First Captive Breeding of the Yellow-shouldered Amazon
(Amazona barbadensis barbadensis and Amazona barbadensis rothschildsi)

by Ramon Noegel
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This colorful little parrot, the yellow-shouldered Amazon parrot, often mistaken for a small double-yellow head, may owe its current popularity to Rosemary Low. She has written extensively on this bird and done in-the-field research of its Netherland Antilles habitat. It was due to her inspiring and informative discourse on *barbadensis* at the 1979 A.F.A. Convention that prompted my young assistant Greg Moss to begin to seek out specimens in the fall of that year for our captive breeding program. After many phone calls, flights to Texas and a lot of cash expended, we came up with ten long-term pets. All sexed out as males with the exception of one. Two of the males are on loan to us from the Ellen Trout Zoo (Texas) and San Diego Zoo. One was brought back from Venezuela by a well-known baseball professional. Most came to the U.S. by missionaries and merchant marines. By meeting the former owners we obtained a detailed history of each bird’s place of origin. The old hen and two of the males had come from the Island of Bonaire, the rest from the coast of Venezuela. These additions gave us a total of three females and eleven males.

We paired the old hen with a like subspecies male. The two young females were paired with like nominate species. It might be mentioned here that, like Rosemary Low, I see little difference between the two races except that in most specimens the nominate is larger, in some specimens quite large, and has a darker green body and more golden yellow on the head. The yellow on the shoulders is more extensive. With so few examples it is difficult to make a judgment as many differences can be attributed to individualism.

In 1981 the *rothschildsi* pair produced two clutches, one in May and the other in July, consisting of three eggs each. One chick hatched from the first and two chicks from the second but the parents failed to rear them. In 1982 the pair again nested and three eggs were deposited on May 22, 25, and 28. Due to the previous bad experience we placed one of the eggs under a nesting pair of Cayman Brac Amazons (*A. leucocephala hesterna*). It hatched June 16th and was well cared for by its foster parents until removed for hand rearing at ten days of age. In the meantime the two remaining eggs had become quite soiled by the hen’s bad nest habits and failed to hatch though both were fertile. Prior to this, one of the two nominate race pairs deposited three eggs on May 13, 16 and 19. The inexperienced young female was so often out of the nest box that we decided to move the eggs to a pair of Jamaican yellow-bill Amazons (*A. collaria*). The three eggs, being fertile, hatched June 9, 10 and 12. The foster parents gave excellent care to the chicks which became very fat in appearance. They were removed between ten days and two weeks of age and hand reared.

All four chicks at time of writing (Dec. ’82) are fully on their own in an outside aviary. They are, in size, nearly as large as their parents which means when they reach full size in four years they will prove larger than the two parent pairs. I have noticed this in our second and third generation *leu-*

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Rosemary Low has been working with this species for several years and has greatly contributed to the knowledge of their habitat. She has, I believe, three pairs and has, on occasion, had fertile eggs but her experience has been the same as ours, i.e., poor parents. This year, however, one of her pairs produced three eggs. A newly hatched chick was rescued on July 15th and it was successfully hand reared. This is a...
first European captive breeding for Rosemary. Rosemary’s dedication to this species deserves a great deal of praise because she had to overcome in obtaining her original specimens were tremendous. Listening to old line British aviculturists who insisted eggs be left with the parent birds, pioneering a new species for captive breeding, etc. are just a few of the obstacles she faced. Congratulations are in order for this laudable achievement.

It is interesting to note here that a pair in the collection of Jean Delacour hatched chicks in 1977 but the parents failed to raise them to maturity.

Rosemary points out that her barbadensis are easily sighted. “It became apparent that they could be sexed by the extreme aggressiveness of the males. They are intrepid; there is nothing they would hesitate to attack when in breeding condition.” For some unknown reason this fierce aggression is oddly enough displayed by all our specimens against Greg Moss. Even during breeding season the pairs will take food from my fingers but instantly seek to attack him when he approaches their aviaries. As individuals they were all delightful pets when we received them but soon turned vicious when paired. The males are very protective of the hens to the extent that they would easily kill a hen if we did not keep their wings clipped. We recently sold a male yellow-shoulder and instructed the new owner to clip the male’s wing because he also had a hen. The wings were not clipped and the male consequently beat the hen so badly he had to be removed. Instead of clipping the male’s wings, the owner the upper mandible down to the quick which not only only kept the bird from attacking its mate but kept it from feeding as well, therefore, it did not breed this spring. This is a very inhumane and unnecessary practice. Clipping one wing is an old and safe practice by knowledgeable aviculturists who have saved many psittacine females in this way for thirty years that I know of.

We can all learn from each other’s experiences and this is the reason I so often include these little experiences in my writings. Aviculture has become a science in the last decade and the more we pool our knowledge the more future generations to come.

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