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CONTENTS

2. Editors Note

Paul Wexler

3. A note from your Chairman

David Jones

7. The flight of Turacos

Clive Humphreys

12. BlueTouraco breeding

Owen Joiner

15. Breeding the Violaceous Touraco

Rainer Berenz

19. Fruit species eaten by Louries

Clive Humphreys

22. Breeding the Red-Crested Touraco

Owen Joiner

24. Iron Storage and it's Pathology

Clive Humphreys

29. Wanted & For Sale

banana, grape, kiwi and mango. Providing the chicks with a drop of water was advised as they desiccate rapidly in the brooders.

The chicks themselves are black velvet in appearance, gorgeous. By day 4 / 5 they become very active and it is difficult to contain them. They are adept climbers and would explore furiously. From other people's experience it would be highly recommended to avoid (if possible) excessive imprinting as aggression in adulthood can be of great concern and personal danger!

I have to confess that I actually failed in successfully rearing the two chicks that hatched during the spring of 2003. The first hatched chick made it to day nine and then succumbed suddenly to an intense gastric infection. The second chick had a bad hatch, which required assistance and failed to survive the second day. Were I to have the chance of hand rearing this species again I would place more emphasis on the solid fruit content of the diet and less on the animal content. I would also consider the provision of an antibiotic from an early age to discourage infection. This in itself may lead to chicks of weak immunity, I don't know. Whichever, these birds are simply fantastic and if given the opportunity I'd recommend working with them just for the challenge.

Owen

Breeding the Violaceous Touraco (*Musophaga Violacea*) at the Bobenheim Birdpark / Germany

RAINER BERENZ

In 2002, the Violaceous Touraco was the second species of the order touracos we were able to rear at the Bobenheim Birdgarden. One bird was raised by the parents, but died after leaving the nest (about 18 days). A second one was hand reared.

Appearance:

Length about 50 cm, basic colour is metallic blue. Feathers on the top are bright red. They have red feathers in the wings, just like other touraco species of the blue and green groups.

Below the eyes, there is a white line. The legs of the birds are black. The bill is red, above a yellow shield in front of the head. For all English speaking people of the ITS, it should be mentioned that this shield is the characteristic pattern, which gives the bird its German name: Schildturako [shield = Schild].

The bird's call is metallic like.

Habitat:

Western Africa (Senegal to Congo). The birds live near forests, parks and rivers (NN to 1000m).

Breeding:

The birds have 1 - 3, typically 2 eggs, which are incubated 25 - 26 days. The nest is typical of touracos.

Breeding activities at the Bobenheim Birdpark:

We kept Violaceous Touracos for several years. The birds lived in different aviaries during this time. The smallest aviary is 3m x 2m x 2m, another 4m x 2m x 2m and the largest one 10m x 7m x 4m.

In the past years, we had eggs several times, but only off a pair living in the largest aviary mentioned above. In this enclosure, the birds lived together with Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), Abdim Storks (*Ciconia abdimi*), Mynahs (*Gracula religiosa intermedia*), Spotted Thick-knees (*Burhinus capensis*) and Blacksmith Plover (*Vanellus armatus*). The birds usually bred in a basket in a tree (at about 1 meter high) without building a nest. Being quite shy in such a big aviary, they stayed on the nest when breeding, even when the eggs were checked. This phenomenon could be noticed from all touracos breeding in our park.

The pair that breed successfully in 2002 was the result of a swap of the birds inside the stock of the Birdpark. One of these two pairs had eggs for about 3 years, never with the result of a baby bird at the end of the incubation time. The other pair never did any breeding activities. During 2001, this pair had a bad fight with the result of the male being killed by the female. Unfortunately, this happened so fast and without any signs of trouble before, that we were not able to act before this drama.

The other pair had a couple of eggs before. We never really thought of getting young birds from this pair, since the male was at least a 10-year-old bird, which came from another birdpark as a female. A surgical sexing by the vet with the result of a male was a big surprise 3 years before. Previously the bird was thought to be female because of its behaviour. Nearly the whole summer, this bird was incubating: with eggs, or without, it spent hours and days / weeks on this. We have never had a male touraco doing this. So we came to the conclusion that this bird may not breed successfully.

To our surprise, two eggs lay in the nest in the middle of June 2002. Since we didn't know if the eggs were ok, we transferred them into the incubator. Breeding temperature in the incubator is 37.5 degrees Celsius, humidity 50%. To our surprise, one of the eggs

seemed to be ok and by using a strong lamp, we could see the embryo growing. After 25 days, we had the first Violaceous Touraco ever bred at the Bobenheim Birdpark.

The birds had a second clutch (only one egg). Another chick in the nest was the result, which was parent reared. The bird left the nest after 16 days quite vital, but died after two days outside the nest.

Digression:

Another way of checking embryos in the eggs is the so-called "bathing of the eggs". This is especially useful for eggs of other species, e.g. waders with dark coloured eggs. Of course, it is a good method of checking if the embryo is still vital. For this exercise, you need a basin of warm water (30 - 35 degrees Celsius). The eggs are placed in this basin and will behave in the following way:

- * In the first 10 days, the eggs will sink under water. No reaction will be seen and the eggs will remain still. Depending on the species, fertile eggs will start to move under water, the way the embryo is acting inside the egg.*
- * The longer the eggs are incubated the more the egg will start to move from the bottom of the basin up to the water surface.*
- * As a result of the development of the embryo, it will move quite a lot at the end of the incubation time.*

With the bird starting to come out of the egg, this method becomes dangerous. Water may come into the egg and the chick may be drowned. Since incubation times are no secrets any more, this can be easily avoided.

By practising this over several years, we have quite a lot of experience with this and we are able to see quite accurately when an embryo might die.

The egg collectors who normally take all our "bad eggs" normally confirm our assumptions.

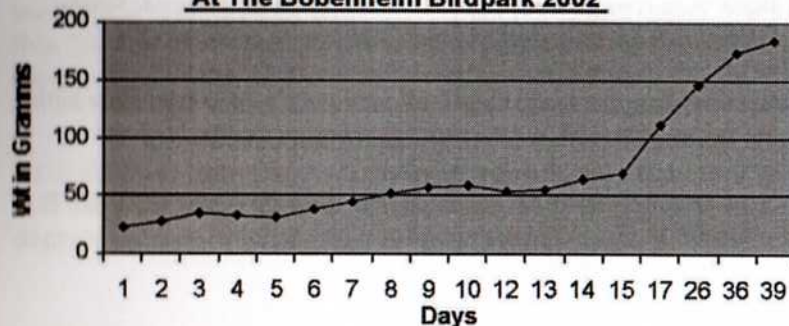
Hand rearing the **Violaceous Touraco:**

This bird was the first touraco we hand reared at Bobenheim Birdpark. We decided to feed the bird with banana and baby food. We also choose pap (100 % fruit ingredients). The baby bird didn't like the pap. So we had to feed this first. Also banana wasn't its no. 1 food. So we started having a problem. At the same time we raised the touraco, we also hand reared a Common Crane (*Grus grus*), European Thick-knees (*Burhinus oediconemus*) and Peruvian Thick-knees (*Burhinus superciliaris*). Basic food for these birds were waterfowl pellets (Lundi regular, a German product). We put the pellets in water before feeding time. After a few minutes, they had the size of frozen peas. We tried to feed them to the young Touraco, and these pellets became his favourite food. He liked them so much, that he jumped out of his nest as soon as he saw them. He even didn't know when to stop and he still tried to eat them when he wasn't able to swallow them any more. The young bird was sexed to be a male.

In spring 2003, the young bird died without being ill before. A veterinarian institute we gave the body to did not find any reasons for the death.

Unfortunately, we lost the male of the breeding pair in autumn last year and the female during this summer. So we have to start again building up a new pair. It's a shame, but it's always the same...

**Increasing Weight Of The Male Violaceous
Touraco Musophaga violacea
At The Bobenheim Birdpark 2002**



Fruit Species Eaten by Louries in Zimbabwe

CLIVE W. HUMPHREYS

It won't surprise you to know that as native fruit-eaters, wild turacos or louries in their home Africa, visit fruit trees in local gardens and commercial orchards too. There are rarely though many complaints about turacos stealing fruit because their low population densities as large birds mean that they seldom cause very serious financial loss, though there will be those who dispute this. Their favourite fruits of course are indigenous ones moreover, so the impact they have is negligible. Many commercial growers seem not to mind sharing their fruit with such colourful comical birds. I know I look forward to the raiding visits from the two species that frequent my garden when the mulberries and wild figs *Ficus capensis*, *F. thonningii* & *F. sycamoris* are in fruit. Their attention to my lettuce, peas, sweet peppers and broccoli is not so welcome though. I have only recently become aware of their readiness to descend to the ground of my veggie patch even though both my neighbours have a cat each!

Turacos like other fruit eaters must be significant in the dispersal of tropical forest trees and plants because they drop seeds whilst feeding and many seeds pass directly through the gut to germinate far from where they were eaten. This is very important in the regeneration of forests especially in areas where they are damaged. My observations of seeds passing through the gut and growing in my aviaries are Cape gooseberries *Physalis* and Guavas *Psidium* though neither are indigenous African species sadly. In the future when Africa attempts the huge battle to rehabilitate its degraded environment the dispersal effect on plant seeds by frugivores like turacos and bats etc. will be of immense value as it is now. The spread of Guava (*Psidium*) an introduced fruit tree is likely to be thanks to this biological phenomenon.

Louries have been recorded eating the fruits of following