

BREEDING THE YELLOW-SHOULDERED AMAZON***Amazona barbadensis***

by Derian A. Silva Moraton

In recent years, pet parrots have been the subject of much discussion. I have heard it said that they are kept merely for the entertainment of their owners; that they provide no value to the continuation of their species; that they become so imprinted that they can never be used for breeding; and even that the keeping of parrots as pets should be banned. I could write an entire article on all of the claims I have heard. In fact, pet parrots help foster an interest in nature, the sciences and conservation; and they can be as cherished as any family member and grieved over when they die. They can also be a source of revenue for people living in poor, remote areas. I have several friends who keep just a single pet parrot, who have travelled to remote areas to see parrots in the wild, thus fuelling ecotourism and in turn conservation where it really counts - in the country or countries in which the birds occur.

Pet parrots, with some exceptions, can often be used for captive breeding. My experience breeding the Yellow-shouldered Amazon, beginning with a pair of former pet birds, is a good example of this.

The Yellow-shouldered Amazon has a disjunct distribution across northern Venezuela, being found in Falcón, Sucre and Anzoátegui, as well as on the islands of Bonaire, Margarita and Blanquilla. It inhabits dry scrub. Its numbers fluctuate a great deal, diminishing in very inhospitable years (during severe droughts) and flourishing during wet years (when there is good rainfall). There is also pressure on it as the result of birds being taken for the local pet trade. Throughout its range this species is regarded as a good talker and birds are consequently traded (albeit illegally) as pets. Most of the original birds that reached the USA and Europe (mainly through the Canary Islands) were brought back as pets.

As an aviary bird, the Yellow-shouldered Amazon was ignored until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Ramon Noegel began acquiring single pet birds for breeding. He succeeded in gathering together a small group and, in 1982, bred the species for the first time in captivity. For this achievement he received a first breeding award from the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA). (A little later the same year Rosemary Low bred this species for the first time in the UK.) Since then the Yellow-shouldered Amazon has been bred with greater frequency. Indeed, in 2009 in South Florida no fewer than 63 were produced by a handful of breeders; more were produced by aviculturists in other parts of the USA.

In 1984, I acquired my first Yellow-shouldered Amazons. The two had been pet birds. The male, named Herbie, was quite a character, who was always chattering, dancing and on the move. He was typical of many representatives of his kind - garrulous and hyperactive. The female, Lolita, was the opposite - a morose, barely active and quiet bird. They represented the two personality types that occur. My experience (which many others share) is that the calmer males are the ones that are most likely to be good breeders. The hyperactive birds become so aggressive sometimes that the females eschew them, preventing successful mating.

My two birds, though of contrasting personalities, got along very well. Within months of being placed together the female nested. Only two eggs hatched and both chicks were reared. The male was believed to have been about 23 years old at the time of breeding. The female was acquired as a nestling by its owner in Caracas and subsequently immigrated with her to the USA. The male I acquired on loan and the female was purchased when her owner could not return with it to Venezuela, where she was retiring. One of the youngsters went to the owner of the breeding male, as part of the loan agreement. He was given the name Herbie Jr or simply called Junior.

In late January 2009 I received a call from the daughter of Junior's owner. As her elderly mother was going into a nursing home and was not allowed to keep her bird, she wondered if I would be willing to adopt it. I readily agreed and Junior duly arrived. In many respects he brought back memories of his father. He spends all day chattering and on the move. However, in contrast to his father he is never aggressive. His father was a demon when breeding and more than once bit me as I was changing the food bowls.

Junior passed through quarantine and was kept in the house, but clearly enjoyed being outdoors and spent the summer in a wire gazebo. As he preferred to be outdoors, I introduced him into a cage housing several other Yellow-shouldered Amazons. Within two weeks he had paired with a young female not quite two years of age. She was not unlike his mother - morose and very calm, though for short periods twice a day, she becomes excited and calls. The two birds lived amicably with the others, though they perched separately from them. As there was no outward sign of fighting, I did not separate them.

In April, when I was on my way to Europe on business, the pair began to fight with the other birds. As a temporary measure, my wife placed them in a cage just 3ft long x 2ft wide x 3ft high (approx. 0.9m long x 0.6m wide x 0.9m high). It contained a horizontal box 1ft 2in long x 10in wide x 10in high (35.5cm long x 25.5cm wide x 25.5cm high). The cage was intended to house the pair only until I returned and could build them a flight.

My wife reported that the pair found the cage very much to its liking.

Junior was active and talkative and could chat away to the macaws and cockatoos on either side. I was away longer than I expected and it was almost three weeks before I could begin to build the pair a flight. By then, to my surprise, the female had a swollen vent and, two days short of her second birthday, laid her first egg. She went on to lay a clutch of four eggs, all of which, not unexpectedly, proved to be infertile.

I, therefore, took the opportunity to transfer the pair to the new accommodation I had built. This though was clearly not to their liking. Both sat on the floor and barely ate anything. The male barely moved or talked. After three days, I returned them to the cage and they called excitedly and behaved as if they had been given a new lease on life. Both immediately began eating and bathed in the water bowl. The following day the female was back inside the box. Within three weeks she had laid a second clutch of eggs. Because the birds had been together only a short time and the female was so young, I did not expect the eggs to be fertile. To my surprise, I was proved wrong.

The five eggs were fertile. One of them (probably the first) was cracked accidentally and the second egg failed to develop beyond the second week. The other three hatched successfully. The pair's behaviour was exemplary. The male fed the female for the first week and she in turn fed the young. After the first week, the female would leave the nest and the male would then enter the nest and feed the young. When they were three weeks old, they were removed and hand-reared. All three were weaned successfully and proved to be two females and a male.

They were placed with other Yellow-shouldered Amazons and, in the future, will be used for breeding. When the large number of young bred in 2009 mature, they will boost the potential breeding population of this species. I can clearly see this attractively coloured parrot becoming very well established in captivity.

Parrot behaviour is clearly inherited. Junior's father would chew his tail and flight feathers when the female was incubating the eggs; he clearly missed her and out of boredom damaged his feathers. They grew back again after the young were removed. Junior did the same. When the female no longer had a reason to return to the nest (because the young had been removed), Junior called and became excited - he finally had his playmate back. The two birds were clearly very fond of each other.

My experience demonstrates that former pet birds can and will breed. The natural instinct to reproduce is ingrained in the genes and given the opportunity and suitable conditions, many former pet parrots will breed successfully.

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BREEDING THE TAIWAN YUHINA *Yuhina brunneiceps*

by Gary Bralsford

Back in 1986, I purchased a pair of Taiwan (Formosan) Yuhinas *Yuhina brunneiceps* from a dealer in Derbyshire, here in the UK. He used to have some very nice small softbills, such as Daurian Redstarts *Phoenicurus auroreus*, Blue-and-white Flycatchers *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* and yuhinas.

There was a large bank of cages, one of which contained the pair of yuhinas that were feeding one another. These proved to be a really steady pair of Taiwan Yuhinas, a species endemic to the island of Taiwan, where this most attractively marked yuhina inhabits montane forests.

There were not many Taiwan Yuhinas around at the time. Dave Campbell had imported a few, but there had been no large consignments. The first UK breeding of this species had been achieved by Bob Beeson in 1984 (his account of the breeding was published the following year in *Cage & Aviary Birds*).

I placed my yuhinas on their own in a 10ft x 4ft x 6ft high (approx. 3m x 1.2m x 1.8m high) aviary, with a 5ft x 4ft (approx. 1.5m x 1.2m) shelter inside my shed. I placed half-open-fronted nest boxes and wicker nest-pans inside the shelter and in the outside flight. To provide privacy, all of the nest sites were screened with conifer cuttings. As the floor of the flight was paved with 3ft x 2ft (approx. 90cm x 60cm) paving slabs, I placed tubs of plants around the outside of the aviary. I used Russian Vines *Polygonum baldschuanicum*, honeysuckle *Lonicera* sp. and dwarf conifers. The vines and honeysuckle were secured to bamboo canes and to the dividing wire of the flight with wool.

One day I noticed the larger of the two yuhinas trying to tease out fibres from the wool tying the climbers to the wire and later watched it carrying these fibres to some conifer cuttings I had tied to the aviary wire. After watching this behaviour for about an hour, I could not resist taking a look. I pulled back the conifer cuttings and saw that they had begun to weave a nest platform that they had attached to the conifer stems in the wire. I left them alone for a couple of days and when I looked the second time, the nest was beginning to take shape, with coconut fibre being used and animal hair being used for the lining. However, I was concerned that the nest was top-heavy and looked as so it was about to collapse under its own weight. I quickly cut a piece of chicken wire, which I shaped into a cup. I then wired this to the frame of the flight beneath the nest to support it.

I just hoped that the pair would return to the nest and that I had not



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