



Adult male green aracari (*Pteroglossus viridis*)

first and second breeding of the Green Aracari

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, CA

The Green Aracari (*Pteroglossus viridis*) is perhaps the most attractive and colorful member of the aracaris (genus *Pteroglossus*), a group of small toucanettes in the family Ramphastidae. Ramphastids are found exclusively in the Western Hemisphere with a distribution extending from central Mexico to southern South America. Comprising six genera and forty-one species, these often comic looking birds inhabit a broad range of environments from hot, humid coastal rain forests to high altitude cool, cloud forests.

The green aracari inhabits the south central portion of Venezuela from the lower Rio Caura eastward to the Sierra de Imataca and south to the northern Gran Sabana and adjacent portions of northern Brasil and the Guianas. It prefers the rain forest from sea level to 2,000 feet and occurs alone or in small groups. These birds are quite nosy and inquisitive. They travel through the forest in the upper and middle heights of the foilage in single file making long leaps from branch to branch with wings closed.

Green aracaris are one of the few sexually dimorphic Ramphastids. The male's head and neck are black. Back, wings and tail are olive green; rump crimson. Breast, abdomen and vent are yellow, thighs olive. The bill is approximately 3½" long. The ridge of the upper

mandible is orange-yellow with a wedge shaped red mark on the sides; lower mandible is black. Base of bill is dull orange. The skin in front of the eye is blue, whereas behind the eye it is red. The female differs from the male in that her head and neck are a rich brown.

In captivity, green aracaris are active flyers when placed in an open flight unobstructed by trees and shrubs. They are one of the least aggressive members of their family and rarely, if ever, show hostility to their fellows, or other species of birds, even during the breeding season. Initially, two pairs of green aracaris were acquired and placed together in a flight measuring 6'x24'x9'. With the onset of the 1980 breeding season, two of the four birds commenced to nest without any concern for the remaining two green aracaris or the pair of white crested laughing thrushes in the flight. However, once it was positively determined who the breeding aracaris were, the other two were removed to another flight with their own nesting facility.

As is the case with other toucans, green aracaris nest in cavities, and in the wild are known to roost several to a hollow. The easiest facility for nesting would be to provide a box of appropriate dimensions, but unfortunately, toucans prefer logs with a soft interior that they can work with their beaks. The process of



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Photo by Jerry Jennings

*Green aracari
mother (right)
with son.*



nest chamber excavation stimulates the birds sexually and cements the pair bond.

The ideal nest log may be constructed from the trunks of palm trees. The species of tree is unimportant, so long as the log is allowed to dry out before placed in the flight. Otherwise, the enclosed cavity will develop a moldy growth inside and may even produce odor of ammonia, which is repugnant to birds. Since green aracaris are relatively small, the ideal length of the log would be thirty inches with an inner cavity diameter of 10 inches. The nest hole entrance should be 2½" in diameter, 4" from the top of the log, and can be made with a hole saw which is available as an accessory for electric hand drills. Nest logs can be cut to length and hollowed out using a chain saw to depth of not more than 20" for this species. That allows them 8"-10" of digging before reaching bottom — a feat that will require several breeding seasons. Once the log has been hollowed out, it must be covered on top with wood (since that end is open) and should be covered on the bottom so that they don't tunnel through and mice don't come up from the bottom. The log should be placed on a platform so that it is as high in the flight as possible.

The first breeding of the green aracari began when eggs were laid during the first week of May, 1980. These hatched May 30th with one young male fledging July 14th. The hatchling chick was pink in color and was totally lacking in pre-natal down. The parents recycled immediately after the first chick fledged. However, this nest terminated two weeks after those eggs hatched August 11th when the young were ejected from the nest.

During the 1981 breeding season, the original breeding pair returned to the nest and fledged two young, a male and female, in August. As of May 26, 1982, they were feeding at least two more young approximately four weeks old. In addition, a second pair had begun to breed, laying their first eggs around May 15,

1982.

Green aracaris, as with other toucans, do not appreciate interference during the nesting cycle. This may account for two nest failures in 1980 and 1981, when their nests were repeatedly examined. The two successful nests during those years were marked by little or no interference, and no interference in 1982. That suggests leaving well enough alone. Babies can be heard in the log from some distance, and the number of little voices can be ascertained, thus their progress can be monitored to some degree.

Diet of the green aracari is typical for toucans. They require a daily allotment of fresh fruit which should be diced to bite size, or approximately 3/8" diameter. Fruits may consist of anything available from the market except citrus, which may have a too high acid content for these birds. They are quite fond of apples, grapes, papayas, bananas, pears, peaches, berries, etc. They will also readily consume frozen cut corn, peas, and carrots, which must be thawed before serving (vegetables should not be offered in lieu of fruit, but as a supplement to it). Mynah pellets are offered as a fruit supplement, as well.

Green aracari also require a protein source which may be easily provided via a good dog kibble, such as Purina High Protein Plus, keeping in mind that the kibble is small and round in shape. Live food, often required with other species of toucans, does not appear to be prerequisite with green aracari though they will take mealworms which should be offered.

Green aracari may be kept in pens as small as 8'x12'x6' and should breed in such facilities. Thus, this species would be an ideal one with which the novice toucan breeder should start. It is easy to house, easy and inexpensive to feed, and easy to differentiate the sexes. And it is one of the more colorful species available at a reasonable price. ●

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