

which I can buy from a local farmer at a real savings. His "seconds" sell for only \$10 a bushel (50 pounds). If I purchased "firsts" in the grocery store, 50 pounds would cost \$30 (sixty cents a pound). Last year I shared some of my inexpensive sweet potatoes with my neighbor and she wondered why they were classified as seconds. Sweet potatoes can be stored for many months if kept cool and dry, or they can be cooked and frozen for later use.

Almonds, walnuts, and other nuts that parrots enjoy can be bought in bulk quantities from wholesale suppliers in California at prices significantly lower than retail price. This year I am buying both almonds and walnuts from SAM'S discount store at almost the same price per pound as from the suppliers in California last year. This works out better for me because I can buy smaller quantities and avoid the problem of finding storage space for 25 pound purchases.

I feed a lot of jalapeno peppers to my birds. I have always bought them at the best price I could find, but last year, a friend gave me a large amount of her surplus peppers. She told me how easy it was to raise them and that I could easily raise them in my garden or even in pots. This year I went to the nursery and bought 12 jalapeno plants, six banana pepper plants, and six bell pepper plants. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed with peppers.

I gave some away but I also used a lot of them for my family and my birds. I strung and dried peppers. I dehydrated peppers in my handy-dandy Ronco food dehydrator. I chopped peppers in my Vita Mix food processor and even made salsa, some of which I froze for future use in bird bread. I fed peppers to my birds every day until they started throwing them back at me.

I learned that six banana pepper plants will out-produce 12 jalapeno plants. If you don't have a garden space, you could plant a pepper plant in a big clay pot and have enough jalapeno peppers to keep one or two birds happy and healthy.

Before the first frost of this Fall, I picked at least half a bushel of peppers. I am going to chop and freeze them for future bird bread.

Frozen mixed vegetables can be purchased inexpensively when bought in five-pound bags at SAM'S for only \$3.49 (current price in the Austin, Texas area.). Frozen vegetables are the next best thing to fresh and can be used to stretch our bird food dollars when used with other fresh produce.


I have not fed Nutriberries to my birds this year, but when I did, I ordered them in bulk from Lafeber and the price was substantially better than when buying them in the 2.25 pound buckets. Those individuals who have only a few birds can pool their resources with several other bird owners and buy the 20-pound bulk shipment and share it. This would amount to a substantial savings.

Last year, I discovered that some stores bag the unsold bulk nuts in mesh bags and sell them at a discount. I bought several bags that contained mostly almonds. They stayed nice and fresh in the freezer. My birds enjoyed removing them from the shell to get at their favorite nut.

I buy 50 pound bags of popcorn at SAM'S for around \$10, boil it until the inside of the kernels are soft and puffed up to about three times their size when dry. I add the popcorn to my bird bread or feed or to a soft food mix with cooked beans and rice. The 50 pound bag is much cheaper than buying small bags at the grocery store.

Participating in food co-ops such as SHARE (Self Help And Resource Exchange) can cut the price of many bird foods in half. The savings come from pooling money with other co-op members. Buyers for the co-op seek out the best bargains, and cut out the middle man. Anyone can participate. Call 1-800-548-2124 for a SHARE program in your area.

Be watchful. Recently, I was driving my normal route home and noticed a tree loaded with fruit. I wasn't sure what they were so I read the name on the mailbox and called when I got home. The woman told me they were persimmons and said for me to come and take all of them if I wanted them. Free bird food right off the tree!

We can all find numerous ways of feeding our birds good, nutritious food without going into debt. 

# Aracaris Earning Their Keep!

by Jerry Jennings, Fallbrook, CA

**B**ird breeding is an activity that can be both fun and financially rewarding at the same time. The more birds one raises, the more likely will it be financially rewarding, but the more exotic and challenging species provide more pleasure and sense of accomplishment.

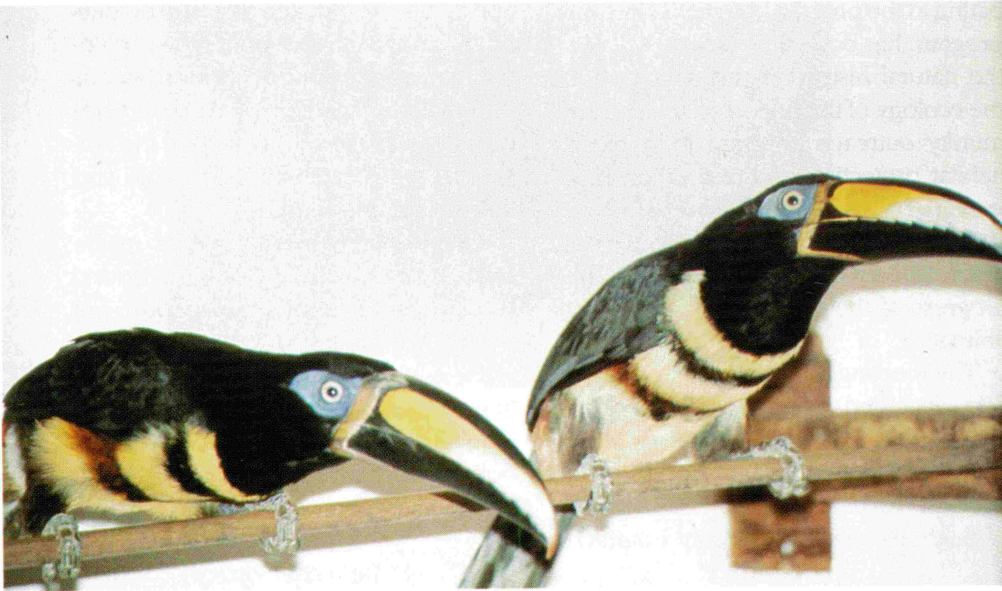
As a budding aviculturist, I could readily see the potential of the production of a thousand Zebra Finches a month, and especially so since my first pair seemed capable of producing sons and daughters on a biblical scale! It didn't immediately occur to me that it might be a greater effort to reach large numbers and the repetitive malaise that accompanies such methods remained hidden from my consciousness. It seemed that one could not easily reproduce a bird that was both challenging, fun, and financially rewarding.

Toucans certainly do not come to mind as a "bread and butter" bird, or a species that gets one back to the "basics." With those thoughts in mind, Emerald Forest Bird Gardens was to be a haven for toucans dependent for their support on the production of parrots. **WRONG!**

Several things have transpired in the intervening years. Parrots have substantially and dramatically declined in value, while softbills, and toucans in particular, have increased. The laws of



*The Green Aracari is not usually thought of as a money-making bird but Jerry Jennings has his breeding prolifically and there is a good market for them.*



*These Many-banded Aracarís are not as easy to breed as the Green (above) but are a valued part of the outstanding collection of toucans and aracaris at Emerald Forest Bird Gardens.*

supply and demand account for most of this, and today toucans are the "bread and butter" of Emerald Forest Bird Gardens.

While the large toucans are expensive and not easy to obtain or breed, the small toucanets and especially the aracaris are exactly the opposite! There is much to recommend the aracari, of which there are three species readily available at reasonable prices. These are the Green Aracari, the smallest toucan weighing on average 140 grams, the Collared Aracari, and the Black-necked Aracari.

Aracarís have the dual qualities of making interesting and colorful aviary

occupants as well as affectionate pet bird companions. In both capacities, they will delight the aviculturist with their behaviors.

Aracarís do well in mixed species flights and will not molest other species of similar size or larger. They also have the added advantage of making wonderful pets. As handfed babies, they develop into intelligent, playful, and affectionate pets that are readily trained to play catch, fly to and from their owners on command, and to potty in their cage. While they do not learn to talk, they pretty much are what one could hope for in a quality family companion.

Aracarís' qualities as pet or aviary birds position them to fill a broad demand, which is one of the three key elements necessary to their consideration as a financially rewarding species with which to work. Another necessary element is that there must be an actual demand, which currently far exceeds the supply, and the final element to this equation is the requirement of reproductive reliability.

Aracarís reproduce seasonally from early March through late August. It is common for them to multiple clutch, and when young are continuously pulled for hand rearing, parents will nearly always recycle three times per season and are capable of recycling up to five times.

Clutch size varies from 2-3 young, while occasional clutches of one to four young are possible. Aracari incubation lasts 16 days for all species, and young are weaned in 50-60 days, whether parent reared or handfed. Once young have been pulled from the nest (should be done between two and three weeks of age) good pairs will be back on eggs within two weeks. Simple math indicates potential production of six chicks or more per season. It is easy to see that one pair of aracaris could equal 1,000 Zebra Finches, or 300 Cockatiels in revenue, while taking up far less space and time.

Diet for aracaris consists of pellets and fruit. A low iron pellet is required for these birds along with a variety of fruit, such as papaya, grapes, apple, banana, pear, blueberries, raspberries etc. Citrus fruits are too acidic and should be avoided. Simple avicultural practices followed with care will contribute to making aracaris husbandry a rewarding activity in all the facets aviculture has to offer.

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*Jerry Jennings is a long-time member of the AFA and has, indeed, been accused of founding the organization. He was its first president. He has numerous first breeding awards and has written many articles for Watchbird as well as for other journals. World traveler, former naval officer and gentleman, lawyer, businessman, alpine ski expert, and highly experienced aviculturist, Jennings has settled down to a very nice bird farm in Fallbrook, California, where he directs a crew of helpers while leading a life of leisure and luxury.* 