

first breeding of the Tucuman Amazon

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Photos courtesy Life Fellowship



Baby Tucuman Amazon — The first hatched in captivity.

The breeding pair of Tucuman Amazons.



Our first Tucuman Amazon (*Amazona tucumana*) arrived at Life Fellowship (Caribbean Wildlife Research, Inc.) late in 1978. Readers will remember it was pictured in the Aug/Sept. '79 edition of *The A.F.A. Watchbird* and was no doubt the first real photograph of this unique parrot to appear in print. The same picture has since then appeared in several European publications. Due to its here-to-fore inaccessible habitat in Bolivia few Tucumans reached the market places. For the most part these were chicks collected by the Indians. It would seem that Miss Anne Kindler, a South American animal dealer of many years, was the first to recognize the rarity of these parrots and purchased five of them for herself. When she moved from Bolivia to the U.S. in Dec. '77 she brought the five Tucumans along with her other most treasured pets. Unfortunately only three survived the quarantine and were later sold to a California aviculturist. All three sexed out as hens as was our first specimen. We subsequently were able to obtain two more Tucumans from a New York dealer. One was an adult male and the other a juvenile hen. The male was paired with our first young adult hen. Nesting activity was noted in April, '80 and three eggs were deposited in May which proved infertile and were pulled resulting in a second clutch of three eggs in June. These too were infertile.

Due to the severe drought in the spring of '81 all our Amazons nested in June and July when the rains came. The Tucumans commenced laying on the 14th of June. Again three eggs comprised the clutch. Since we had noted what seemed to be an inability in the cock to properly copulate we had little hope of the eggs being fertile and therefore failed to date each egg as is our general procedure. When the first egg was ten days old the clutch was candled and one proved fertile but due to the lack of embryo development it could not have been the first egg. The egg hatched on the 12th of July and the chick was allowed to remain with the parents until about seven days old, when it was pulled

for hand rearing. Those attending my lectures at the San Diego A.F.A. Convention in August saw slides of this first captive bred offspring taken when it was about ten days old.

In late September Mr. Dale R. Thompson, Chairman-Avy Awards Committee, visited here and saw the bird when it was fully feathered. Also, Mr. Tom Ireland, A.F.A. President, has on several visits here seen this first captive bred Tucuman. I point all this out as I feel verification of first breedings are a must to insure the professional aspect of first breeding awards.

Today in aviculture we hear rumors of professed breedings of rare and unusual psittacines but when these rumors are followed up offspring so often fail to exist. Confusion of this type may arise from misuse of terms. Thirty years ago in aviculture the term "breeding pair" meant a pair that had produced young. Today when we hear of a "breeding pair" it quite often simply means the owners saw their birds copulating. Others hearing what they consider a novel occurrence rush forth to declare the Jones have a breeding pair of Carolina Parakeets, etc. Similar misleading identification occurs with the novice and even with the professional.

When we were trying to obtain Yellow-shouldered Amazons (*A. barbadensis*) for breeding we followed up an ad in the American Association of Zoological Parks surplus bulletin. In talking with the zoo bird curator he assured me it was in fact a Yellow-shouldered Amazon and he had keyed it in with Forshaw's *Parrots of the World*. When it arrived it turned out to be a common Blue-front (*A. aestiva*). What is perhaps even more unforgivable is to see Amazons mislabeled in books written by supposed knowledgeable men of letters. No wonder we poor average mortals become confused.

When immature, the Tucuman has flecks of yellow in the V-shaped red forehead. This vanished in less than a year and the rose red becomes a permanent color. As in many of the Brazilian, Bolivian and Paraguayan Amazons there is a heavy black edging on the green head and neck feathers. In the Amazon's northern range such black edging seems limited to certain Caribbean Island Amazons and to the little *xantholara* of the Yucatan.

After seeing our original specimen, two south Florida dealers imported approximately twenty each of the Tucuman. From these imports we were able to pair up our remaining hen and add three more pairs to our collection. We sent one

pair to Rosemary Low who had been much taken by the tameness and antics of our first specimen. Rosemary calls them "Tucs" and it is a fitting nickname.

Tucumans demonstrate hyperactiveness making them a delight to behold. Much comedy is evidenced in breeding courtship. One gets the impression they need help in accomplishing actual copulation. At the time of this writing (May '82) we have witnessed this awkwardness in all five pairs. Whereas our other Amazons get their act together at a very early age, in this respect the Tucumans do not, making them unique in Amazon behavior. Other aviculturists share my opinion that their antics are more kin to the conure family than the Amazons. They are loved by all who become acquainted with their excellent personalities. To point this out, when the pair was incubating their eggs we experienced no difficulty in removing them from under the hen. The male would at this time enter the box making a strange whistling note, trying to cover the hen and nest with his wings but neither bird made any attempt to bite or show aggression to Greg Moss or myself. This tameness has remained to this date. A very unusual performance for an Amazon.

At any rate, the first captive bred Tucuman continues to thrive and is now as large as its mother and appears to be a hen. From all indication its parents and two other pairs of Tucumans will soon go to nest this season.

It is doubtful these Amazons will ever be plentiful on the parrot market due to the difficulty in obtaining them. Importation in this country is usually based on two factors: cost of a species in the country of origin and the demand for said species in the U.S. The first factor will be of interest to readers. In Bolivia an exporter charges \$250 to \$275 for a Tucuman. A Blue-fronted Amazon (*A. aestiva*) is only \$30 to \$50. These prices are based on the scarcity or plentifulness of a given species, thus showing the Tucuman to be a difficult parrot to obtain. Add to this high price the risk the importer takes in transportation, quarantine, disease, etc. and it becomes understandable why few are imported. The second factor lies in that few aviculturists know anything about the charm and uniqueness of this bird and therefore the demand in the U.S. does not exist as it does with European collectors who have in the last year imported as many as could be obtained from exporters. Due to this we are unlikely to see much of this Amazon in the U.S. market. ●

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