Double yellow-headed Amazon

*Amazona ochrocephala oratrix* Central America

Also known as the Yellow-headed Amazon, Tres Marias Amazon, Yellow-fronted Amazon.

Proposed alternative scientific name *Amazona oratrix*.

- o. oratrix – Mainland Mexico
  - A. o. tresmariae (Islas Marias, Mexico)
  - B. o. beliziensis (Belize)
  - A. o. hondurensis (Sula valley, northern Honduras)

Double yellow-headed Amazons are probably the most popular and well known of all Amazons. They are relatively large, stocky green amazons with yellow over the entire head extending down to the shoulders in mature birds. The beak is pale horn color. Prominent red splashes are found on the carpus (shoulder). Primary and secondary flight feathers are green with blue tips. Tail feathers green with yellowish green tips. Red patches on outer tail feathers. Yellow around lower legs.

Occurs on the pacific slope of Mexico as well as the gulf slope of Mexico north of the Yucatan and small populations extending into gulf coastal regions of Belize and Northern Honduras. Inhabiting savannahs, tropical deciduous forests, dense thorn forests, evergreen floodplain forests, gallery woodlands and pine forests. Nest in tree cavities. They eat Pine seeds, new leaves, palm fruits berries, pods, fruits, acorns and buds. Occasionally cause crop destruction, especially corn crops.

Length is 11 to 13 inches. Weight is 400-600 grams. Males are generally larger than females and have larger heads and beaks. Eyes of juveniles are brown while eyes of adults are orange-yellow. Juveniles have a small yellow front that gradually increases in size with age until approximately 3-5 years when the yellow extends to the shoulders. Yellow on the head, neck and legs will become more extensive until approximately 30 years old in some individuals.
Double yellow-headed amazons can probably live up to 50-60 years or more. Little is known about their life span in captivity. Breeding age is approximately 3-5 years.

**Personality** - Double yellow-headed amazons are one of the most popular of the neotropical parrots. They are well known for their talking ability. They are intelligent, inquisitive birds and remain relatively tame longer than most amazons. Mature birds, especially males may become aggressive. They are relatively common in captivity and often available for pets. They are active by nature and have a tendency toward obesity if closely confined.

**Activities** – Double yellow-headed Amazons should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew. In order to ensure safety companion amazons should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young amazons should be socialized to many people and exposed to a variety of situations such as new cages, toys, visits to the veterinarian, handling by friends, wing and nail clips, etc. to avoid fear of novel situations. They need to have some space for exercise.

**Dietary needs** - Amazons should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee Exact is an excellent staple diet for amazons. Weight should be monitored and if they become too heavy food volumes should be restricted to prevent obesity. The diet should be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Feed approximately ¼ cup of Kaytee exact and 1/4 cup of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. Monitor food intake. Overfeeding leads to pickiness, selective feeding and wasteful throwing of food. Because of their tendency to obesity, Double yellow-headed Amazons should be fed no sunflower or safflower seeds or seeds should only be given as treats. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

Birds, which are fed only seeds, will need vitamin and mineral supplementation to prevent deficiency diseases. Preferably vitamins should be added to soft food rather than putting in the water as this dilutes the vitamins, water soluble vitamins break down rapidly and water with sweetened and vitamins is a good growth medium for bacteria. Vitamin added to the outside of seeds is usually lost when the bird shells the seeds.
**Grooming** - Routine bathing or showering is vital to maintaining good plumage and skin condition. Birds can be misted and allowed to dry in a warm room or in the sun, or gently dried with a blow dryer. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as amazons often fall and injure themselves. Clip only the primary flight feathers and only enough so the bird will glide to the floor. Double yellow-headed Amazons are heavy bodied and care must be taken not to cut too many feathers. Excessive wing clipping can result in injuries from falling.

**Identification** - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and assist in maintenance of medical and genealogical records. Many breeders apply closed legs bands when chicks are young. While they present a slight risk of entrapment closed bands are preferable to no identification, especially for breeding birds. Microchips, which can be implanted into the muscle or under the skin, are a reliable means of identification but require electronic readers to verify identification. Tattoos may be used but often fade or become illegible with time. Footprints may have some application in identification.

**Sexing** - Double yellow-headed amazons are monomorphic (sexes are not visually distinct). Surgical sexing or DNA sexing must be used to confirm sex of breeders. Males often have red scalloping on the nape that is seldom seen in females.

**Housing** - Double yellow-headed amazons are very active and should be provided the largest cage that space and budget allows. They should also be supplied with a retreat to guard against insecurity and fear responses. Ideally the cage should provide room for flight. Durable cage construction is not as critical as it is for macaws and cockatoos. Locks or escape proof latches may be necessary on cages. Ideally the bird will have an outdoor cage as well to allow playtime in the fresh-air and sunlight.
**Breeding** – Double yellow-headed Amazons are easier to breed in captivity than most Amazons. In North America Double yellow-headed amazons breed predominantly in the spring and have a limited breeding season typically from February or March to June or July. Clutch size is typically 3 to 4 eggs. One inch by one inch by 14 gauge welded wire, or 1” X ½ “ welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 8 feet long suspended 4 feet above the ground or floor.

Nest Box - Grandfather style wooden boxes can be used. Size should be approximately 12” x 12” x 24”.

Incubation period is approximately 24-26 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 10 to 12 weeks of age. Double yellow-headed Amazons are relatively easy to hand-rear. Most hand rearing formulas can be used successfully. Kaytee Exact regular or macaw hand rearing formulas are good choices.

**Aggression**
Male Double yellow-heads are occasionally aggressive toward their mates. Clipping the wings of the male prior to the breeding season may be necessary in aggressive individuals to help the female to escape in case the male becomes aggressive. Males in breeding condition can be very aggressive to keepers.

Double yellow-heads can be noisy when in breeding condition. When breeding amazons, noise and proximity to neighbors must be considered.

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**Common diseases and disorders**
- Obesity
- Feather-picking
- Psittacosis
- Poor eating habits
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Toe necrosis
Conservation Status - Endangered - Double yellow-headed Amazons are listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) but have been proposed for listing on Appendix I. Wild population is probably less than 7000 birds and the population is fragmented. It is also declining due to habitat destruction and capture for export and use for pets locally in other areas. In the past large numbers were traded and used locally for pets. Double yellow-headed amazons are relatively common in the United States and in great demand as pets.