

BREEDING THE RED-TAILED AMAZON AT THE TROPICAL BIRD GARDENS

By Mike Curzon (Rode, Somerset).

The Red-tailed Amazon *Amazona brasiliensis* is listed in Appendix 1 of CITES. The species is found in south-eastern Brazil and in his second (revised) edition of *Parrots of the World* (Lansdowne Editions, Melbourne, 1978), Forshaw makes no reference to having seen the species in the wild. The illustration by Cooper in the same work was painted in 1972. It shows a bird with a darker back and with more yellow in the tail than the birds at Rode. Could it be that coloration deepens with age? Certainly the colour of our birds has intensified over the past 3½ years. So far as I am aware, the only colour illustration of the Red-tailed Amazon to have appeared in the *Avicultural Magazine* was in January/February 1960 when a colour photograph was reproduced. The bird in question was owned by P. H. Maxwell.

In those days the quality of colour photography and reproduction of prints and transparencies was not very good compared to the standards being achieved today. Any members who are fortunate enough to have Rosemary Low's *Amazon Parrots* will see the species depicted in a plate by Elizabeth Butterworth which is much more in line with the birds we have in the collection here.

HM Customs and Excise offered us four birds, which had previously been confiscated, in September 1991. You can imagine our surprise and delight at being given an opportunity to work with this relatively unknown Amazon. The birds' ages were unknown and all were extremely timid. Therefore, they were allowed time to settle down.

The sexes are similar in appearance and the four birds paired up as we had believed they would. However, to ensure that all was well they were surgically sexed and microchipped in the autumn of 1993. One pair was believed to be mature, but in the case of the second pair ('B') the cock was an immature.

The birds were housed in identical aviaries, in the same range, in an off-display area, each being 15 ft. x 5 ft. x 7.5 ft. high. There is a half open-fronted shelter at the rear and the birds receive early morning sun. As previously stated, they were extremely nervous when first received from the quarantine station and took longer to settle down than any other species of Amazon we have had at Rode.

Their diet consists of a mixture of sunflower, safflower, buckwheat, mixed soaked pulses (soaked for 24 hours), peanuts, fruits in season and root vegetables (mainly beetroot and carrots) although only one pair will consume these latter items.

The following notes relate only to pair 'B'.

Our standard Amazon nestbox measures 20 in x 10 in x 10 in. The first box was put into position at the back of the aviary, alongside the shelter but with the entrance hole facing the other way to give maximum privacy. During 1993 the pair did nothing other than play around with the box and roosted outside at night.

Neighbouring birds were a pair of Hahn's Macaws *Diopsittaca nobilis*, in an aviary to the left while that on the right was empty. Early in 1994 a second nestbox was placed inside the shelter, immediately behind the door. Both boxes were used but it was the second of them that was eventually selected by the pair. We had placed pieces of rotten wood in the base and these were chewed by the female.

Two eggs were seen on 20th May and the birds were left undisturbed. On 17th June our Head Keeper, John Meeke looked into the box and saw two chicks and one egg; one of the chicks was recently hatched. The adults were not very vocal - which is unusual compared to our other breeding pairs of Amazons. The parents had a craving for dandelions, loving the flowers, plus fruit and vegetables.

We knew from the food intake that the chick was alive. The question in our minds was whether it was alone. As time went by we became even more convinced that it was single chick and as long as food was taken to the box we were not going to interfere. Perhaps if we are fortunate enough to breed the species in the future, more inspections will take place, but this is something which will have to be evaluated.

The great day arrived on 22nd August when a chick was seen looking out of the nestbox. It fledged six days later on 28th August. It was seen feeding itself on 10th September. The fate of the second chick and the remaining egg is unknown.

The young bird was sexed that autumn and proved to be a male. It has less red on the head and a face that is best described as a diluted version of its parents. It is a very attractive bird.

At the time of writing (April 1995) it has gained more colour. It may well be that as it continues to colour in the years ahead, we will be able to work out how old its parents were when they arrived here. The young bird spent the 1994/5 winter alone in a smaller aviary but

within hearing distance of its parents.

Pair 'A' have done nothing other than play around in their nestbox.

For those interested, this is believed to be a first UK and European breeding, and possibly a world 'first'. The Stud Book for the Red-tailed Amazon is kept by Dr. H. Lucher, Director of Zoo Dresden. In addition to the birds at Rode, others of the species are held at Loro Parque, Palmitos Parque, Zoo Dresden and the World Parrot Trust at Hayle (Cornwall).

There may, of course, be other birds in other hands and anyone who is aware of such birds is asked to get in touch with the Stud Book Co-ordinator.

The following is an extract from an HM Customs and Excise press release dated 11th August 1994 -

One pair of Red-tailed Amazon parrots, seized together with nine similar birds by Customs in East Anglia during 1991, and subsequently housed at The Tropical Bird Gardens, Rode, near Bath, have recently successfully produced a chick which will shortly leave its nest. This is very good news for Red-tailed Amazons as they are considered threatened with extinction and prohibited from being exported from their native Brazilian habitat. Trade in the birds is more generally prohibited by their being listed in Appendix 1 (the highest category of protection) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, to which the UK and many other states are signatories.

Customs are delighted that the birds have prospered at Rode and look forward to hearing of further chicks being produced to add to, rather than diminish, the world's population of parrots.

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SUCCESSFUL BREEDING IN A SMALL COLONY OF GREATER FLAMINGOS

By Clément Lanthier
(Veterinarian/Curator, Granby, Québec)

Summary

Flamingos have been displayed for decades in captivity. Considering the number of specimens and groups, there has been little success in reproduction. Efforts to adapt the environment and management of relatively small flocks of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* have been successful in breeding this species. Simulating large flocks with the use of walled mirrors, adequate substrate, sufficient lighting, privacy and proper nutrition are believed to be major factors in reproducing small flamingo groups in captivity.

Considering the number of flamingo *Phoenicopterus sp.* groups listed in the International Species Information System (ISIS) Bird Abstract, it is surprising that captive reproduction is still erratic. Independent of species, 5,214 flamingos, distributed in 147 groups, were listed in the December 1992 Abstract. Forty-three of these groups reproduced in 1992, for a total of 136 hatchings. This poor breeding performance indicates the need to improve the captive management of flamingos. This short paper describes our practical experience in maintaining and breeding a relatively small group of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* at the Granby Zoological Garden.

Captive Environment

Canada is obviously not the ideal place for flamingos. Seasonal temperature variations are so large that Canadian institutions who decide to keep flamingos outdoor in summer need an alternative enclosure for winter months. Preferably, summer and winter quarters should be designed to give birds the opportunity to walk in and out when seasons change. However in Granby, we have to catch the birds twice a year to relocate them. This is certainly stressful but no injury has occurred so far. Winter housing temperatures in Granby are held near 21° Celcius.

The winter and breeding housing is relatively small: the flock has access to 36.2 m² of which 36% is water (figure 1). The pond is divided in two levels. A shallow area (10cm deep, 30 cm wide)

outlines the deeper portion of the pond (37.5 cm). The junction is progressive so birds can walk easily in and out. The pond is made of concrete and is surrounded by a 7.5 cm high wooden edge to keep nesting substrate out of the water.

The thickness of the nesting substrate varies from 7.5 cm to almost 1 m. where nests are erected. Flamingos are quite unique nest builders. They build monticules of soft, damp material. We provide a peatmoss and straw mix and keep it constantly and appropriately damp. Other institutions have used mud or sea sand mixed with a little clay or earth to bind (Kear, 1974) which is also successful. Nesting substrate is offered indoors and outdoors but so far flamingos have only been interested in breeding indoors.

The humidity level of the substrate is re-evaluated twice a day by keepers. Showers (simulated rain) are not sufficient to keep the substrate damp. Perforated hoses are run under the substrate's surface so keepers can control the humidity. In the winter housing, the ceiling sprinkler is turned on twice a day for approximately one minute. Because rain sprinklers have no significant effect on the frequency of group display behaviour (Stevens, 1991), keepers have discontinued this practice when birds begin to build their nests. However, we have found that temperate showers are useful in keeping the substrate damp and plumage clean. In the summer, natural sunlight is more than sufficient. Flamingos prefer to stand in a sunny area of their enclosure and rarely stand in the shade. Appropriate winter housing lighting is important. Both quality and quantity must be planned carefully. Wide-spectrum fluorescent lighting (Spectralite) is used for the flamingo group in Granby. Natural daylight in our region is less than 10 hours per day in January. We artificially alter the photoperiod in order to stimulate the birds to reproduce (courtship, nest building, egg-laying, incubation ...) before relocating them to their summer enclosure for public viewing; we initiate an "early" spring. In January, indoor lights are on 11 hours a day and then, 15 minutes are added weekly until 14 hours of light per day is provided (mid-March). High pressure sodium lighting (Lumalux 150 watts) also varies under the same protocol. This very bright light simulates sunrays and occasionally the birds are seen facing the lights sunning themselves with their wings opened. These lights, which are approximately 3 m. from the floor produce this particular light that appears to be sporadically attractive to the flamingos.

Flock Constitution

Fifteen birds constitute our flock: eight males and seven females



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