



Tico, a young Blue-fronted Amazon at large in the wilds of Virginia.

Yellow-winged Blue-fronted Amazons

Amazona aestiva xanthopteryx

by Tom Marshall
Leesburg, Virginia

Conservation Act may actually serve to protect these birds from severe harvesting, but long-term survival is dependent on maintenance of mature forests for nesting and foraging and the curtailment of a "shotgun" approach to controlling alleged pest species, which is so prevalent in Latin America.

Many times parrots are classified as pest species as justification for extensive control programs or as a rationale for the exportation of birds for the pet trade. Blue-fronted Amazons are fond of citrus fruits and are seen as a threat to agriculture in their range, especially in Argentina. Citrus plantations located in valleys surrounded by mountains covered with subtropical humid forests are vulnerable. However, there is a tendency to exaggerate parrot damage by farmers. Given the fact that Blue-fronted Amazons are conspicuous, as they arrive in large flocks (outside the breeding season), are brightly colored and certainly very noisy, this is easy to understand.

Studies, however, have indicated that damage by these and other parrots occur in a very unpredictable fashion. Usually a few plots are severely damaged and others are left untouched. These attacks on citrus, when they do occur, usually are associated with agricultural frontiers jetting into previously forested areas and nesting habitats. Increased damage to citrus groves often happen, as well, when farmers, perhaps for the purpose of price speculation, have left crops unharvested long after ripening.

Although "politically" labeled a pest species, Blue-fronted Amazons don't really fit the profile. Amazons limit their diet to what can be found in trees. They do not forage on the ground. Their diets tend to be restricted to fruits and buds.

Blue-fronteds are reportedly highly

mobile, undergoing a northern migration, presumably following the fruiting of certain trees, but this takes place only after nesting. During nesting season, they stay close to their nest sites and away from other pairs. As in other cavity-nesting birds, the breeding cycle of parrots is relatively long and nestling growth rate is slow. They breed only once a year and they have a well-defined breeding season.

True pest species respond to favorable environmental conditions, such as an abundance of crops, by increasing the number of broods produced per year simply by extending their breeding season. The Blue-fronted Amazon is not capable of capitalizing on the abundance of food in this manner.

Blue-fronted Amazons may no longer fall victim to the trapper for the pet trade, but they may fall victim to unenlightened pest control programs unless alternatives can be found and/or unless farmers and politicians can be educated on the impact of such programs on birds with such low productivity rates.

Conservationists will have to do their part on educating the people of Argentina and in those other countries that constitute the Blue-fronted's range. However, aviculturists have a huge obligation to the Blue-fronted Amazon that can only be met by a concerted effort to breed them.

There are literally thousands and thousands of these birds in the United States, but how many people are working with them? They are very beautiful, good talkers, and should command a good return on your investment. Support breeders who are working with this species. Buy a domestically bred baby and learn, as I have, that Blue-fronteds have few equals as pet birds. ➤

For the past five years, I have owned a domestically bred Yellow-winged Blue-fronted Amazon, which I named "Tico" after a friend I met in Costa Rica. Costa Ricans refer to themselves as "ticos". This fact is illustrated in the name of the country's leading newspaper, *The Tico Times*.

Tico is a handsome five year old male with fluctuating hormone levels and those concomitant problems associated with sexual maturity. I thought I might sell him, but I can't bring myself to do it because of all my birds, he is the most interesting and in his unique manner the most loyal.

Regardless of Tico's moniker, Blue-fronted Amazons are not found in Costa Rica or anywhere in Central America. The nominate race, which is fairly scarce in captivity, occurs in Brazil, the inland eastern region as far south as southern Mato Grosso. Tico's parents and other *xanthopteryx* hail from southern Brazil (southern Mato Grosso), in Paraguay and northern Argentina.

Blue-fronteds don't seem to be endangered, although the Yellow-winged subspecies has been exported in devastating numbers. Between 1981-87 alone, there were 204,000 *xanthopteryx* exported to the U.S., Europe and Asia. Compounding this situation is the inexorable habitat destruction at the rate of 50,000 hectares per year. The Wild Bird

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