

My experience breeding Spot Flanked Barbets *Tricholaema lacrymosa* June 2009

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In early June 2008 I acquired 1 pair of Spot-Flanked Barbets *Tricholaema lacrymosa* they are one of only a few species of African Barbets that can be visually sexed.

In this species it can be seen by the eye colour of the iris; in the female it is reddish brown and in the male it is yellow, all other markings and colours are the same in both sexes. Both sexes also have the same calls so this cannot be used as a guide for sexing.



They like to roost in a hideaway place and will use nest boxes or logs to sleep in, this is handy as the birds can keep themselves warmer when the weather is cold and they will also use this nest throughout the daytime too when they get cold or just want to rest up.

I housed the pair in a small flight 6ft long x 6ft high and 2ft wide and by the 25th of June they had laid 2 eggs (which it seems is the usual number) in a silver birch nest log of which I purchased several of whilst on one of my many visits to Europe. On the 3rd of July both eggs were found thrown out on the aviary floor but could be clearly seen to have both been fertile.

However, the hen quickly laid again and on July 29th 2 chicks hatched out, incubation was done equally by both the cock and the hen and rarely were both birds seen off the eggs at the same time.

The eggs were plain white with no other markings on them and they were quite round rather than oval like most eggs. The nest chamber was bare with all loose materials thrown out and no nesting material being used whatsoever. The young were slow growers and were naked with no down at all, but by the 6th of August the pin feathers of the flights could be seen growing.

Whilst raising the chicks the parents were fed a fruit diet mixed in with the universal and white skinned mealworms. They seemed more interested in feeding fruit to the youngsters than Livefood so it wasn't given in great quantities, only when there was no live food left in the dish were they added as there was no point putting more in if there were still some left.

On the 8th of July they were closed rung with size E ring but I was not sure on the size and thought they might be a little small if the leg grows much more but as I have excellent ring cutters I could remove the ring later on if it became problematic so I was not too worried.

By the 11th of August the feathers on the flanks were beginning to grow and on the 13th of August I fitted another closed ring size G as I was still unsure of the correct size. The better fitting ring would be left on with the other being removed. Whilst putting on the rings the chicks eyes were now open and they could bite hard not just a peck but clamping their beak onto your skin and holding on. The best fitting ring proved to be size G, size E was removed as I Don't like rings on birds that are too loose as it is a recipe for disaster.

But I Do if possible close ring all birds that I breed if possible, if this has not been possible due to various reasons I fit metal coded split rings & I use BTO ringing pliers for this, I was shown by a very good DEFRA inspector, the late Bob Scott how to use the pliers & where to obtain them when I used to keep Schedule 4 species.

On Friday 15th there was a change in the flight, the male was shouting and chasing the hen relentlessly not even allowing her to feed. I kept an eye on them for a while and she ended up hiding on the floor and was not even able to return to the box because as soon as she came up he was after her again. At this point it was time to take action so I went in and checked the chicks first, one was found to have been bitten across the eye and the skin was broken but the eye was ok and would heal.

They had not been fed for a while, so I removed the male and put him in the next flight and filled up her food dish hoping she would come up and feed and then return to the nest log and carry on looking after the youngsters, if not it meant I would have to remove them for hand rearing.

Luckily she came up and fed herself for ages, she must have been starving, after a further 10 minutes she went back into the log and the chicks could be heard calling and being fed so I decided to leave well alone and let nature take its course. First thing in the morning I was up and went down the garden to check all was well, I was massively relieved to see it was.

On Thursday 28th August the 2 youngsters left the nest log but returned to it to rest and all went in to roost at night. The youngsters were very similar to the parents but instead of having spots they were barred. Incubation was around 19 days but I cannot be certain as I lost my notes on that. The chicks were 30 days in the nest and the mother continued to feed them for a further 2 weeks. The

mother and 2 youngsters stayed together through the winter with the male kept next door. I did try the male and female together with the 2 young removed several times but she was terrified of him so he was exchanged for another male.

The sexes of the youngsters could be seen after 2 months but can be a little tricky to determine. Both the 2 young I bred turned out to be males. These will be mature enough to reproduce within 12 months.

In the flight I also have a silverbirch trunk that is going rotten (approximately 4ft tall and 8 inch thick), they have burrowed a hole into this and if they choose this to breed in this year no information or nest inspection will be possible. The only reason I have been able to get this information is because they bred in the hollow log that I purchased in Belgium that has a swivel top.

These birds are fairly hardy but they do need frost free quarters.

They seemed to thrive best on a fruit based universal mixture rather than a high insect one and are quite happy to go without livefood.

The diet I use for mine is chopped grapes, apple and grated carrot mixed to the universal mixture (ORLUX Universal Premium + spirulina), different fruits can be used depending on availability. Even though these birds have a relatively large beak their throat is quite small so chop the fruit accordingly. If fruit is just cut in half and left for the birds to peck out I find it builds up on the beak and needs to be removed, but when cut up small and added to the mixture this problem does not occur.

I did try to do a single mixture of universal but whilst the more insectivorous species have done ok, it did not agree with the barbets and were looking seriously unhappy so I reverted back to two mixes. Why do we try to change things when it works?

This is my own personal experience.