



# Care of Toucans, Toucanets & Aracaris

## Introduction

Birds of family Ramphastidae are found in South and Central America, from central Mexico to southern Brazil, and include the large toucans, the smaller aracaris, and the very small toucanets. Known for their large and colorful bills, there are at least five genera and over 40 species of toucans. The males and females of most ramphastid species are impossible for humans to tell apart, however, some species, such as the green aracari (*Pteroglossus viridis*) are sexually dimorphic with differences in color between males and females. If properly cared for, toucans have a life expectancy of up to 25 years.

## Diet

Wild ramphastids mainly eat fruit, as well as insects, small birds, and reptiles. In captivity these birds should be offered diced, mixed fruit as well as a nutritionally completed, formulated toucan pellet.

Captive birds are particularly sensitive to iron storage disease or hemochromatosis. The total iron content of the diet should ideally be <40 parts per million or ppm (20-60 ppm).

DO select a toucan pellet that is low in iron (< 150 ppm).

DO offer colorful fruits, such as papaya and berries.

DO NOT feed citrus fruits, tomatoes, and pineapple, as these contain high levels of citric acid and ascorbic acid which increase iron absorption.

Also, offer a calcium/vitamin D3 supplementation to growing or reproductively active birds.

Fresh water should always be available, however ramphastids generally do not consume large quantities of water. Instead they obtain most of their daily fluid requirements from fruit.

## Husbandry

Like many fruit-eating species, ramphastids often produce large, wet droppings which makes them best suited as aviary birds. These active birds should be kept in large, lightly planted

aviaries that allow them to move around enclosures by hopping from branch to branch. Toucans also require ample space. Large toucans should be housed in aviaries measuring at least 4 m wide, 7-8 m deep and 2-3 m high.

Although most of these birds are relatively cold-tolerant, they can be sensitive to frostbite in temperate climates. So, consider moving your bird indoors during the cold weather months. Birds housed indoors may also benefit from a UVB bird lamp.

Toucans enjoy bathing and should be provided large water receptacles.

Ramphastids are sensitive to yersiniosis, a bacterial infection that can be transmitted by rodents. Therefore, strict sanitation and careful vermin control is very important for your bird's health.

## **Behavior**

Toucans are social birds that often spend their time in flocks of dozens. Pairs may split off for breeding but return to flocks with their offspring. Toucans are also territorial birds. Mate aggression, fights between males, and interspecies aggression are common.

## **Breeding**

Toucans are cavity nesting birds. Some species take over the nests of woodpeckers, while others, especially the larger species use their bills to make a hole and hollow out decaying limbs of trees. Both sexes share incubation and rearing duties. The general convention is that toucans are provided with a hollowed-out section of palm log for the facilitation of breeding in captivity, although some breeders have been successful with conventional plywood nest boxes, especially where they have been modified to include an external bark tile covering with cork over the entrance hole to allow the birds to "hollow it out".

## **References**

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