



## *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

*PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia*

### **Make Mine a Mini Macaw**

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**By Rosemary Low**

These small parrots can give lot of pleasure.

The appeal of the small Macaws is very well known in the USA – less so in the UK. For their size, their personalities are huge: intelligent, inquisitive and full of mischief. They are equally attractive as aviary birds or as pets. Availability is the only problem.

These days Hahn's Macaw usually hand reared, are fairly often advertised. Note that this species is often classified in the genus *Diopsittaca* rather than as an *Ara*. It might be thought of as a link between the Conures and the Macaws. Unlike Conures, however, it has the bare skin on the face which is typical of the *Ara* species. But at only 12in (31cm) its size is Conure-like. Some Conures are larger!

Originally from Guyana and Venezuela, Hahn's make affectionate playful pets – but, be warned! Some are noisy. This factor definitely varies according to individuals and circumstances.

As aviary birds Hahn's are interesting because they can be bred in a colony. Success will depend partly on the size of the enclosure. Each pair will need to be able to establish a small territory around the nest box. For this reason, nest boxes should not be grouped together as in a colony of lovebirds, for example.

To establish a colony all the birds should be put into the aviary at the same time. Henceforth none should be added or removed, as this will upset the harmony. Remember that Hahn's are probably unique in this respect and colony breeding of other Macaw species should not be attempted unless the aviary is enormous – and even then it might not succeed. Hahn's lay three or four eggs (five egg clutches are known), which are incubated for 24 days. Young spend eight weeks in the nest.

### **Good Breeders**

A distinctive small Macaw is the Yellow collared (*Ara auricollis*) – the only one with yellow in the plumage. It comes from the central part of South America, including Bolivia. These birds have tremendous character! As aviary birds I simply love them! The pairs in my care were excellent and consistent breeders. I would guess that parental reared young would make equally good pets as those which have been hand reared. The clutch size is three or four and the incubation period is approximately 25 days. After ten weeks the young leave the nest.

The previous species and the foregoing have been placed in the genus *Propyrrhura* in recent years. The Illiger's Macaw (*maracana*) is rarer in aviculture and is on Appendix 1 of CITES. It is probably already extinct in parts of its range (Argentina and the Rio Grande do Sul area of Brazil). In Paraguay it survives in one region. This species definitely deserves more attention from bird keepers who should try to mate up unrelated pairs. The offspring of one very prolific pair probably dominate the gene pool in the UK. This pair who spent most of their life with Olivia Bruce, were remarkable. They reared 124 young before the female died in 1991. The male died a few months later.

When Olivia applied for a licence to sell the young of this Appendix 1 species, she was told that they did not breed in captivity! Fortunately, she had kept my articles from *CAGE & AVIARY BIRDS*, which had documented the history of this prolific pair in two locations. She got her licences!

Actually this pair may not have been remarkable, in that all the small Macaws have the potential to be prolific in good hands. Perhaps it says more about the care they received. Anyway, Illigers are lovely birds, close to the Yellow-collared in behaviour and personality.

A small Macaw which is recommended only for the experienced bird keeper is the Red-bellied, now sometimes classified in a separate genus, *Orthopsittaca*. The specific name is *Manilata*. In behaviour and appearance it is different to the other small Macaws. It is also much more difficult to keep.

Very prone to obesity and of a more nervous temperament, sadly many imported birds are short lived. Breeding successes are still comparatively rare and sustained success with one pair is extremely rare, I had a wonderful breeding pair in my care at Loro Parque. I attribute their success partly to the large aviary they inhabited. A small aviary or a suspended cage is literally death to this species, as it quickly becomes overweight and dies. Death is often due to atherosclerosis and fatty and degenerative changes in the heart. For this reason, plus its temperament, it is unsuitable as a pet.

The Severe or Chestnut-fronted Macaw (*Ara severa*) is not common in the UK. At 19in (49cm) it is the largest of the group. In the wild it still has a large range over the northern part of South America, as far south as Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. In the USA where it has always been more numerous than in Europe, it is quite often kept as a pet. In Europe it is a handsome and uncommon aviary bird. Clutch size is two or three and the incubation period is 26 days. Young remain in the nest for about 12 weeks.

In all the species mentioned, male and female are similar in appearance. DNA feather sexing is recommended. They are sexually mature at three or four years and their potential life span is long – probably up to 40 years.

## Variety in Diet

Feeding them is easy, with the accent on variety. The basis of the diet should be either a seed mixture which contains plenty of small seeds or pellets; if that is the food they were weaned on. A wide variety of fruits and vegetables are eaten. I suggest offering a minimum of three fruits and two vegetables daily. Walnut halves in the shell, lightly cracked hazelnuts and boiled peanut kernels (boiled to kill possible toxins) will be relished. A little cooked chicken on the bone is also eagerly taken. For the Red-bellied Macaw, high fat items must be strictly limited. This includes sunflower seed.

As pets the small Macaws can give tremendous enjoyment. They may learn to repeat a few words but that is irrelevant. It is their cheeky and cheerful characters which make them irresistible!

*(Courtesy of the UK Birdkeeper)*

*The above article was written for the UK Bird market but the general description of the birds is true for Australia. If you are interested in any of the above mentioned species make sure you have plenty of money! The cheapest, I'm told, is the Hahn at about \$7,000. The rest are above \$15,000.*

*(Paul Henry, Editor)*

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