

# BREEDING OF MILITARY MACAWS (*Ara militaris*) IN VEERMATA JIJABAI BHOSLE UDYAN ZOO, MUMBAI

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## Characteristics

Length 65 cm. (25 1/2"), olive green, red forehead uppertail coverts and rump blue, Eyes yellow, beak dark grey. The female is slightly smaller. Young resemble the parents, but they are duller with brownish tinge.

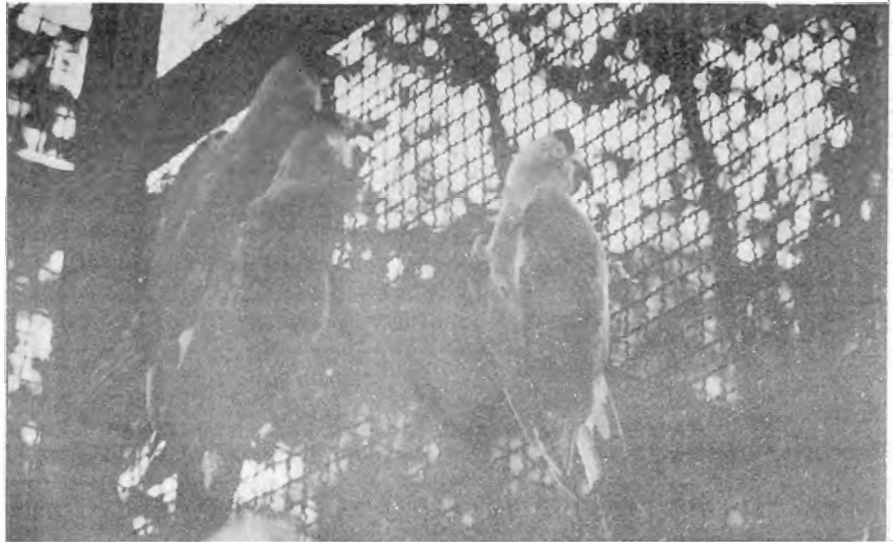
## Distribution

Mexico to Argentina in dry forest and open wood land. Only a few breeding successes are known. The female lays 2-3 eggs. Incubation time about 28 days. The young leave the nest after about three months.

The Regional Deputy Director, Wildlife, Western Region, Govt. of India, Mumbai seized an illegal consignment during February 1987 wherein 12 Military Macaws were transferred to Veermata Jijabai Bhosle Udyan Zoo. Out of these, four birds were transferred to National Zoological Park, New Delhi during March 1988. Out of the remaining eight, one died in the Zoo.

All seven birds were housed in a spacious enclosure as they were too young to sex. During the initial period, we could not identify the pairing. After prolonged close observations of their behaviour, one identified pair was separated and kept in another cage and two pairs were kept in the same original enclosure. While identifying the pairing peculiar behaviour was seen. Both male and female use to groom each other, and spent most of the time together, sitting on perches separately and in pairs.

We experimented to find the suitable breeding nests for them. Initially, we tried different sized wooden boxes, earthen pots embedded in concrete, tree trunks, but the birds did not respond appropriately. They entered the nest but did not lay any egg. Their reluctance to breed led us to conclude that the birds were young when they arrived in the Zoo. We consulted Shri Sharad Sane, the well known expert in Breeding Exotic species like Pheasants, Parakeets and Cockateels, although, he had not had the experience of breeding macaws. He suggested that we use the long barrel type box which should be about 4 to 5 ft.



Second generation Military or Great Green Macaw, *Ara militaris* at Veermata Jijabai Bhosle Udyan Zoo, Mumbai.

Photo courtesy Publicity Dept., Mumbai Municipality Corp.

in height, as they need a hollow to go down in darkness for nesting.

Considering this aspect, during the month of March 1994, we provided two different types of nests for them with the intention that both the pairs will select one each suitable to them.

1. A 6 ft long by 18 in. diameter stem of palm tree was taken and made completely hollow keeping only 2 in. thick top peripheral hard portion intact and both top and bottom ends closed. An 8 in. diameter entrance hole was made at the distance of 1 ft. below from top (Fig.1). The inside diameter of the hollow portion was 16 in.

This nest was kept erect in a corner and the inside floor was filled with saw-dust and wood shavings upto 1 ft. from the bottom.

2. A second nest box made up of wooden planks was prepared and provided immediately after a one-week period. We assumed that out of these 2 nests, the breeding pair will select the most suitable nest of their own choice. The wooden box was 4ft. high, 2 ft. wide and 2 ft. deep with an 8 in. diameter hole about 6 in. below the top portion as entrance (Fig. 2). The inside floor was filled

up with wooden saw dust and shavings as bedding upto 1 ft. at the bottom. This box was placed about 8 ft. above the ground level.

As such, five alternatives of different nests were provided in the cage. The nest of wooden box, earthen pot, embeded in rockery and the palm stem was being used by the birds for going in, resting etc. Out of the two pairs, one pair who had selected and taken charge of the wooden box nest of 4' height had started continuously using the wooden box. The female bird use to spent most of the time in the nest. In the first week of May 1995, we observed an egg through the observation window provided on the box and the female bird spent most of the period inside the nest indicating that she had started incubating.

After an incubation period of one month in the first week of June 1995 a nidicolour hatchling hatched. Both the parents took part in rearing the hatchling. The full grown young military macaw with complete plumage come out of the nest box in the 1st week of August 1995. This

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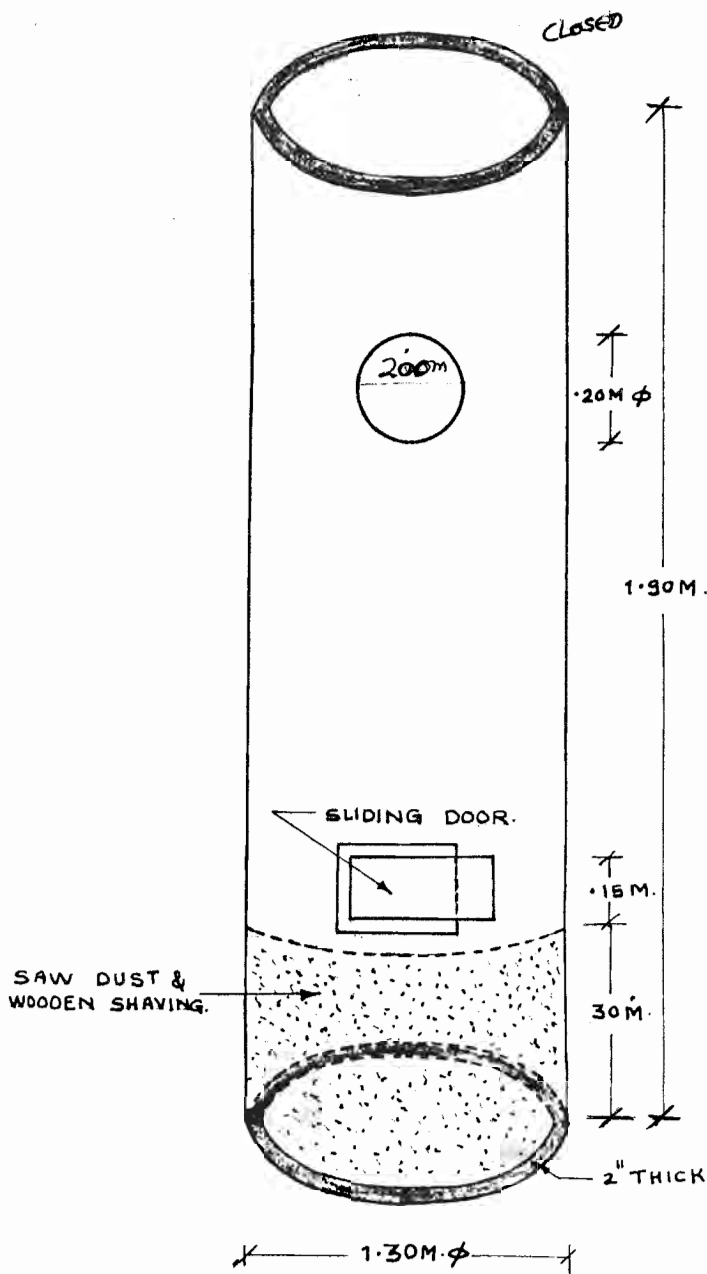


Fig. 1. Tree log

was the first time that our zoo was successful in breeding the Military Macaw.

During the next breeding season i.e. March/April 1996, both the nests, that is the wooden box where the first success was achieved, and the palm tree nest was kept ready with new bedding of saw dust and wood shaving. During May 1996, we could observe the breeding pair using the same nest of wooden box and the second pair using the other nest made of a palm tree trunk. Each female layed one egg which successfully hatched during the first and second week of June.

During the period of rearing from June to August 1996, a peculiar behaviour of the parents was noticed. Both the pair watched and guarded the nest area and stayed around the nest. Whenever keeper or staff went for observation near the

nest, the pairs would screech loudly, making continuous calls till we left the nest area and cage.

**References:**

Book "Cage and Aviary Birds" by Mathew Uriends. The MacDonalad Encyclopedia, London.

A note from Cleveland Metroparks Zoo published in the Birth and Hatchings section of May 1990 issue of Animal Keepers Forum reports that Military Macaw is an endangered species. They regularly bred Military Macaws and had 26 individuals.

**Sincere Thanks:**

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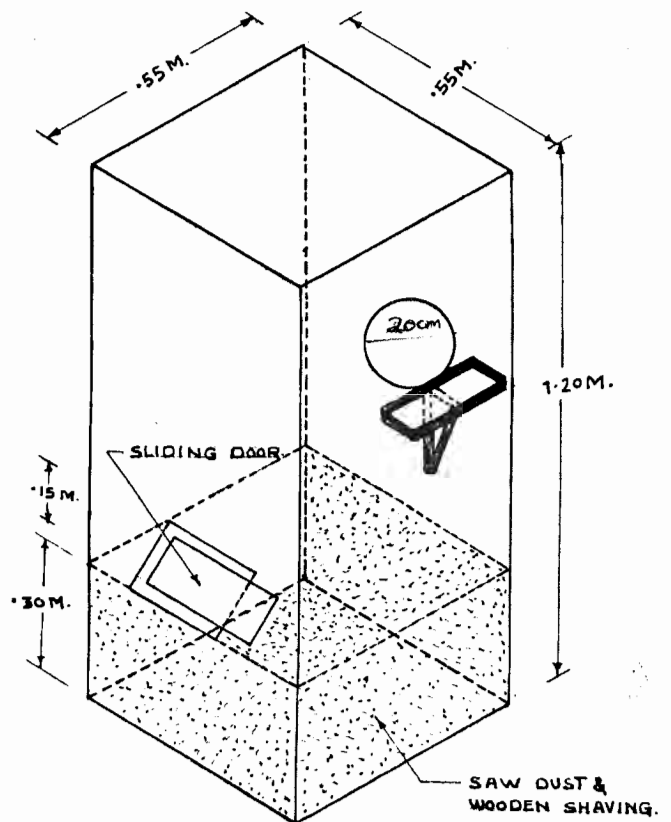


Fig. 2. Nest box