

Crimson-rumped Toucanets

(*Aulachorynchus haematopygus*)

Jerry Jennings, Fallbrook, California



Crimson Rump Toucanet

Photos by Jerry Jennings



Crimson-rumped Toucanet baby birds 5 weeks old

Emerald Toucanet

Photo by Paul Bratescu



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The Crimson-rumped Toucanet (*Aulachorynchus haematopygus*) was the first species of toucan to be bred in captivity, when Frank Todd, then Curator of Birds at the Los Angeles Zoo succeeded in reproducing it at the Los Angeles Zoo in May 1970. From the late 1970s to early the 1980s, they practically disappeared from captivity in the U.S. then reappeared in 1983 when several dozen pairs were imported through a Los Angeles quarantine station. Several pairs wound up in private hands and a couple zoos, notably Disney World in Orlando, where they were kept and bred for about five years on Discovery Island. They were also kept at Emerald Forest Bird Gardens and its predecessor Walnut Acres Aviaries from 1983 to 1993, but eventually disappeared. While few pairs were ever actually set up for breeding purposes (most imports went directly into the pet trade), those that were proved to be excellent breeders.

The Crimson-rumped Toucanet ranges from Western Venezuela through Colombia into northern Ecuador and is a mountain species found in the lower to mid elevations of the cloud forest from 300 to 3,000 meters. A dark green bird, it is difficult to spot in the forest, but its brilliant red rump distinguishes it from any other toucanet. It has the typical call of the Mountain toucanets, making a series of short, high pitched grunting sounds, which it uses to locate other birds and/or announce its territorial claims.

The Crimson-rumped is similar in size and shape to the Emerald Toucanet. Its green body feathers are darker and more bluish than the Emerald and it has a noticeable bluish cast to the feathers on the chest and flanks. Its bill is dark maroon with a white band at the base. The eyeskin is reddish brown and the iris dark red. The Crimson-rumped's defining characteristic is, of course, the brilliant crimson rump. The Emerald Toucanet's feathers, on the other hand, have a yellowish cast to them, with a slight hint of brown on the nape. The Emerald's beak is mostly yellow on the culmen and the mandible is black, the eyeskin is black as is the iris and the rump is green.

Crimson-rumped Toucanets are excellent aviary birds (and pets, too) enjoying a planted aviary where they can forage around and hop and flutter from branch to branch. We keep them in flights measuring 8' x 12' x 8' high, though that is larger than actually necessary. They are calm birds and are peaceful aviary inhabitants. Whereas Emerald Toucanets can be pugnacious, Crimson-rumped are not.

Crimson-rumped are remarkable breeders in captivity and quickly settle in and reproduce. Our first pair set up this year has produced an incredible

six clutches of eggs, the last of which was just laid. The previous five clutches have resulted in 12 babies and more are on the way.

Crimson-rumped, like all toucans, nest in hollow trees, which we mimic in captivity with the use of hollow palm logs we construct from four-foot lengths of palm tree trunks. The interiors of these logs are hollowed with a chain saw to a depth of 22 inches and an inside diameter of 6-8 inches. A two and a half inch nest entrance is made five inches from the top of the log with a "door knob" saw fitted to a hand drill.

Once the nest is in place, four feet off the ground, or as high as possible in the aviary, these birds will begin their investigations. If the time of year is right, they will begin to breed. Crimson-rumped typically lay 3-4 eggs per clutch and will incubate for 16 days, when the eggs hatch. The parents usually do a good job of incubation, but more clutch/egg production can be stimulated if the eggs (or young) are pulled for artificial incubation or hand-rearing. The parent rearing cycle lasts approximately 60 days from hatch. The chicks typically fledge at 42-45 days and spend the next two weeks learning to eat on their own. Once the eggs or young are removed from the nest, however, the parents usually return to lay another clutch within 17-20 days. The breeding season will last 4-5 months, thus allowing for multiple nests, if managed properly.

The adult pairs at Emerald Forest Bird Gardens are fed a diet of Mazuri Zoolife Low Iron Softbill pellets and a fruit mix consisting of papaya (75%), bananas (20%) and blueberries (5%). Other fruits may be substituted for the above mix, though citrus must be avoided. When young hatch in the nest, the Mazuri pellets are moistened to maintain hydration in the chicks. Handfed babies are also weaned onto moistened pellets, and then gradually converted over to dry pellets.

Crimson-rumped Toucanets make excellent pets, as well as aviary birds. They can be trained to do tricks, potty in a specific place, and taught to play catch as is the case with all toucan species. Prospective pet Crimson-rumped must be hand-reared and socialized as any pet quality bird. The hand-feeding process is as simple as feeding a baby parrot. We utilize Kaytee Exact handfeeding formula with a little Gerber's baby fruit added and the formula is fed with a syringe.

A presentation on the incubation and hand-rearing protocols was delivered at the AFA Conference 2004 in San Francisco and it will be published in the forthcoming proceedings. ❖