

MIXED FORTUNES WITH THE CHESTNUT-BACKED THRUSH *Zoothera dohertyi*

by Jim Jerrard

I obtained a pair of 2006-bred unrelated Chestnut-backed Thrushes from my friend Gary Bralsford, who was first to breed this beautiful Indonesian thrush in 2003 (see *Avicultural Magazine* Vol.109, No.4, pp. 150-153).

In March when the male started to sing, I provided a couple of nest sites in their flight and in the second week of April the female started to build a nest, using dry grass and moss, and lined the cup with bits of paper, sisal and fibres. The nest was completed by April 18th and the first egg was laid on April 21st, followed by a second egg. One egg hatched on May 2nd but the chick died the same day. The other egg was clear. No further nesting attempts were made and the male stopped singing. There was heavy rain, wind and cold weather, but things continued to go well with my other birds, though I did lose a few chicks.

When the bad weather died away at the end of June, the male Chestnut-backed Thrush started to sing again and the female started to rebuild, but did not lay until August 11th. This time she laid a clutch of three eggs, two of which hatched on August 26th. The other egg was clear. The two chicks were reared on earthworms and crickets and fledged on September 8th.

On September 17th the female laid again. This time she laid a clutch of two eggs. One hatched on October 1st and the other the following day. By then though the days were getting shorter and the nights were getting longer and it was getting cold, it was not surprising therefore perhaps that the chicks failed to survive past the fourth day. Had they reached seven days old, I would have ringed (banded) them, as I had ringed the two earlier chicks, then hand-reared them, but it was not to be.

The society supports a Special Interest Group for keepers and breeders of the Chestnut-backed Thrush. The UK contacts are Andrew Owen and Ian Hadgkiss - Tel:01296 653286/E-mail:Andrew.Owen@nationaltrust.org.uk

BREEDING THE GUIANAN TOUCANET *Selenidera culik*

by Bengt Larsson

The Guianan Toucanet is distributed in lowland forests from eastern Venezuela, through the Guianas to northern Brazil. It is common in the wild but rather scarce in aviculture. Before 1990 it was almost unknown in captivity. Jerry Jennings in California bred it for the first time in captivity that year. Subsequently he and other private breeders in the USA were successful several times with different pairs. In Europe I had until recently only found records of it having been bred by Leif Rasmussen, a private breeder in Copenhagen and at Aalborg Zoo, Denmark, both having raised eight to 12 young to independence in the 1990s. Leif Rasmussen kept a pair of the young through to the following year and unexpectedly the pair bred successfully in the birds' first year.

As small numbers were regularly imported into Europe during the past 10 years, I suspected that there might be others and earlier this year discovered that this species has been bred at Olomouc Zoo in the Czech Republic and arranged an exchange of birds. According to the ISIS website there are not many Guianan Toucanets kept in zoos, though many large collections are not on the ISIS website.

The species of the genus *Selenidera* are unusual among members of the toucan family in showing marked sexual dimorphism, a characteristic they share with four species of the genus *Pteroglossus*. Despite their rather dull coloration - predominately black, grey and mossy green - the male and female Guianan Toucanet are both extremely attractive birds, with their contrasting colours of yellow, red and chestnut. The light blue skin round the eyes is almost shining. The beak is black and dull red. They are the size of a jay and weigh 150g.

Members of the toucan family are intelligent birds, not unlike crows, and need some kind of environmental enrichment. Their temperament is very calm and they only show aggressive behaviour during the breeding season and even then never towards each other in my experience, though I have heard of other breeders who have experienced fighting between the sexes. My Green Aracaris *P. viridis* are much more nervous and need more space in order to feel comfortable. Members of the toucan family are best kept in pairs and not with other species. It is certainly not advisable to keep them with other breeding birds and never with birds smaller than themselves. In the wild, toucans often rob other birds' nests. They eat fruits and berries from a great variety of plants and, besides eggs and nestlings of other birds, the bigger species are capable of catching small birds on the wing. A friend of



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Unusual coloured young male with female-like grey breast, with black feathers emerging. This was the breeding male.



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At 14 days old the chick's eyes have probably not yet opened.



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The breeding female.



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Heel pads of 14 days old nestling.



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At 23 days old the chicks' pin feathers are in uniform lines, like in an illustration taken from a school book on bird anatomy. Note the chicks have no down and the parents had removed all the peat from inside the box before laying the eggs.



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Twenty-three days old.



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At 30 days old the black feathers emerging on the breasts reveal that they are males.

mine had a pair of Swainson's Toucans *Ramphastos ambiguus swainsonii* that caught and ate a Bengalese that escaped and got into the toucans' aviary.

At the end of May 2003, I exchanged a female Keel-billed Toucan *R. sulfuratus* for an old pair of Guianan Toucanets. I put the pair in a covered outdoor aviary measuring 1m x 2m x 2m high (approx. 3ft 3in x 6ft 6in x 6ft 6in high). It was furnished with standing, small, full-branched trees and horizontal perches at different levels. The pair enjoyed using even the thinnest branches of the trees. After two weeks, high up in the aviary I put a nest box measuring 60cm x 20cm x 20cm (approx. 2ft x 8in x 8in). I filled the nest box with peat and it did not take more than 15 minutes before the male entered the nest box and started removing the peat. This method of triggering nesting works with many hole-nesting softbills (e.g. see D. Rinke's accounts of breeding trogons at Walsrode Birdpark, Germany). Within a few days the box was completely empty and a week later the female laid the first egg. Incubation commenced following the laying of the first egg, after which the female laid another egg each day until there was a clutch of four eggs. The male did 70% of the incubating during the day. The eggs did not hatch and I removed them five days after the expected hatching date.

Three weeks later the female started laying a fresh clutch of eggs. This time one of the eggs was punctured and the other three hatched after 16 days. When the chicks were just over 20 days old it suddenly turned very cold and one night the temperature dropped to below freezing point. In the morning the parents were in the nest box but when I came home from work and planned to take them inside, both parents were out of the nest box and the three chicks were dead. At the time the pair was upwards of 12 years old and last year produced a clutch of eggs when probably over 15 years old.

The following two years were spent building two new bird houses and aviaries. Although no breeding activity was expected, a few fertile clutches were laid, despite much disturbance and movement between aviaries. At the beginning of 2004 I had the opportunity to buy two more pairs from a dealer. All the pairs were given nest boxes measuring 60cm x 20cm x 20cm (approx. 2ft x 8in x 8in) hung at an angle of 45° and with a 10 cm (4in) entrance tube of natural cork. Often they could be heard inside working on the walls of the nest boxes, confirming their close relationship to the woodpeckers. They slept in the boxes every night.

One of the new birds had a female-like grey breast but a yellow band on the nape like a male and later proved to be a male. None of the breeders I have been in contact with in Denmark and the USA have ever seen such a bird, although Miguel Rochas in California bred a female with a yellow nape band that disappeared later.

Nothing much happened until the spring of 2006. By then I had lost

patience with the new pairs and was planning to change the males around. Used to the very obvious courtship behaviour of parrots, I found that of the toucanets much less obvious. They never sit close together, seldom preen each other and I have never observed them mating. The male does though frequently feed the female. What I have learned is that it is more important to listen to them than watch them. The male feeds the female while making a characteristic “chopping” sound, unlike any other, and often in the nest box, in which I believe that mating occurs.

One day the water bowl had been made messy with material from the nest box, behaviour I recognised from the older pair. Two weeks later there were two eggs. At least one more was laid but it was punctured. As scheduled they hatched with one day in between, following a 16 day incubation period. The chicks developed rapidly and their weight increased tenfold in four weeks. They were fed mostly *Zophobas* larvae and grasshoppers during the first two weeks. The parents kept the nest box perfectly clean. After 42 days one of the chicks was out in the aviary but returned to the nest box the same day. Two days later both of them were out in the aviary and after that only returned to the nest box at night. Once they were fully feathered it was obvious that they were two males. I let them remain with their parents for four months.

The parents never showed any aggression towards me but became more confident and took insects from my hand. The breeding male of the older pair hates me and attacks my hand when I am feeding it. He lost his tongue as the result of a fight through the wire with a male Green Aracari and I have to catch him a few times each year and clean his bill.

I feed my toucans and hill mynahs chopped fruits, berries and vegetables of at least five different kinds each day, using papaya, banana, apple, pear, grapes, elderberries, redcurrants, green peas, maize (sweet corn), peppers, squashes, eggplant (aubergine) and other low acid foods. Because of the serious danger of iron storage disease I use only universal food and pellets with a declared low iron content of less than 85ppm or mg/kg, such as Nutribird T16 pellets, TOVO and Orlux universal food. The ratio of fruit to universal food/pellets is about 58:38 with the remaining 4% consisting of livefood. They have never eaten slugs, earthworms, pinkie mice or crickets but enjoy grasshoppers, *Zophobas morio* larvae and some mealworms. They get 10-20 *Zophobas* worms per day, increased to 40 a day during the breeding season and occasionally get grasshoppers. The numbers are increased when they are raising young.

From the end of March to the end of May 2007, the young breeding pair produced five clutches, each of three or four eggs. All of them though were damaged and later disappeared. After the first clutch was damaged I



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Pair with newly fledged young.



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Male at four months old.

started to give the pair more vitamin D₃ and water soluble calcium (Orlux CalciLux) unsuccessfully. It may be that the eggs have naturally thin shells. There is also the danger of them being damaged when the pair move about in the nest box and it is important that the birds are not disturbed at night. The nest box should be fixed at an angle, so that the birds do not jump down onto the eggs and there should preferably be some material in the bottom of the box to keep the eggs in place. This is difficult though, as the pair remove any loose material from the nest box.

This species is easy to keep and relatively undemanding and it should be possible to establish a self-sustaining population in captivity. I think it is high time we started a European group to cooperate over the breeding of members of the toucan family and I invite anyone interested to contact me: bl@skanskbyggjanst.se

Postscript

Since the above account was written, Bengt Larsson has travelled to the Czech Republic and exchanged one of his males bred last year for a female bred earlier this year at Olomouc Zoo. Olomouc Zoo now (October 2007) has 3.3, 1.3 bred there. Unfortunately, the zoo's breeding female died after the second clutch of young was reared. Bengt Larsson now has 4.4 unrelated birds and a friend of his in Sweden has 2.2, which includes a male from the author.

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The author is a biologist and a consultant to several Swedish zoos. For three decades he bred several species of lorries and lorikeets and in 1980 was among the first aviculturists to breed Duyvenbode's Lory. He later started to keep softbills. Bengt was recently appointed Editor of Fagelhobby, the Swedish national avicultural magazine.

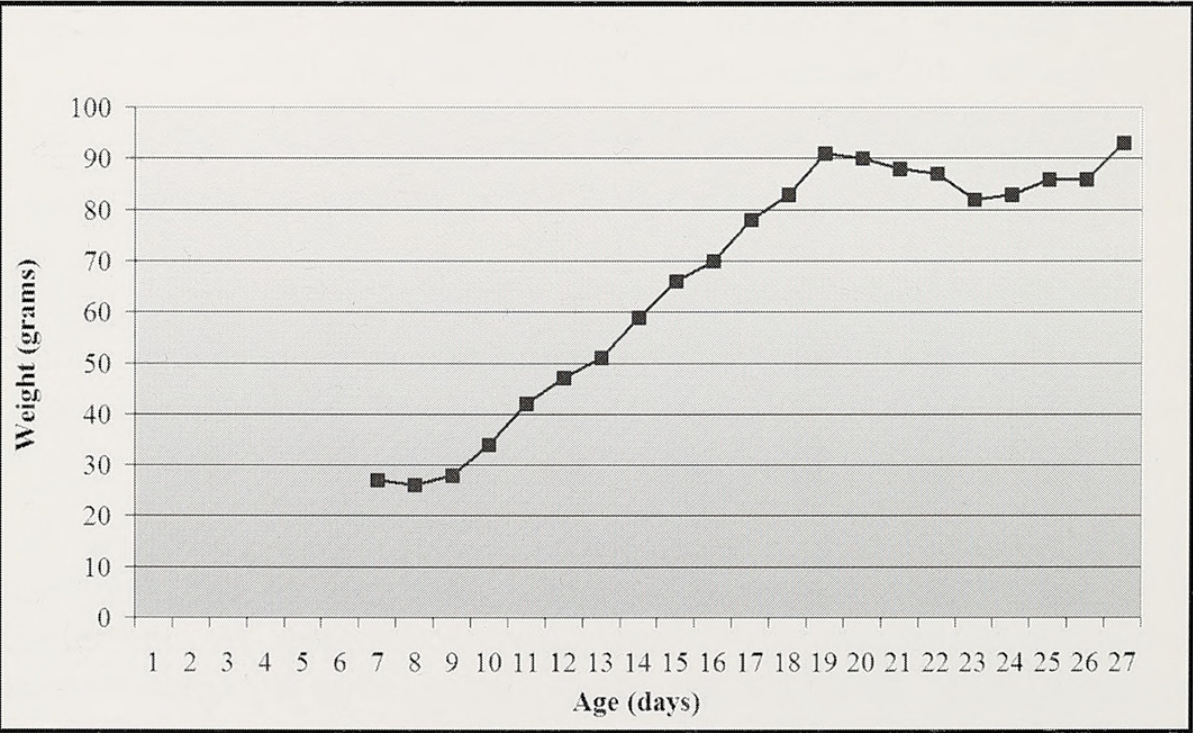
HAND-REARING A WHITE-BROWED COUCAL
Centropus superciliosus AT EXMOOR ZOO

by Derek Gibson

Our White-browed Coucals having successfully parent-reared their offspring over the past two years (see *Avicultural Magazine* Vol.112, No.2, pp.49-52 (2006)), it came as somewhat of a surprise when we found a three or four day old chick lying dead on the aviary floor. Up until then we had found the coucals most obliging parents that took great care of their young. When we inspected the nest, however, we found a further two chicks, very cold, but still alive, a clear egg and a second dead chick. The two surviving chicks were transferred to the zoo's Incubation and Rearing Station.

The first chick weighed 27g whereas the second chick weighed only 7g. Both were placed in a small pot lined with kitchen towel and small twigs to prevent any problems with splayed legs, and then placed in a brooder set at 33°C (91.4°F). The larger chick's eyes had started to open. We quickly pooled ideas with staff at the Cotswold Wildlife Park, where the White-browed Coucal had previously been successfully hand-reared. The chicks were offered pinkie mice, rat pups, waxmoth larvae, mealworms and papaya, plus a vitamin supplement, Ace-High, a Vetarc product that has been used at the zoo over the past three years.

Fig. 1. Growth rate of hand-reared coucal.





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