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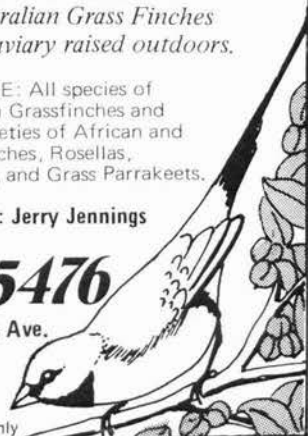
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First Captive Breeding of the Emerald Toucan

by Jerry Jennings

Woodland Hills, Ca.



Young emerald at nest entrance.

Introduction

Toucanets, along with toucans and aracaris, belong to the New World family *Ramphastidae*, which is comprised of six genera and forty-one species.

As the term implies, the toucanet is a smaller version of the toucan, and may often appear not to be related at all. Certainly the emerald toucanet fits here, for it is one of the smallest of the Ramphastids, whose bill more closely resembles that of a large barbet rather than the flamboyant blade of the more closely related toco toucan — a fellow family member.

Description

The emerald toucanet (*Aulachorynchus prasinus*) is almost entirely emerald green with the following exceptions: throat light greenish white, tips of tail feathers, underside of tail and vent reddish brown, legs and feet gray, eye ring and iris black, upper mandible of beak predominantly yellow with central portion brown, lower mandible maroon brown

tipped in yellow. Sexes are indistinguishable except for beak length, the female's being shorter.

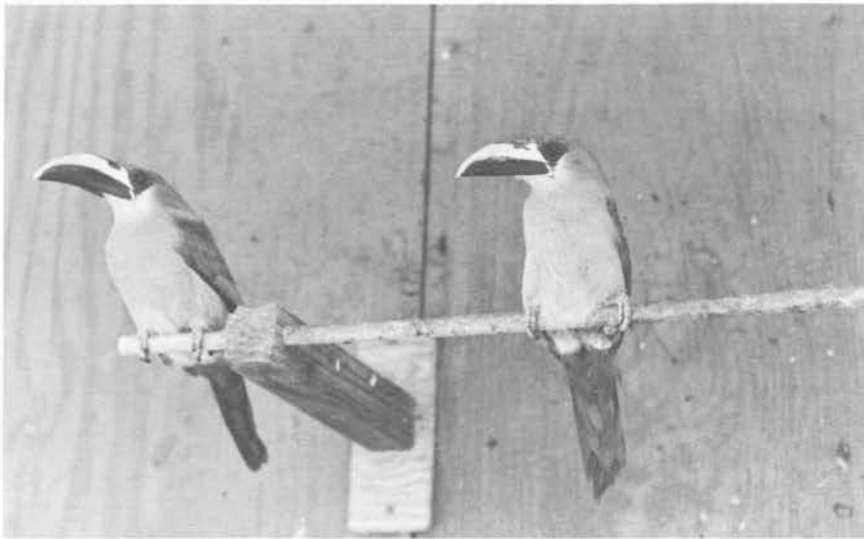
In captivity the emerald green color fades to a bluish green unless the birds are color fed with a carotinoid base food additive as is commonly done with flamingoes, scarlet ibis and red factor canaries.

Range

The Emerald toucanet has a limited distribution as Ramphastids go. It ranges from southeastern Mexico (state of Vera Cruz) to northern Nicaragua. It inhabits the humid mountain forests of the highlands and locally the wooded foothills. When not breeding the emerald is found in small flocks in the forest canopy foraging for fruit and berries. They nest in hollow trees during March to April laying two white eggs.

Captive Environment

A large 16' x 16' x 9' flight was prepared as a potential breeding facility for one pair



Photos by Jerry Jennings

Emerald toucanet. Male left, female right.

of emerald toucanets. The rear wall of the flight as well as the adjoining four feet of both walls and roof were constructed of plywood, forming a solid shelter against wind and rain. The remainder of the flight walls and roof were constructed of $\frac{1}{2}$ " x $\frac{1}{2}$ " mesh welded wire stretched over frames of redwood 2 x 4's. The flight was completely open on the inside allowing unlimited access between shelter and screen area. No other heat or weather precautions were taken.

In the open portion of the flight in one corner a multi-forked branch was hung, which became the night roost for the pair. In the shelter a perch of $\frac{3}{4}$ " dowel was suspended six feet from the ground.

In one corner of the shelter a six foot long palm log of undetermined species was erected. This log had previously been hollowed out to a depth of two to three feet and was donated by Dale Thompson in 1977. It had previously housed woodpeckers and crimson-rumped toucanets.

Near the opposite side of the shelter, away from the nest log a feeding station was provided. This station consisted of a platform two feet from the ground and was secured to a small post. By placing a mild insecticide such as Malathion dust around the post, ants were deterred from dining on the fruit offered the toucanets.

The flight was devoid of any vegetation except for bermuda grass and spontaneous weeds growing on the ground. Subsequent experiences with planted flights for Ramphastids has taught that they will playfully pluck all leaves off whatever plants are provided, unless the plants are hardy, fast growing, outnumber the birds significantly, and the birds weary of the pastime.

Breeding

Into the above flight was placed a single pair of emerald toucanets obtained in 1976. In the spring of 1977 the birds twice attempted to rear young, but were unsuccessful as reported in a previous issue of Watchbird.

In early May 1978 the pair was once again observed actively excavating the log nesting cavity. By mid-May the birds were incubating eggs, though they would usually leave the nest at the sound of approaching visitors. The hen did most of the

incubation and brooding of the young.

On May 27, 1978 the faint sounds of young nestlings could be heard. Since it is not exactly known when incubation began, no definite incubation period was determined, however, it is somewhere between two to three weeks.

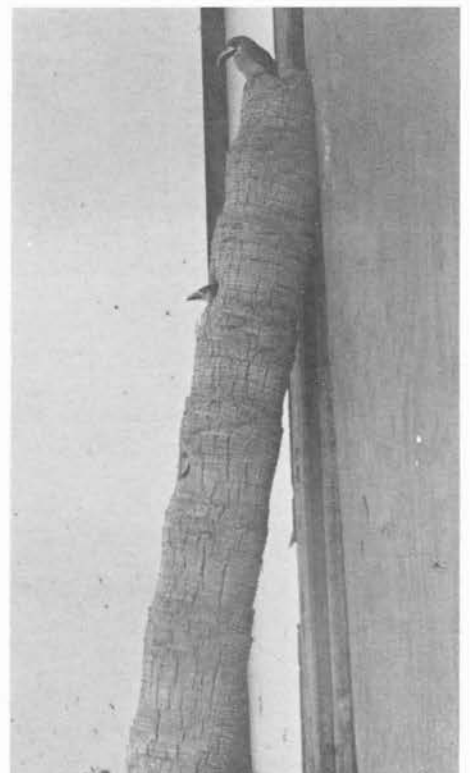
On June 15th nestling sounds ceased. An inspection of the nest was made by laying the log on the ground and gently tilting the bottom skyward until the contents rolled to the entrance hole (the only access to the log). Two babies appeared alive and well. Both young had developed pinfeathers, though one was significantly larger than the other.

On July 2, 1978 the first youngster appeared at the nest entrance, but did not fledge until July 3rd. Once the first youngster left the nest, the second youngster appeared at the nest entrance, fledging the following day.

During the first few days out of the nest, the young toucanets were very flighty and uncoordinated. At the slightest disturbance they would fly into the wire through which their beaks would protrude, causing beak damage and ultimately breaking off the beak tips in both birds. These tips, fortunately, regrew and resumed their normal appearance within six months. It was nearly a month after fledging before the clumsy, panic flying behavior ceased.

In late fall 1978, the youngsters were observed harassing their mother and were

Young emerald emerging from nest for the first time.



Female at nest entrance.



removed. Unfortunately, the mother suffered an injury, the results of which caused her demise several months later.

Within a few months after fledging it was possible to determine the sex of the two offspring, based upon beak length, as a male and a female.

In early spring 1979 the 78 hatch female was paired with her father, and the 78 hatch male with an imported hen. Unfortunately, the latter pair were not provided a nest log in 1979.

The father/daughter combination proved fruitful in late summer 1979. Upon my return from the A.F.A. Convention in Miami, I discovered familiar peeping sounds coming from the nest. Up to that time there had been no apparent indications of nesting activity as the adults were never observed entering or leaving the nest. Within three weeks of this discovery, two young left the nest.

These second generation young were equally as flighty as their mother had been on fledging the previous year and repeated the beak damage outline earlier. Again, the two young proved to be a male and a female.

Diet

Basic diet for emerald toucanets, as with all toucans, consists of a variety of diced fruit including apples, pears, bananas, grapes, papayas, canteloupe, and berries. Citrus fruit is deliberately avoided due to the high acidity. Gaines dog meal and mynah pellets are served dry and may be offered in a feeder much like sunflower seed is offered to psittacine birds.



Young emerald at feeding dish.

It had been previously been thought that toucans in general would not rear young without the offering of live food. In fact, no known successful breedings had occurred without live food included in the diet. The failure of the first breeding attempt by the emeralds in 1977 and the subsequent success in 1978 supported that notion. However, no live food was offered the Emeralds during the second generation breeding until the nest was discovered

several weeks after the nestlings had hatched.

Conclusion

As the 1980 breeding season gets underway, two pair of Emerald toucanets are busily excavating their nest logs. Both pairs are comprised of one captive reared and one wild caught bird. A third pair, both members of which were wild caught (one had been a pet for several years prior to its acquisition) will be set up for the 1980 season.

It appears emerald toucanets are destined to become established in captivity, as they are apparently quite prolific.

Findings

- 1) Emerald toucanets can be sexed by variation in beak size.
- 2) Nest cavity excavation is an important stimulant to breeding.
- 3) Precautions should be taken to prevent young fledglings from damaging their beaks in collisions with the aviary wire.
- 4) Emeralds are sexually mature at one year of age.
- 5) Live food may not be as important a dietary supplement for captive reared birds as it appears to be with wild caught birds, though it is strongly recommended.*
- 6) Toucanets may be very aggressive toward each other as well as toward other birds of the same or smaller size, especially during the breeding season.

* Live food may consist of pinkies, mealworms, crickets, etc.

Emerald toucanet family.

