The Brown-breasted Barbet, *Lybius melanopterus*, is not well represented in zoos and private aviculture. This beautiful softbill originated from Africa.

A pair of Brown-breasted Barbets was acquired from a dealer in October of 1988. The birds appeared to be adult birds and were in good plumage. The pair was housed with a pair of White-headed Buffalo Weavers, *Dinemellia dinemelli*, in a planted aviary. Although given a nest log, no reproductive behavior was observed. While the two species were compatible, it was felt that perhaps the aviary was not large enough to allow both pairs of birds to settle in. The pair of barbets were removed from the aviary in the fall of 1989. Their new enclosure was a wood and wire aviary off-display in the basement of the bird house.

The aviary measures 2.5 m x 1.2 m x 2.4 m (8'4" x 4' x 8') and the barbets were the sole occupants. The floor of the enclosure is concrete which is covered by a thin layer of shavings. Branches and vines are provided as perches and two wooden logs with cavities were provided for nests and roosts. The lighting is all artificial and was set for a constant 12 hour cycle. Food and water is provided on an elevated platform 1.5 meters (5') off the ground. Other species of small birds are housed in adjacent cages but no other barbets are within visual or vocal range.

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bles (corn, black-eyed peas, carrots, and beets), soft billed bird-fare (Relia-
ble Protein Products), and insects (mealworms, waxworms, and crick-
ets). The fruit is chopped small and
the vegetables are diced, cooked, and
canned. Fresh food and water are pro-
vided once a day in the morning.

In early 1991, over a year after being
put in the off-display breeding area,
the birds began to show an interest in
the nesting logs. One log, 50 cm long
and 25 cm (20" x 10") in diameter was
hung vertically near the top of the
enclosure. The other nest was a palm
log 1.8 m (6') high and 15 cm (6") in
diameter which was set on the floor in
a rear corner. Both nest logs already
had cavities and the birds showed
interest in both. Additional wood was
removed from both logs for several
months. The birds seemed to gra-
dually focus more attention on the palm
log and when the female stayed in a
nest all day this was the nest she
chose. Unfortunately, we were unable
to see the bottom of the cavity in the
palm log. On April 15, 1991 the female
began spending most of the day in the
log. For the next 50 days the female
was mostly in the nest log although
there were sporadic days when she
seemed to be out of the log most of
the day. On June 5th a chick was
found fledged on the floor of the cage.
The interval from the first day of incu-
bation to fledging was 51 days. The
same interval for a pair of Double-
toothed Barbets Lybius bidentatus
was 50 days (Faust, 1968).

The chick began to perch within
several days of fledging and would
regularly roost in the nest log. The
appearance of the chick was similar to
that of the adults but the brown areas
tended to be darker, the red less
extensive and a variable white patch
was present on the side of the face.
The white patch is only present three
to four months.

The Brown-breasted Barbet is
known to breed in groups in the wild
(Fry, 1992), and the most likely expla-
nation for nest helpers is offspiring from
the previous nesting. Faust (1968) de-
scribes offspiring feeding and
removing fecal sacs from subsequent
nestlings. With this in mind, the chick
was left with the parents during the
next nesting attempt. The adults
began to stay in the nest log in late
June and on August 29th a new fledg-
ling was seen. The chick from the first
nest was often in the nest during incu-
bation and rearing of the next chick
although no feeding was observed
directly.

A total of six chicks were reared by
this pair of birds in 1991 and 1992. All
clutches resulted in single chicks. It is
unknown how many eggs were laid in
each clutch. The genus Lybius gener-
ally fledges one to three chicks with
the average being two (Fry 1992, Faust
1968). It is possible the narrow size of
the nest log (six inches) contributes to
the consistently small clutch size. In
1993 a second pair of barbets began to
breed. The first clutch produced two
chicks. While the size of the enclosure
was similar, the nest log is ten inches
in diameter, which is significantly
larger than the first pair's log. Fledge
weights for four offspring were 56, 44,
42, and 44 grams.

The second pair of breeding birds
was composed of a male purchased
from a private breeder (Jim Gunders-
on) and a female hatched at the St.
Louis Zoo in March of 1992. This
breeding confirms that the Brown-
breasted Barbet reaches sexual matu-
ricity at one year. The enclosure, diet
and aviary setup are the same as that
for the original pair.

From available records, it appears
the Brown-breasted Barbet was first
bred in North America at the Washin-
ton Park Zoo in Portland, Oregon. A
pair was acquired in 1988 and first
bred in August 1989. A total of 11
chicks were produced between
August 1989 and May 1990. Although
a number of chicks were sent to other
locations, all the chicks as well as the
adults are now dead. As mentioned
earlier, Gunderson produced a num-
ber of young in 1992, several of which
were acquired by the St. Louis Zoo.
No other institutions appear to have
bred this species and only a small
number are in other zoos. The genus
Lybius as a whole is poorly repre-
ented in captivity even though they
breed well and make excellent display
specimens. Hopefully other zoos and
private breeders will take an interest
in the Brown-breasted and other bar-
bet species.

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