



# CARE INFORMATION

- TOUCANS -
- ARACARIS -
- TOUCANETS -

## Buying a Toucan

### WHAT SHOULD I GET?

If a pet quality bird is desired, a handfed youngster is the most suitable. Toucans are as trainable as a parrot and only your imagination will determine the limits of their capabilities. They love to be scratched on the back of the head, and will enjoy cuddling just like a cockatoo. About the only thing a pet toucan cannot do that a parrot can, is to learn how to talk.

If breeding toucans is the desired goal, then wild or parent reared birds are preferable, since hand reared birds may have become imprinted on humans, making them less successful as breeders. However, it is possible to turn pet birds into breeders at a later date, though males may be aggressive toward the young, which may then have to be removed from the nest for hand rearing.

## Acclimating Your Toucan

### GETTING THEM COMFORTABLE

When your new bird arrives, you need to keep in mind that the journey, however long or short, has been stressful. The bird(s) should be kept in a cage for several days for close observation, to ensure it is eating well and behaving normally. Ask EFBG what type and size cage the bird was previously in, and try to approximate that as closely as possible.

If the bird(s) are to be housed outdoors, under no circumstances put the bird(s) out in the afternoon or evening. Always plan to release the bird(s) early in the morning, the earlier the better. This will give them all day to familiarize themselves with their new surroundings, find their food stations, and begin to relax.

When placing birds outdoors, always do it in nice weather, never during rain, and preferably when temperatures approximate those of its previous home or location, never when the temperature exceeds 90F.

## Building Their Home

### WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

Toucans can be housed in or outdoors. Pet birds may be kept in large cages and breeding pairs should be kept in even larger quarters. Dimensions for enclosures:

- Toucanets - 4' x 8' x 4'
- Aracarís - 8' x 12' x 8' or 8' x 12' x 6'
- Larger toucans - 12' x 24' x 8'

Toucans, including other pet birds, are better when NOT wing clipped. Toucans do not have the ability to use their beaks to climb as parrots do, and have a difficult time getting around their cage if wings are clipped. If clipping is absolutely unavoidable, then perches need to be appropriately placed to allow them total mobility.

Toucans, toucanets, and occasionally the aracarís may be a bit pugnacious with other species in their family and with smaller birds, and therefore should not be housed with different birds in small enclosures or cages. In an indoor pet cage environment one or two birds of the same species can be kept together. If it is deemed desirable to house several species of birds together, (i.e., toucans with other toucans, hornbills, touracos, jays, etc.,) it should be done in a large aviary. Birds the size of finches and parrotlets should not be housed with toucans.

Aracarís are quite docile compared to the larger toucans, and can more readily be housed with small birds in a planted aviary, but not with finch sized birds.

When birds are introduced to each other for the first time, it is imperative to keep an eye on them for several hours to ensure the birds are compatible. It will be immediately apparent if they are not.

Toucans are reasonably weather tolerant and are able to adjust to temperatures that drop to freezing at night, or rise to 100F in the day. However, they adjust gradually, and should be placed outdoors in the Spring, Summer, or Fall, where they may gradually adjust to the declining temperatures of Winter.

Summer heat is potentially more dangerous than cold. Whenever the temperature is capable of rising above 90F, there absolutely must be shade available at all times, and if the temperatures can exceed 100F, misters on top of the aviary to cool will be required.

Whatever housing is provided, it must be completely free of hazards. Toucans are susceptible to poisoning from toxic plants, chemicals, fertilizers, sprays, and foreign objects small enough for them to swallow. They may also eat small mice that have been exposed to poisons. Snails will often eat rat poison, and are one of the favorite foods for most types of toucans; despite manufacturers' claims that snail and rat poisons have no secondary kill potential, they do!!

No chemicals, insecticides, or fertilizers should be used anywhere near their enclosure. Indoors these birds are susceptible to household chemicals harmless to people, and especially to Teflon that may vaporize from cooking utensils which accidentally burn.

In the category of foreign objects, toucans in their immense curiosity will play with and eat almost anything. This includes nails, tacks, marbles, broken glass, leaves, staples, etc. Needless to say these objects and their kind are generally fatal! Check your enclosure.



## Diet

### WHAT DO I FEED MY TOUCAN?

Toucans, toucanets, and aracarís are frugivorous birds, whose primary diet is fruit. In the wild they consume fruits from as many as 100 species of plants and trees. They also consume a variety of insects for protein, especially during their nesting cycle.

While it is impossible to even approximate their wild diet, they can easily be properly fed. Fruit will make up the bulk of their diet, and is absolutely necessary! Toucans have evolved a specialized digestive system to process fruit, and they get most of their moisture from fruit, not from drinking water. For that reason, toucans must be fed fresh fruit EVERY DAY! Seeds, on the other hand, MUST NOT be fed.

We prefer to feed papaya as the primary fruit, bananas, grapes, and blue berries in a mixture of 70% papaya, 20% bananas, 5% grapes and 5% blueberries. If papaya is unavailable, substitute it with cantaloupe. Be sure to watch our online tutorial video on our website.

We choose fruits that are available all year long, as toucans take some time getting used to new food items. However, fruits high in citric acid such as oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruits, pineapple, and tomatoes should be avoided as the acid content is thought to impede their digestive system and facilitate the uptake of iron.

The fruit diet must be supplemented with a low iron protein source, and we recommend Mazuri Low Iron Softbill diet by Purina Mills. This diet was developed at our farm in cooperation with Purina Mills. It's readily available from pet stores or feed suppliers.

Unfortunately, toucans and a number of other bird species (i.e. Mynahs, Starlings, Tanagers. etc.) have a genetic predisposition for the super absorption of iron, known as "iron storage disease" or hemochromatosis. This disease is described as the accumulation of dietary iron in the liver, until the stored iron reaches a toxic level, causing the death of the bird. It is best to prevent this disease, rather than treat it, by providing a low iron diet.

Please note there are several "low iron" diets on the market that were "designed" to solve iron storage disease, but may be harmful to toucans if they contain propylene glycol. Avoid these diets at all cost. Propylene glycol is also used as a carrier for some medications such as Ivermectin, Ivermectin should be used with caution and in consultation with your veterinarian. Propylene glycol will kill your birds, so be sure to read the list of ingredients! It is important to note that there is no such thing as an iron free diet. In fact, some iron is needed by all animals for the formation of hemoglobin in the blood.

If the above diet is adhered to, your toucan(s) should live a long and healthy life. This diet is complete and NO additives such as vitamins or minerals are required. The pelleted portion of this diet contains all the vitamins and minerals needed. The addition of extra vitamins and minerals, rather than helping, can actually lead to gout or other metabolic disease resulting in premature death.

Fresh water should be provided at all times. You will soon note, however, that toucans prefer to bathe in their water rather than drink it, as they get most of their moisture needs from the fruit.

Toucans eat larger quantities of food and process their food much more rapidly than parrots and other birds. Because of this, they MUST HAVE fresh fruit daily and a constant supply of pellets. They cannot survive if this requirement is not met.

## Health Problems

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY TOUCAN?

Toucans, toucanets, and aracaris are reasonably hardy birds. They have a life span of approximately 20 years.

Toucans are susceptible to certain diseases when exposed and when under stress. Most commonly, they can contract E. coli, salmonella, and yersinia-- all bacterial infections which are easily treated. These bacterial infections are often acquired from contact with rodents, which contaminate the toucan's food with their urine and feces. It is important to maintain a rodent free environment.

Toucans are also susceptible to internal parasites such as roundworms, proventricular worms, and capillaria worms--all of which can cause death. These worms damage the gastrointestinal tract. Fortunately, they lay eggs almost constantly, which can be identified during a fecal exam. The worms are easily eradicated with a dewormer. Worms are initially acquired when the bird eats contaminated food, or insects which serve as the intermediate host for a particular parasite.

As mentioned under diet, iron storage disease is a dietary disease involving the accumulation of iron. In some individual birds the onset may be faster than others. There is no way to diagnose this disease in living birds, except via liver biopsy, which is stressful and risky surgery, and the only known method of treatment is through phlebotomies (removal of a fixed amount of blood on a periodic basis). This treatment regimen may work for the pet bird, but is not practical for the large breeding flock. A low iron diet will generally eliminate the risk of iron storage disease.

The only other health concern of import is the possibility of gout, which is a nutritionally related problem resulting from over ingestion of minerals, primarily calcium.

### Breeding Toucans TOU-CAN MAKE THREE

We have found that breeding toucans is not as difficult as some might believe and that our recipe works for all species.

Toucans require a large area relative to parrots to breed, and must be housed alone in pairs, preferably following the size enclosures mentioned above under housing. While they will breed in boxes, with a concave bottom, they are far more likely to breed if they are provided with a "natural" nest, which we construct from palm tree logs which are hollowed out to a depth of 24 inches and an inside diameter of 8-11 inches for the large toucans and 5-6 inches for toucanets and aracaris. Logs allow these birds to continually dig their nest chamber deeper, which helps them cement the pair bond. Toucan nests do not require nesting material, if you put material in the nest, they will simply remove it.

All Ramphastids lay pure white, elliptical shaped eggs, usually 3-4 per clutch. Incubation for all species lasts 16 days, and young fledge the nest at 46-50 days for large toucans, and 40-42 for the toucanets and aracaris. During the time chicks are in the nest, some of the larger species may require the feeding of crickets as a supplement. Any other live food is not required, nor desired.



Contrary to rumor, live baby mice, or "pinkies" are not necessary and potentially harmful because they can carry diseases including salmonella. Additionally, the pelleted portion of the diet is offered soaked, during the entire time the chicks are in the nest.

Occasionally, toucans will not properly rear their young, requiring that the nestlings be pulled for handfeeding, which is also a necessity if a tame bird is desired. Handfeeding toucans is slightly different than handfeeding parrots, since toucans do not have crops. Small amounts of food, depending on the size of bird, are fed, then the bird allowed to swallow completely before the next mouthful is offered. A good rule of thumb is to feed a total volume of food measured in cubic centimeters (cc's) that equals 10-15 percent of the bird's body weight, and this volume should be divided into 6-10 servings. If there is food visible in the mouth, the next serving should be delayed until the mouth is clear. Toucans will need to be fed 5-7 times a day depending on age - the younger, the more frequent.

Our baby birds are raised on the New Mazuri Handfeeding Formula for all baby birds. Various strained baby fruits such as apples with bananas or blueberries is added to the formula for handrearing of the toucans, toucanets, and Aracaris.



### More Information GOT MORE QUESTIONS?

Please contact us via the contact form on our website, or call 760-728-2226