

A website for hand rearing of birds – why?



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Self-sustaining populations of birds urgently need to be established in our aviaries and zoological gardens. It is imperative that collections collaborate to share knowledge and experience in all aspects of avian husbandry, including hand-rearing.

Due to the special situation imposed by the indefinite ban on the import of wild birds into Europe, the EAZA bird Taxon Advisory Groups had discussions during their meeting in Athens (Greece) in May 2009 and decided that it is very worthwhile to support a hand-rearing website.

In general hand-rearing is not the ideal, natural rearing by the parents is a better solution and should be our goal. If hand-rearing is not done carefully chicks can become imprinted on humans to such an extent that they may never go on to be successful breeder themselves. Never the less hand-rearing, when done responsibly, can be a useful tool in bolstering the numbers of those species we seek to build self-sustaining populations in our collections. If correct protocols are followed it can be reliable and result in birds fully able to contribute to breeding programmes.

It is also possible to foster eggs or chicks. We know for example that Barbary Doves are good at rearing other pigeon species.

Hand-rearing rare and endangered species can help to increase numbers and maintain genetic diversity *in situ* as well as in captivity. The hand-rearing of failing chicks of many species can ensure they reach maturity when otherwise they would not have done.

The aim is not to advocate hand-rearing over parent rearing but to say it does have its place and best practice is necessary to prevent mistakes being made, particularly repeating the same mistakes made by others. We are therefore thankful to Louise Peat; of Cotswold Wildlife Park; who has taken the initiative to produce such a website. We all know this has to be used very carefully. The results can only be as good as the information provided to the website. All bird specialists are therefore encouraged to add, control and use this site with the necessary ethical and biological professionalism. The site should provide us with the most useful protocols and best practices currently available. Our hope is that by using these formulas we will be much more effective to the good of our birds and their populations.

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