

# HANDRAISING TURACOS ON THE RUN

*Story and photos by  
Kateri J. Davis*

All softbills are uncommon in aviculture and generally unknown to the public outside of zoo settings, but turacos have been raised in captivity by private aviculturists for decades. These medium-sized, fruit eating, natives to Africa can be grouped into the greens, purples, greys, and the Great Blue species. Most zoological institutions have at least one turaco on display, and several breed them. Many of the turaco species have disappeared from U.S. aviculture, and the remaining ones are losing ground due to difficulties with small numbers of bloodlines, in pairing up birds, getting them to breed, and finding aviculturists who have the space and time to work with them. Thus, every egg laid and every chick hatched is important to the future of turacos.

The turacos are one of my favorite softbill families: large, colorful, active, hardy, and curious birds. I have been raising turacos for almost 20 years and have had many occasions to hatch eggs and handfeed chicks. These birds are much too active to make good house pets so my choice to handfeed is to save chicks, not to ensure tameness, although handfed turacos do make great tame aviary occupants.

My problem, though, is that handraising while working full-time out of the house is a big chore. Being able to be mobile while successfully



**The mobile setup includes a heating pad, power inverter, brooder, chick's cup and an ice chest.**

handfeeding any chick is tricky. For two weeks or so, the handfeeder has to be on the bird's schedule and is usually tied to the house. Luckily, turacos take to handfeeding on the run in stride, and having now figured out a successful technique, I have the freedom to leave the house and still raise healthy turacos.

Once a turaco egg hatches, I leave the chick in the incubator for the first 24 hours, in which he doesn't need to be fed anyway. The next day he is moved to my mobile brooder set up. I have never been able to find a commercial one so I make my own. I use a medium-sized, see-thru, plastic critter-keeper container that has a ventilated top with a handle. A layer of cloth is placed on the bottom

and loosely rolled washcloths are arranged around a plastic cup in the center. The rolled cloth holds the heat in well. Humidity is not a problem but if higher humidity is needed, some of the cloth can be dampened.

The chick is placed in a second cup layered with a paper towel and some alfalfa hay so that it can grip with his feet and not become splay legged. This second cup fits into the first, and the chick is covered loosely with a small cloth, which simulates being brooded and reduces stress on the chick. I cover the whole container with a hand towel or place it inside a large carrying bag. This way I can carry the brooder, and no one can see what I am actually carrying,

and the heat is retained while on the move.

To heat the brooder, I place it on a heating pad. I can regulate the heat easily by switching from low to high and by changing the amount of container covered with the cloth. Younger birds require more heat than older chicks, usually around 95 degrees F. Monitor behavior. If the chick is panting, reduce heat; if the chick is huddled down tightly and not gaping actively, increase heat. Regulating the heat is the trickiest part of mobile handfeeding but gets easier with experience. I do not recommend the chemical hand warmer packets as the heat is not constant and often gets too hot. Hot water bottles are heavy, hard to regulate, and cool off too quickly.



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A 9-day-old chick is fed in his cup.

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Water brooders are not easily carried and have to be treated more carefully so not to spill or break the heater.

At work or wherever I go, I have to plug in my heating pad, but I haven't found that to be too difficult. I get good at looking for power outlets! For the car, I bought a Mobile AC Outlet (DC to AC Inverter—200 watts continuous) that plugs into the lighter socket in the car's dash. I plug the heating pad into it. The unit costs about \$35, but it is well worth the price! This powers the pad for hours even when the car is off. This allows me to go on long drives and leave the chick in the car for hours safely. Cold weather is not a problem, but I do need to take the chick with me if the day is too hot as the chick will overheat.

In a small ice chest, I pack extra paper towels, feeding syringe, small cup, and small container of formula. Turaco formula is 75 percent Kay-tee Exact Handfeeding formula to 25 percent fruit Gerber's strained baby food mixed with water to a pancake batter

consistency. When it is feeding time, I fill the cup with warm (not hot) water, draw up the formula in the syringe, and place the syringe in the water to heat the formula. If no hot water is available, I heat the syringe full of formula by placing it on the heating pad for a couple of minutes. I always test the temperature of the formula on my wrist before feeding to make sure it is not too hot. I do not take an exact temperature reading.

Stopping to feed a bird at regular intervals is not always possible when at work, but turaco chicks don't seem to mind. Starting at 6 a.m., I feed well in the morning right up to when I leave for work around 7 a.m., then every chance I get, which is usually between every one to three hours. When mobile handfeeding, especially when the feeding intervals are long, I feed slightly larger portions than I normally would. I still am careful not to overfeed though. Turacos do not have a crop. Instead the food goes into an expandable esophagus, and you can see a food bulge on the





Weaning a White-cheekedTuraco, in his carrier with a feed cup.

right side of the turaco's neck after feeding. Healthy turacos will gape hungrily, even when the food is visible in the throat, and, if overfed, can aspirate easily. Once home at about 7 p.m., I feed every hour until 11 p.m.. I do not feed through the night.

On day two, chicks get about 0.3–0.5 cc of formula per feeding, and I gradually increase that daily until day nine when they get around 3 cc. Check for feces at each feeding. Turacos do not need to be stimulated to defecate and should defecate several times during the day. Keeping the chick clean is important, and I change the bedding when needed. Because of time crunches being at work, I have a second set of cups with the paper towel and hay in place ready to go so that I can quickly move the chick to the clean container and be back at work.

Heat is slowly decreased as the chick grows and feathers. Generally by day nine, the chick is trying to get out of the cup, and I start offering small

chunks of fruit and water-soaked pellets with the formula. Often chicks at this age will be picking up and mouthing the bedding, and eating their feces, so I offer a small cup of fruit and soaked pellet bits. The chicks will wean quickly and can be totally weaned by day 10–14. Once weaned, the chicks are moved to a larger setup and left at home. By day 14, most chicks are fledged, actively moving about their home, and can be left at room temperature.

Turacos can be successfully hand-raised from day one in mobile set-ups. The chicks easily take to irregular feeding schedules, being shuttled around, and heat changes. I still recommend a regular feeding schedule if at all possible, and am not recommending manhandling them, but you can handraise and still have a life. Not all birds can take this kind of experience, but turacos are hardy and adaptable.

If you have questions or need advice on turaco hand-raising, feel free to contact me at [DLAviaries@aol.com](mailto:DLAviaries@aol.com).

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# 'The Art of Falconry'

## An 800-year-old Classic Reprinted

*Review by Sam Sloan*

In the year 1248, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick Hohenstaufen the Second, wrote a book about hunting with falcons. For nearly eight centuries, it has been the definitive text on the subject.

Ishi Press International is proud to announce a modern English-language reprint, with a new introduction.

Frederick II is one of the most significant and fascinating figures in European monarchs to bring Aristotelian philosophy to this region on a grand scale.

This book is not merely a manual about training, feeding, breeding and breaking the independent spirit of winged killers, to find and retrieve game for the master. It is also an allegorical presentation of Aristotelian logic as it relates to human behavior; so as to break the independent spirit of people to Absolutist authority.

While this is a reprint of a 1943 English-language translation from the original Latin, it is much more. The new introduction is by John Chodes, who wrote a play that was presented off-Broadway, called "Frederick Two"; a theatrical treatment of Frederick Hohenstaufen the Second's life. It was scheduled for Broadway, but the producer died before it could be actualized.

This new introduction is

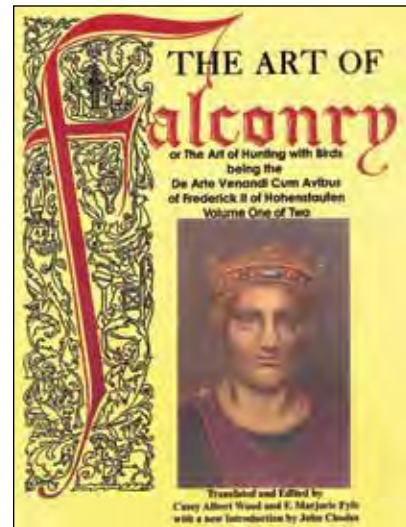
divided into two parts, and adds a great deal to our understanding of Frederick's life, and how he has influenced the course of Western thought down to the present time.

Part I is an overview of Mr. Chodes' play, focusing on Frederick's bizarre relationship with four consecutive Popes: Innocent II, Honorius III, Gregory IX and Innocent IV. Frederick was the spiritual son of Innocent III, and was involved in a desperate power-struggle with Honorius III; Frederick murdered Gregory IX and died facing Innocent IV on the battlefield.

The play also examines Frederick and three of his wives: Queen Constance of Aragon; 13-year-old Yolande; Queen of Jerusalem; and Bianca Lancia, a call-girl, given as a gift to Frederick by Pope Innocent III. She was actually a spy for the papacy. Later she became Frederick's empress.

Another major chapter is on Pietro Della Vigna, Frederick's cultural minister and strongest friend. Pietro was also one of the great poets of the medieval era. At the end of the play, Frederick executes Pietro for his attempt to assassinate him.

Part II of the introduction takes an entirely different path. Here we see how *The Art of Falconry* fits into the intellectual battle between the Vatican and Frederick, for who would control



the mind and soul of the Western world. As part of this mental struggle, Frederick created the secular University of Naples, one of the first in the West, to counter the Christian schools of higher learning. He financed translations of Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, whose worldview tended to promote royal absolutism.

Frederick hired Michael Scotus, the famed scholar, to transform the original Greek texts into Latin, the language of the Roman Christian church. Frederick also supported the major philosophical texts of Albert Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who had used Aristotelian logic to define Christian thought. This was paradox.

In the light of this fascinating history, hopefully you will enjoy *The Art of Falconry*.

The two volumes are available through Ishi Press and Amazon.

# Living with Parrots of Different Sizes

*Review by Rosemary Low*

I only reached page 10 before I heard myself saying ‘Congratulations!’ out loud! When the authors of *Living with Parrots of Different Sizes* decided to buy two Amazons as pets, they weighed the pros and cons of parent-reared and hand-reared young. They decided on parent-reared. The young Red-lore Amazons were six months old and straight out of their parents’ aviary, yet after six and 10 days they were taking seed from their fingers, and after 16 days the male was sitting on the hand. They soon proved to be easy to train and to handle.

The Swedish authors, Birgitta Magnusson and Peter Tössberg, had kept Budgerigars and Cockatiels for some years before deciding on larger parrots. The book describes their experiences with their birds in a most appealing way. It is also full of practical information. Advice is given on important decisions that many parrot owners must make. They debated on whether to take on a “second-hand” Amazon, in this case a Blue-fronted named Morty, 11 years old and captive-bred. The previous owner was on the point of having him euthanized because of his aggressive behavior. They decided to give him a chance although several previous rehoming attempts had ended after seven days at the most. Morty proved to be unpredictable, attacking and biting “quicker than a cobra.” They



were both badly bitten. Despite some serious injuries they persevered—and suddenly Morty fell in love with Birgitta and became totally devoted to her.

I like this book a lot because it describes problems that many parrot owners face, and how they were successfully overcome. Problems with the re-homed Amazons included screaming and biting. A Cockatiel that had had at least five previous homes was stressed and aggressive on arrival but proved to be a very special and lovable bird.

Some of their observations, with which I totally agree, are rarely published elsewhere. For example, the authors felt it was important to show her dead mate to a Cockatiel, so that she could understand he had gone. Otherwise she might scream for a long time, not knowing where he was. The authors ask: “How many veterinarians are aware of this?”

The section on Budgerigars as pets is outstanding. Their

huge popularity of the 1950s and 1960s declined when larger parrots became available. Like the authors, I have always maintained that they are perfect pets, being intelligent, charming and easy to manage. It was interesting to read that under Swedish law, Budgerigars must live with at least one of their parents for the first six weeks of their lives, to ensure that they are fed properly.

The photographs by Peter Tössberg (one or more to a page) are superb. He took an incredible 40,000 shots to achieve the desired results. Those of the Blue-front in flight show the full beauty of this Amazon. And all their birds are in such perfect feather condition that the photos alone are worth the price of the book. Cockatiel and Budgerigar owners will enjoy the enchanting photos of chicks at different stages of their development and of adults in flight.

I would describe this as a book of extremely useful and very readable reminiscences, and can recommend it unreservedly. A hardback, it has 144 pages and is available via [www.bokus.com](http://www.bokus.com), which has an English section.

*Review by Dorothy Schwarz*

This is a parrot book with a helpful difference. Many manuals arrive bulging with instruction. In *Living with Parrots...*, theory and instruction are kept to a minimum and the actual stories of the authors’ named

birds remain at the forefront.

The authors' thinking is very much in line with current ideas of positive reinforcement and behavior science that enlightened owners are keen to pursue.

Two other attributes are noteworthy; the authors began with, and still keep, cockatiels and budgies. The intelligence and adaptability of these small birds is often overlooked in favor of their larger cousins. For Birgitta and Peter, each bird embodies a personality in its own right and is described as such. With small birds like budgies, they consider that a small flock fits in better with the birds' wild nature of true flock birds. One of their pairs breeds and we are shown how the chicks, although parent-reared, are accustomed to the human hand at a young age.

Two trends are altering our attitudes toward pet birds. One is for owners to understand the science behind positive reinforcement training. The other idea concerns husbandry—the growing belief that parent-reared birds, once hand-tamed, are less likely to develop problems in maturity through being confused about their own avian identity.

Once Birgitta and Peter had decided they wished to add parrots to their household, they chose, after careful deliberation, a pair of non-related, parent-reared Red-lore Amazons (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*). It took them only one month to turn these unhandled 6-month-old aviary birds into pets. They used positive reinforcement training and sunflower seeds as treats/rewards.

Another success carefully

described is how the pair took on two rescue Amazons, not both at the same time, and how they rehabilitated both birds. The first male, Morty, was relinquished for aggression and the female, Filippa, for similar reasons. The authors believe that with hard work, time and engagement, it is not impossible to correct problems; it is only a matter of analyzing them.

Controversy exists about how to fit captive birds into our lifestyle with benefit to both sides. This small book is packed with hands on information on how it can be done. One aspect which convinces me that Birgitta and Peter mean what they write is the evidence of the 290 photographs that illustrate the text. The book is worth having for these pictures alone. I warmly recommend it.

## BEST OF CATEGORY

**P**rinting & Imaging Association of MidAmerica held its annual Graphics Excellence Awards gala on Thursday, April 28, 2011, to honor excellence in the graphics and printing industries. Printing companies from Kansas, Oklahoma, western Missouri and Texas submitted entries in 64 categories to compete for the coveted award "Best of Category."

Entries were judged not only on the execution of the printing, but also on excellence in the elements of design.

AFA's *Watchbird* was entered by 360 Press Solutions (AFA's printer) in the category "Magazine Series." Competing against magazine series submitted from printing companies in four states, AFA's *Watchbird* won "Best of Category – Magazine Series."

Jason Tuggle, owner of 360 Press Solutions, complimented the piece by saying "The vibrant colors and well executed design of AFA's *Watchbird* made it a great piece to enter. We were confident it would

place and were very excited when it swept the magazine series category."

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