



Fischer's turaco

# The Fischer's Turaco

## THE 2014 AFA CONVENTION'S THEME SPECIES

By Kateri J. Davis

Spring is here, and it's time to start planning to attend the AFA convention in Portland this summer. Delightfully, the Fischer's turaco is this year's highlighted bird. turacos (also known as touracos, plantain-eaters, louries, and go-away birds) are an amazing order of African softbilled birds, and the Fischer's turaco is a rare, but coveted, avicultural aviary bird. Their order, Musophagiformes, is closely related to the cuckoos.

Fischer's turacos (*Tauraco fischeri*), also known as East African red-crested louries, are beautiful, shy fruit eaters, about the size of small chickens. Their basic green and dark bluish colors help them blend into the foliage of their forest habitat, with only the flash of bright red flight feathers giving them away as they fly from tree to tree. When viewed in the sunlight, their heads look like they are on fire due to the red on their crests and napes. Delicate white eye-stripes and red orbital skins adorn their faces. They can be easily distinguished from the more commonly kept Red-crested turaco by the lack of a white face.

Fischer's turacos are one of the green turacos, and are closely related to Green/Persa and Livingstone's turaco species. All the green turacos have unique copper-based pigments in their plumage. Turacoverdin creates the green coloration on the body and the water-soluble turacin creates the bright red color of the flight feathers.

The Fischer's turaco is common in its limited native range of east Africa, but is more often heard than seen, especially because this species travels by itself or in pairs, thus making it easy to miss. Their vocalizations include a series of barking calls, as well as a variety of grunts and growls. There are two races, and the island-bound *T. f. zanzibaricus* is the only turaco to be found off of the mainland of Africa.



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Green-crested turaco



Livingstone's turaco



Fischer's turaco

The Fischer's species is listed on CITES II and is no longer able to be imported, so the individuals that are in the USA now are what aviculturists have to work with. While no softbill species or group can be called common, turacos are some of the most popular softbills held in private and zoological institutions. However, Fischer's turacos are very rare in the USA with currently fewer than 15 individual birds total. The species has never been plentiful here, and the few people who have been lucky enough to work with them have not found them to be easy breeders. Just locating and acquiring the appropriate genders to pair up makes breeding Fischer's turacos difficult. Despite this, there have been successes. Sid Milne first bred the species in 1991 in the USA, and sporadic breedings in various aviaries have occurred since.

All the green turaco species have similar requirements for breeding in captivity. Being shy, Fischer's turacos should be housed in large aviaries and given lots of privacy to encourage breeding. Only one pair per aviary is recommended. Bonded turacos allofeed and chase one another during courtship. Turacos can become aggressive to their mates, so hiding places on the ground should always be provided in the aviary. Introducing turacos to one another usually needs to be done with a howdy-cage method, and always with a watchful eye when the birds are put together.

Once bonded, wild turacos make loose, flimsy, platform nests out of sticks in tree canopies. In captivity, pairs will use

nestboxes or baskets placed high in aviaries. Both sexes help make the nest and incubate the eggs. Incubation for Fischer's turacos is 22-23 days, and a typical clutch is 2 white eggs. The little, black, fluff ball chicks are born semi-altricial with wide open eyes and alert demeanors. Growth is quick, and the chicks fledge from the nests between 4-5 weeks of age. At this point the chicks cannot truly fly but are strong runners. The adults continue to feed them until about 6 weeks old as they learn to fly. If needed, eggs can be incubated from day one, and turaco chicks are relatively easy to hand-raise.

All turacos are frugivorous, so diet in captivity is a mix of chopped fruit and softbill commercial brand pellets such as ZuPreem, Mazuri, or Kaytee. Diet doesn't need to change when in breeding season and raising chicks, making turacos one of the easiest softbills to feed year round. Turacos can be offered mashed hardboiled egg and live food, such as mealworms during breeding. Although not required, both are generally relished and can help trigger courtship.

Turacos are not generally hand-held pet birds, but they make wonderful aviary subjects. Hand-raised birds become quite tame, but do not like to be petted or cuddled. They are too active for house pets and do not stay on perches like most parrots can be trained to do.

Outdoor aviaries are the recommended housing. Turacos can take temperatures down into the occasional 30 degrees F. if given shelter from wind and rain. They need to be pulled indoors in harsher weather.

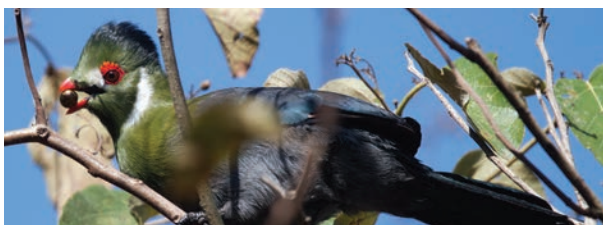


Red-crested turaco

Most turaco species are peaceful toward other birds so can be kept in community mixed species flights, and can even be housed with birds much smaller than themselves, such as finches. They are strong and active flyers, runners, and jumpers, so need aviaries at least 10' x 4' x 8'. Wing clipping to reduce activity is not recommended, except in cases of mate aggression. Turacos are naturally active and need to be to be happy in their environment.

Being that Fischer's turacos are so rare in the USA, all individuals should be in a breeding situation instead of a pet one. This species would benefit from a studbook of participating private individuals as the genetic diversity is so small.

If interested in working with a beautiful, active aviary species, all the turacos including Fischer's are perfect choices. You may not be able to easily find a Fischer's turaco, but there are many other turaco species with which to work! The most popular and easily found in USA aviculture right now are the beautiful Red-crested turacos, White-cheeked turacos, Persa/Green turacos, and Violaceous turacos; so there are still quite a variety of turacos to be found. Please join me and many other turaco fanciers! Feel free to contact me at [DLAviaries@aol.com](mailto:DLAviaries@aol.com) if you would like more information on these birds or need contacts for obtaining one. And come to the northwest to say "Hi" at the AFA convention in Portland, OR!



White-cheeked turaco

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