

Tanagers



This fact sheet gives an overview on keeping Tanagers.

Amongst the most elegant and stunningly coloured birds to be found

in the *New World* are the family of birds known as Tanagers. This family of over 240 species contains some of the most vividly and vibrant coloured birds, which are now becoming rarely seen within aviculture. Some years ago they were readily obtainable, but as their native South American countries have limited the amount of birds available, they have become highly prized within the hobby.

Many breeders of Tanagers are trying to ensure that a viable captive bred population is established. Amongst these aviculturists is Mike Law who since breeding the first **Black Headed Sugarbird** (*Chlorophanes spiza*) in 1989, has managed to successfully breed 17 youngsters. Also known as the Green Honeycreeper, the species is found mainly on the lowlands of S.Mexico to SE Brazil. Easy to sex once in adult plumage, the cock bird shows the black head colour and bright iridescent green plumage with a yellow beak and red eyes. The hens overall body colour is green with no black head or iridescent green plumage. When bred in captivity the hen builds a small cup-shaped nest – usually with co-co fibre and moss. Two eggs are laid, which are white in colour with small brown spots around the blunter end of the egg. Incubation lasts for just 12 days. The hen alone feeds the young nestlings, on a diet of waxmoth and small white mealworms. After a further 12 days the young nestlings fledge, still semi-naked. Their wings are feathered up and short stumpy tail feathers are visible. The remainder of the body is covered with soft downy feathers. The cock bird plays no part in raising the young, even when the young have fledged he will make no attempt to try to help feeding them. At approximately 4-5 weeks the fledglings are independent and can be removed to another flight – at this age it is also possible for the clutch to be sexed, usually one cock and one hen are raised.

Many other species have been successfully bred in the UK over the past 50 years. Another form of Tanager that is available is the **Purple Honeycreeper** (*Cyanerpes caeruleus*), this species is again dimorphic and is easy to sex. In the wild the Purple Honeycreeper can be found in the more humid and wetter regions of Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Amazonian Brazil. They forage amongst the tree

for insects, spiders and small ripe fruits and drink nectar from the many varieties of flowering trees and orchids that they find.

The **Silver Beaked Tanager** (*Ramphocelus carbo*) generally found east of the Andes to Brazil, is another species that is regularly bred in captivity. In Brazil they can be found alongside rivers and lakes. They spend most of their time on the savannahs and at the forest edges, where they can often be in small groups of 4-8 birds. The female alone make a nest in a low dense bush, using mainly dead leaves and other fibres. Two eggs are laid which the female alone incubates for 12 days. They have been observed in the trees and grasses foraging for insects, nectar and some ripe fruit, which they will quite often swallow whole.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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