



The Yellow-faced Amazon, *Amazona xanthops*, is one of the smaller Amazons within the genus. This delightful bird is somewhat of a rarity in American aviculture.



Young Yellow-faced Amazon chicks are usually removed from the nest at the pin feather stage.

Yellow-faced Amazon

by John Stoodley
England

Of all the Amazons in my facility, the Yellow-faced Amazon, *Amazona xanthops*, is the species I consider to be one most ready to breed. They are not the most prolific of the Amazon genus, since few pairs produce more than one clutch per year. This is true even if they are encouraged by either the removal of the eggs as



The Yellow-faced Amazon as adults are difficult to bond as sometimes the females are bullied by their prospective mates during the introduction process.

they are laid or by the removal of the complete clutch.

Those with compatible breeding pairs of Yellow-faced Amazons are fortunate since this small parrot can prove difficult to pair. When problems do occur in the pairing of these Amazons, it is usually the male that is over zealous, especially at the approach of the breeding season. Such bullying can be curtailed by cutting one to two inches from the flight feathers of one wing on the male. This will unbalance the bully, giving the hen that little edge to keep out of the male's way without becoming exhausted. But this common pecking order is not usually the case with *xanthops*.

It is one of my great pleasures to have third generation *xanthops* breeding for me. My first birds came to me from Europe; not as pairs, but as males and females. All were unflighted as their wing feathers had been clipped. I had hoped that they would molt out and grow new flight feathers. But on examination they were found to have been mutilated in an attempt to pinion on capture. Sadly these birds will never again enjoy flying.

During the period of time when our first arrivals were held in quarantine, attempts were made to pair them. Each bird was readily identified with the aid of food dye. Close observations were kept on the cage units; if bird A appeared to be interested in bird C, this pair was then placed side by side away from the other two. After quarantine the pairs were given large flight cages, but still the females were upset with the males. They just would not accept the males and with only two pairs of birds to work with, there were not too many other choices to follow. These behavior problems were eventually resolved. The females were each placed in a sizable outdoor aviary occupied by a rowdy group of juvenile macaws and Amazons. This proved to be a great leveler. The youngsters had no fear of a small female Yellow-faced Amazon and pushed her to the side by simply

nudging her out of their way.

This time when the males kept in small cages were brought into the aviaries, there was no sign of aggression. Each female showed interest and spent time sitting on the top of the male's cage. Later when the males were released into the female's large aviary, the females accepted them. The two pairs were then placed in the breeding units indoors before the cold winter would set in.

The addition of other Yellow-faced Amazon stock acquired gave me three separate blood lines. This is of great importance in keeping the gene pool as wide as possible. Not only do my own breeding stock produce healthy youngsters, but the pairs I pass on will be unrelated and in turn should produce good stock.

Nesting takes place during the later winter months, any time between January and March. In the bird's natural habitat, the Yellow-faced Amazon nests in terrestrial termite mounds. In captivity the usual wooden nest box is readily accepted.

If the nest box is lined with rotting

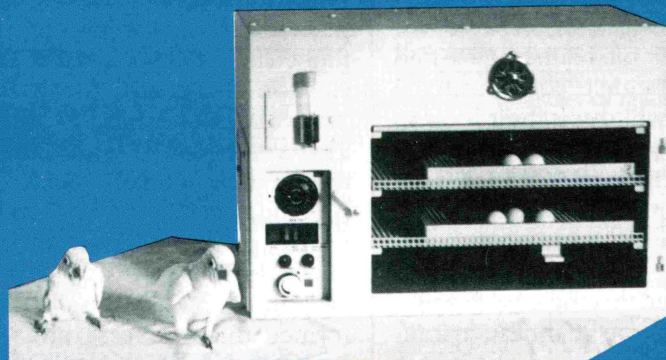
wood it will be much appreciated. The hen will soon reduce it to a soft bedding material. We sometimes forget just what good wood spoils small parrots can be. Likewise, the entrance of the nest box needs to be protected with an edging of metal, otherwise it can be chewed until the box has been whittled away. The birds may then abandon the nest because it lets in too much light. A few strips of wood can be attached to reduce the size of the opening. This will then give the birds something to work on, rather than the nest box itself.

The clutch contains up to three and sometimes four eggs. These are laid between one and three (or more) day intervals. The incubation period is 23-24 days. The emerging chicks are extremely active and carry a bright yellow down. Even though the hens are difficult to pair and both sexes can put on a good show of aggression towards visitors (making threatening runs towards them, holding their wings down but well off the body), the Yellow-faced Amazons do make good parents. They also make good surrogate parents, taking the chicks of any

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other Amazon species entrusted to them.

With a little care they are not a difficult parrot to feed in captivity. My own birds are maintained on a diet of 50% fruits and vegetables, including carrots, beets, celery and crisp greens. The balance is met with a mixture of germinated wheat and mixed pulses.

The *xanthops* has many endearing ways. For instance, a twig will keep this bird entertained for ages, while a rotting log of wood will occupy the birds until the wood is reduced to a heap of pellets. One would expect to find all of these little traits in the offspring's make-up, learned directly from the parent bird by association. There is, however, one skill particular to the *xanthops*, and that is the habit of dunking food in the water bowl. Food and water bowls soon become encrusted with food particles, while the water itself is turned into soup. Fresh water must be given several times throughout the day.

Because of the difficulties experienced in pairing the original stock and their offspring, it has been necessary each year to remove the chicks from the nest box at the pinfeather stage. All are rung (with leg bands) and kept as one group). This practice makes it possible to pair up unrelated birds as soon as they are self-feeding.

Any youngsters taken from the group to be sexed and held apart under observation for a day or two, will encounter fierce aggression on being returned. Occasionally it has proved most difficult to re-introduce a chick into the group. Having taken the youngsters from the parent birds at such an early age (just as they are coming into their pin feathers), we find that once they begin feeding from the dish, they too will dunk their food in water.

Since these chicks removed directly from their parents' nest have no contact with any adult bird during the handfeeding process and after being weaned, it must be surmised that the trait of dunking food can only be an inherited trait. When a parent teaches a behavior (which these chicks did not have access to), it is learned behavior.

I have spoken to trackers in the jungles where these Amazons occur about the aggressive behavior patterns in *xanthops*, and learned that they found this behavior in wild Yellow-faced Amazons to be quite common. This was true even with very young chicks taken from the wild. ➤

Breeding Orange-cheeked Waxbills

by Levin H. Tilghman
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The Orange-cheeked Waxbill, until very recently, has been one of the most commonly imported waxbills. Because of this, relatively few aviculturists have taken up breeding these birds because replacements had been readily and cheaply available.

Unfortunately, the Orange-cheeked Waxbill has developed the reputation for being a poor breeder over the years. Yet if properly managed, they are free and prolific breeders. Crucial for success is privacy for the breeding pair. This means that each breeding pair must have either a small aviary or flight cage entirely to themselves. Without a shadow of a doubt, overcrowding has been one of the most important factors in the limited breeding success of this waxbill.

I initially acquired four domestically raised Orange-cheekeds. They were placed with eight wild caught birds in a flight 6 ft. long by 2 ft. wide, along with Cordon Bleus and Black-cheekeds. They all got along perfectly together. This was in May. By early autumn all of the Orange cheekeds had come into breeding condition and their behavior changed very suddenly and abruptly. The males began displaying and fighting over the hens. Eventually three pairs formed and the excess birds, including the much larger Black-cheekeds, were repeatedly and savagely attacked. The Orange-cheekeds now began nest building in earnest. Soon two pairs had eggs but the bickering continued. One pair was actually evicted from their nest by another half way through incubation. The new pair proceeded to build another nest on top of the one that they had taken over. They soon had eggs but were driven away by the original pair who re-

claimed their old nest site. In this extremely stressful environment, none of the nestings survived and I eventually removed all of the pairs into individual breeding cages.

In the breeding cages two of the pairs immediately went into a molt, but the third pair consisting of a domestically raised hen and a wild caught male produced a clutch of five eggs in a large finch wicker basket nest. No effort was made to incubate them. When a second clutch appeared a few weeks later, eggs were removed and placed under Societies (Bengalese). Two of them hatched in about 13 days but survived only a day. They do not appear to have been fed, although they appeared very similar to young Societies, being light skinned with white gapes. The adult Orange-cheekeds again had eggs within a few weeks. These were incubated almost to the point of hatching before being abandoned. All had been fertile. Soon there was a new clutch but the usual pattern followed. These were incubated about a week. In February the pair went into a very heavy molt and all breeding activity ceased.

In May the male began singing and displaying. The old nest was relined and rebuilt with whatever the birds could find; I did not think that they were really that serious and had not supplied much in the way of nesting material. But while just making a routine check, I was shocked to find three eggs in the nest. I did not have much hope for this clutch and assumed that it would soon share the fate of the previous ones. To make matters worse, the hen proved an extremely light sitter, flying wildly off the nest whenever I entered the room. She