbill Society's 2nd Annual Bird Show September 26, 1993

Sheraton Inn in Norwich, CT
Judges:
Dr. Al Decoteau and others from
American Budgerig Society,
National Cockatiel Society,
and Society of Parrot Breeders
and Exhibitors.
For more information, contact:
Art Godfrey, president
(203) 889-9988

Avicultural Society of Tucson presents its

8th Annual Bird Fair
October 17, 1993
Tucson Convention Center
Exhibit Hall A
9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Free educational seminars, exhibits, raffle,
birds, supplies and a bird performance show.
For information, call:
Terri Morgan (evenings)
(602) 721-4768

Missouri Cage Bird Association's Annual Bird Show November 5 & 6, 1993

Day's Inn
15 Hilltop Village Center,
Eureka, MO 63025
Phone (314) 938-5565
Contact Dianne Groves, show secty.
12470 Sparrow Wood Dr.,
St. Louis, MO 63146
(314) 576-4136
or Bonnie Reynolds, MCBA secty.
3417 Minnesota Ave.,
St. Louis, MO 63118
(314) 772-5142

Pomona Bird Mart June 27, 1993 (see June 27 listing for info.)

Avian Research Association
Avian Handfeeding Lab
starting in January 1993
and repeated every other month
Chaminade University of Honolulu
3140 Wai'alae Ave., Honolulu, HI
For information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Avian Research Association
Basic Avian Pet Ownership and Care
starting in February 1993
and repeated every other month
Chaminade University of Honolulu
3140 Wai'alae Ave., Honolulu, HI
For information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Avian Research Association
Bird Mart & Swap Meet
June 13, 1993
Sept. 12, 1993 Dec. 12, 1993
Chaminade University of Honolulu
3140 Wai'alae Ave., Honolulu, HI
For information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Birds Exotic Spring '94 Bird Mart Extravaganza & Sale March 5 & 6, 1994

Hillsboro, Oregon
Vendor booths, seminars, trained bird show,
bird raffle, handfed babies, breeder & pet birds,
caging & supplies
For more info, contact:
Ron Marks, manager
19235 SW Pilkington Road
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
(503) 684-3799

Seventh National Avicultural Convention of Australia March 11, 12, 13, 14, 1994

Ringwood Performing Arts
& Convention Centre
Melbourne, Australia
For more info, contact:
John Hince, publicity officer
7th National Avicultural Convention,
Donnybrook, Pipers Creek Rd.,
Kyneton, Victoria 3444, Australia