

BREEDING RESULTS IN ZSL LONDON ZOO'S BLACKBURN PAVILION - 2012

by Luke Forster

The birds in the Blackburn Pavilion had a productive year. Several species which had not bred at the zoo for a number of years bred successfully, among these were the Amethyst Starlings *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*, although some other species such as the Toco Toucans *Ramphastos toco*, which had previously bred regularly, had a disappointing breeding season.

Our first chick of the year was a Victoria Crowned Pigeon *Goura victoria*, the parents of which are housed in one of the pavilion's outside aviaries. Sadly, this chick was found dead on the floor one morning, having fallen from the nest at about two weeks of age. Changes were made to prevent such an accident re-occurring. The sides of the nest platform were raised with logs in an attempt to keep the nest looking as natural as possible, whilst providing a deeper nest to prevent the egg or chick falling out when the parents fly off. The nest platform is in the back den area of the enclosure and we are able to leave the lights on when the birds are nesting to reduce the chance of the birds being frightened during the hours of darkness. These measures seemed to pay off, as later in the year the pair fledged a healthy chick, which at the time of writing (November 2012) has yet to be sexed and separated from its parents.

The Amethyst Starlings produced a single youngster in the main walk-through enclosure within the Blackburn Pavilion. This species is housed as a group of 2.2, which we thought would prevent the birds from breeding successfully. In early June, however, one pair became very dominant with the male chasing the other starlings around the flight. The first signs of nesting behaviour occurred, soon afterwards, when the dominant pair was observed carrying around pieces of green leaf which had been removed from plants in the flight. After approximately two weeks, we checked the nest boxes and discovered that the pair had chosen one made from a hollow log, which had been provided with the Amethyst Starlings in mind. A close examination revealed two pale blue-green eggs, with brown speckles (noted as being usual for starlings). The male became aggressive when defending the nest and attacked both myself and another keeper throughout the breeding process. Interestingly, he only attacked the two keepers who inspected the nest - other keepers were ignored. Once the eggs were discovered, the nest was left alone and disturbance kept to a minimum. Later, the parents were seen carrying food to the nest, so all was assumed to be well. This proved to be the case, for after 33 days a fully-feathered young starling was seen

flying around the flight. It was so well developed that we checked to make sure that the two adult females were present, just in case we had made a mistake. An inspection of the hollow log revealed the nest was lined entirely with leaf matter and contained an infertile egg,

Our pair of Red-and-yellow Barbets *Trachyphonus erythrocephalus* surprised us by producing two chicks. The female is heavily imprinted and through the mesh of the enclosure attacks not only staff but also visitors. The pair had historically been provided with various designs of nest box, all of which had been excavated and the pair had become very protective, however, no eggs were ever laid. In 2012 the pair was observed attempting to bore into wooden fixtures within the exhibit. Having observed this, the team provided the pair with a willow log, which enabled the pair to excavate its own nest chamber (as this species normally nests in a termite mound or riverbank, we had not previously provided the pair with a log). Having excavated a nest chamber, the pair spent a lot of time inside it. Due to the shape of the nest chamber, however, it was impossible to see what, if anything, was happening inside. Following the initial success, we encountered an unfortunate setback, when the female was found on the floor of the enclosure fluffed-up and unable to fly - and appeared egg bound. She was taken to the zoo's animal hospital where she was given calcium injections, which improved her condition and she proceeded to lay an egg which had no shell. This disappointing turn of events happened twice, but thanks to the care of the zoo's veterinary team, the bird eventually returned to full health.

After a month and a change of exhibit, the female laid a normal egg on the floor of the aviary. This was placed in an incubator and although it was fertile, the chick died halfway through the incubation period. Several weeks later, during which time the birds had, as usual, been in and out of the nest log, the sound of chicks was heard by keepers during their morning rounds. The birds' daily rations, including the amount of livefood, were increased and after a further two weeks a chick was seen at the entrance to the nest chamber. Three days later two well-developed chicks fledged,

Our pair of Toco Toucans *Ramphastos toco*, which had historically proved to be a very successful breeding pair, laid three eggs. Following the usual incubation period the nest box was checked and found to contain two healthy chicks, but there was no sign of a third chick or an unhatched egg. The box was checked two or three more times as the two chicks continued to grow and develop. The parents were seen taking food into the box and, when standing outside the front of the enclosure, we could hear the chicks begging to be fed. To minimise disturbance no further nest inspections were made. Concerns began to be expressed when we could no longer hear the chicks in the nest and further increased when they had failed to emerge

three days after they were due to fledge. The nest box was found to be empty. One of the chicks was found dead in the undergrowth of the flight, but there was no trace of the second chick. The reasons for this failure have yet to be determined and to further add to our disappointment, the female was found dead approximately one month later due to iron storage disease (haemochromatosis).

Several other species which had bred regularly in the past, such as the Common Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*, Black Hornbill *Anthracoceros malayanus*, Black-naped Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus melanospila*, Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*, Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi* and Sunbittern *Eurypyga helias* failed to fledge youngsters.

Birds bred in the Blackburn Pavilion in 2012

- 7 Crested Wood Partridges *Rollulus rouloul*
- 4 Emerald Doves *Chalcophaps indica*
- 1 Superb Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*
- 1 Victoria Crowned Pigeon *Goura victoria*
- 3 Ultramarine Grosbeaks *Passerina brissonii*
- 1 Amethyst Starling *Cinnyricinctus leucogaster*
- 5 Red-whiskered Bulbuls *Pycnonotus jocosus*
- 4 Orange-headed Thrushes *Zoothera citrinia*
- 1 Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida mulleri*
- 2 Red-and-yellow Barbets *Trachyphonus erythrocephalus*
- 1 Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Nectarinia senegalensis*
- 1 Splendid Sunbird *Cinnyris coccinigastrus*
- 3 Black-cheeked Lovebirds *Agapornis nigrigenis*

Last year was the most productive in the Blackburn Pavilion since the building was redeveloped from the old tropical bird house in 2008. Several changes were implemented which may have helped to achieve these successes. These included dietary adaptations aimed at introducing a noticeable seasonability into the feeding of the birds while planning discussions before the breeding season resulted in us moving some of the birds and allowed the team to focus on the breeding of certain species.

The late John Ellis is greatly missed by the bird team here at London Zoo and throughout the entire zoo and avicultural community. John was one of the main designers of the Blackburn Pavilion and would, I hope, be proud of the successes we have achieved.

*Luke Forster, Qualified Keeper, ZSL London Zoo, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY. Luke is EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) monitor for the Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus* and Blue-bellied Roller *C. cyanogaster*. E-mail: Luke.Forster@zsl.org*

A RECORD OF THE BREEDING OF THE STRAW-TAILED OR FISCHER'S WHYDAH *Vidua fischeri* IN SOUTH AFRICA

by F. C. Barnicoat

Bill Steele maintains a fine aviary set up at his home at Loch Vaal here in South Africa. About five years ago he acquired two pairs of Straw-tailed or Fischer's Whydahs *Vidua fischeri*. One pair was a spectacular inhabitant of his large planted aviary some 11m x 9m x 3m high (approx. 36ft x 30ft x 9ft high), in which the birds enjoy near natural conditions. Flocks of some of the African waxbills, Australian seed-eating species, Black-headed Greenfinches *Carduelis ambigua*, Goldfinches *C. carduelis*, Papyrus Canaries *Serinus koliensis* and others have, through the years, bred well in this aviary.

It was never possible to get hold of the whydah's host species, the Purple Grenadier *Granatina/Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*, but for two to three years a pair of Violet-eared Waxbills *G./U. granatina*, the nearest equivalent host species, was kept in the aviary. The latter eventually died without issue, but typical of the whydahs, the Fischer's proved long-lived and after four years a regularly breeding flock of Blue-capped Waxbills *G./U. cyanocephalus* eventually provided the means for the successful rearing of two Fischer's Whydahs. As far as I know, a breeding success with this species under controlled conditions has not previously been recorded.

In an aviary as large and as densely planted as this one, it is not possible to closely monitor the diverse nesting activities of all the birds. The procedure generally followed is to catch up all the birds once a year, using a trap in the hut inside the aviary in which the birds are fed and, in this way, have a thorough stocktaking each winter when the aviary is cleared out and new branches and brushwood are installed for the coming spring. As the height of the summer of 2010 drew to a close, however, the aviary attendant drew Bill's attention to an unusually openly constructed Blue-capped Waxbill nest and the fact that one of the two nearly fully-feathered young looked different and lacked, for example, any blue feathering. When the two young fledged it was apparent that the one which differed in appearance must be an immature Fischer's Whydah. As whydahs do not skulk away in a planted aviary it was, over the subsequent weeks, easy to watch this youngster assume the plumage of an adult male Fischer's Whydah. The raising of a second young whydah in this aviary the following year went undetected until the stocktake took place in the winter of 2011, when the birds were caught up and there was found to be, not one, but two female whydahs.

No special feeding was required in order to produce this exciting breeding



Forster, Luke. 2013. "Breeding Results In Zsl London Zoo's Blackburn Pavilion - 2012." *The Avicultural magazine* 119(1), 10–13.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/268881>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/314804>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

Rights Holder: Avicultural Society

License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.