

## THE GREAT BLUE AND OTHER TURACOS

by Louise Peat

In 2000, our first major disappointment happened on April 17th, when our male Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata* was found dead on the nest. The pair was nine days into incubating a clutch of three eggs. The chilled eggs were rushed to our incubation room and the dead male was sent to Jason Waine for post mortem, which revealed it had suffered a heart attack from old age (the bird was wild-caught so we had no idea of its true age).

Two of the eggs proved to be clear, but the third went on to hatch, but unfortunately despite all our efforts the chick died four days later. We will never know if this was due to the egg having become chilled for an undetermined length of time. Our limited success with the Great Blue Turacos was very frustrating, we had several clutches of eggs from the pair, several chicks hatched and at one point we had three chicks in the nest. Our longest surviving chick lived 50 days. It was parent reared, and we began to have doubts as to whether the adults were up to the job of rearing their own chicks. We knew that Steve Bishop, who is in charge of Michel Klat's collection at the Old House Bird Garden, Hare Hatch, had also had little success with this species rearing their own young, but had tremendous success hand-rearing them. We decided to follow suit and remove one or two chicks from each clutch for hand-rearing, but at that point our male died. We later exchanged our female for a pair that had been captive-bred at the Old House Bird Garden.

For some reason our usually successful pair of Western Grey Plantain-eaters *Crinifer piscator* was having a bad breeding season, with all six eggs from the first two clutches covered with hairline cracks. It was decided to remove one of the eggs from the next clutch for artificial incubation and hand-rearing. Keeper Nathan Crockford, who had hand-reared a Western Grey Plantain-eater before, realised that the critical part of hand-rearing would be the diet during the first few days. Believing that there are similarities between the plantain-eater and the Great Blue Turaco, Nathan phoned Steve Bishop, who kindly provided him with details of the diet with which he has been so successful. Nathan has used this diet for both the Great Blue Turaco and Western Grey Plantain-eater.

### **The three stages to the diet:**

#### **Stage 1 (first nine days)**

Every three hours for the first 24 hours chicks are given warm distilled water with a pinch of Avipro chick starter. On day two chicks start being fed, by syringe, the hand-rearing mixture made from 75% distilled water,



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### **Adult Great Blue Turaco**

20% banana, with the remaining 5% consisting of racing pigeon pellets, budgie protein, nectar mix, shredded wheat and multi-vitamins, ground together into a fine powder. As the days progress, this changes to 50% distilled water, 40% banana and 10% powder, as the consistency of the mixture is made thicker. In addition to the main diet, wheat grass juice is fed by syringe to the chicks from day one through to independence.

### **Stage 2 (days nine to 11)**

There is an overlap with Stage 1, with from about days six to seven small pieces of paw paw (papaya) and banana and whole soaked pigeon pellets occasionally being fed to chicks. The amounts of these are increased gradually until by days nine to 11 they form the bulk of their diet; with them still occasionally being offered the initial hand-rearing mixture. The wheat grass juice is especially important at this stage, for even though the pigeon pellets have been soaked, they can still soak up more moisture in the gut and the juice will help compensate for this.

### **Stage 3 (day 11 onwards)**

By this stage chicks should be receiving 50% fruit and 50% pigeon pellets. They continue to receive wheat grass juice at each feed and different fruits are introduced gradually and the pigeon pellets are slowly phased-out until just a few are sprinkled on the top of each feed.





Louise Peat

### Nestling Great Blue Turaco

By day 23 our plantain-eater chick was pretty much feeding itself. There had been a slight hiccup when on day 12 the chick refused to eat and over a 24 hour period lost 20g - one-third of its body weight. Nathan put the chick on a course of Baytril and within four days it had regained the lost weight and went on to grow into a healthy bird. Ironically, the adult pair succeeded in hatching and rearing a chick from the same clutch from which we had removed the egg, from which the chick was being hand-reared.

Over the previous four years the pair had successfully reared 10 chicks, all of which had been snapped-up by other collections. We were beginning to become concerned about flooding the UK with birds from the same bloodlines, as at that time nobody else seemed to be successfully breeding this species. However, in 1999, Birdworld, near Farnham, Surrey, began to breed from its pair. So, in 2000, we exchanged birds with it in order to establish a second pair. Shortly afterwards, International Touraco Society committee member Les Disley donated a pair to the park, meaning that we had three pairs and a considerably enlarged gene pool.

Later that year we exchanged our two female Fischer's Turacos *Tauraco fischeri* with Nigel Hewston for a breeding pair of Red-crested Turacos *T. erythrolophus*. All went well until the male escaped somehow and spent 10 days living on wild berries. Fortunately he never strayed out of earshot of the female and eventually entered our catching cage, baited with tempting tit-bits. A thorough search of the aviary failed to discover how he had managed to get out. The only logical explanation seemed to be that he had somehow succeeded in squeezing through the 2in (5cm) square mesh. Therefore, both birds were moved to a different aviary which has smaller sized mesh.

Our pair of Violaceous Turacos *Musophaga violacea* managed to surpass



themselves again that year and even though I tried to slow down the pair's eagerness to breed, the pair produced four male offspring. During my observations I noticed both birds off the nest at the same time while they had a very young chick in it. I had never noticed this behaviour before and due to the lateness of the season grew increasingly worried about the chick, which when I checked appeared strong but hungry. I gave the chick a feed and left it in the nest and went back to continue my observations. After a major bonding session the adults went back to brooding the chick. A few days later I grew concerned again, as I had seen no sign of the chick which was at the age when it should have been much more visible. Worried that there might be a problem, I reached into the nest to feel for the chick and to my surprise, although small for its age, it was fine and was sitting between two new eggs. The eggs were removed as it was felt that the birds would be unable to rear the chick and incubate the eggs at the same time. Only one of the eggs hatched and the chick was successfully hand-reared; the earlier chick was successfully reared by the parents.

I believe that the behaviour just described is not uncommon amongst turacos. Seeing it first-hand brought about a rush of questions, for example do wild turacos do this and, if so, why? If they do not, what are the captive conditions which bring this about, is it the plentiful supply of food? Surely it is not in the birds' best interests to 'over' breed like this, as not only will the adults exhaust themselves and lose condition, but it will ultimately affect the viability of the eggs and chicks. I know many breeders who have had turacos lay clutch after clutch after clutch, and I would be interested to learn the thoughts of other aviculturists on this matter.

We also had success with our White-cheeked Turacos *T. leucotis* which bred for the first time in our walk-through aviary. Nigel Hewston very kindly donated an old pair of White-cheeked Turacos which he had used in the past for foster rearing. They arrived in excellent condition despite their age - the male being a remarkable 26 years old!

On our section at the park we had eggs from 48 species of birds and a total of 76 young were reared to independence. The highlight was a second generation parent reared Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*.

## Acknowledgements

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# RAISING OSTRICH CHICKS AT POTAWATOMI ZOO

by Greg Bockheim

## Introduction

On June 23rd 2001, seven one and two day old ostrich chicks *Struthio* spp. were acquired by the Potawatomi Zoo, Indiana, USA. Details of their weights and food consumption were recorded from the time of their arrival to the time they were returned to their owners, 90 days later, on September 21st. The chicks were exhibited in a relatively large paddock intended for hoofstock, with their nearest neighbours being Addax *Addax nasomaculatus* on one side and Warthogs *Phacochoerus africanus* on the other. Zoo visitors viewed them along the southern boundary of the exhibit, with the northern boundary being the location of a small barn and indoor stall facilities. A water-filled moat acted as a barrier at the front of the exhibit. Further details about their accommodation and husbandry are given later.

## Objectives

1. To fill the otherwise empty exhibit (the male Addax being shifted in with the female during the breeding and gestation periods).
2. To increase the zoo staff's experience of ostrich husbandry.
3. To collect data regarding the chicks' food, water and grit consumption.
4. To collect data regarding aspects of the chicks' behaviour, such as their impact on the exhibit and regarding their husbandry (e.g. the extent of their grazing, aggressive tendencies towards each other and their human caretakers (keepers), potential enrichment opportunities, etc.).
5. To facilitate public relations and media opportunities for the zoo.
6. To encourage visitor education through zoo talks.

## Husbandry

The chicks were selected by the ranch owners to be raised for sale to future potential ostrich breeders. All were descendents of hybrids between the red-necked and blue-necked species *S. camelus* (and various of its subspecies (unspecified)) and *S. c. molybdophanes*. When delivered to the zoo the chicks were less than 72 hours old, making it necessary to follow strict husbandry guidelines. These were gleaned from the ostrich owners and later reviewed and posted in the ostrich stall by the zoo's animal care team.

## Care guidelines

### Enclosure

1. Please leave the red pig heaters, hanging from the barn ceiling, turned on at all times.



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