

© 2008 By Jacqui Glisson Responsible Parenting

Well its that time of year again: breeding season for macaws. Max my blue and yellow macaw has become all territorial and there is a lot of mutual preening, feeding and nesting behaviour going on. Macaws are monogamous, choosing just one mate for life. I love watching Max and Jessie together at this time of year. He absolutely adores her and just the sight of her makes his face blush blood-red. He follows Jessie everywhere and just about falls off his perch with consternation if anyone else goes near her. The down side is that I am no longer a welcome guest at the party. I value my digits so I leave them in peace. This gives me time to agonise about what to do with the eggs once they are laid. People are often surprised that this is not an easy decision. Ensuring the baby birds go to the right home is an agonising process. When I was younger I was tempted to give them to people who had a love for birds but an older and wiser friend cautioned me against that. He said “ If they can’t afford to buy the macaws they can afford to keep them.” At the time that seemed a bit harsh but after 14 years of living with macaws the wisdom of those words have become obvious. Macaws are expensive to buy. I bought both my birds in South Africa where we were living at the time and the two of them cost the equivalent of € 1100. That was just the start. One of the things that attracted me to that particular breed of parrot was their size but big birds need space. Max measures 97 cm from the top of his beak to the end of his tail. So where your mates are paying € 30 for a cage for their budgie, you will be more likely to pay closer to € 600 for one that is big enough to accommodate your macaws. Macaws are noisy and I don’t mean gentle canary song. When a breeding pair sense danger the noise they make will leave your eardrums ringing for some time after they stop screeching. This means that not only do you need to buy a cage big enough for them to move around in, you also need to buy a house with enough land around it to avoid annoying your neighbours. Don’t think you can live in a housing estate and own a macaw. You will quickly find yourself removed from the Christmas card list. Then there is the long levity. The average life span for a macaw is between 25-30 years. That means that you will be stuck with this pet for a very long time. For those of us willing to make the sacrifices involved its wonderful to have a pet that you don’t have to say goodbye to for a very long time. However if you are thinking of buying a parrot for your lonely grandmother, be prepared to inherit the bird once she passes on. The bird will outlive her. This is not ideal. Parrots are highly intelligent and very loyal. Moving them from one owner to another is the equivalent of sending a 5 year old from foster home to foster home. So think before you buy. This is a decision that is hard to reverse. Longevity has its other problems. I bought Max when I was 26 years old and single. In the 14 years that he and then Jessie have been a part of my life I have got married and immigrated to Ireland, all changes my macaws and I had to adapt to. Decisions that have to be made over time often include consideration of the parrots. For instance, my choice of husband. Max being my first macaw got away with murder. Sometimes at night something would disturb him and the only way to settle him down again was to take him into bed with me. My husband said that big beak was the most effective contraception he had ever seen but he still hung around. So I married him. Had he not liked birds I think things would have turned out very differently. I have heard very sad cases where parrots have had to be given away when new partners or babies arrive because they didn’t get on with the bird. Macaws are very protective and will attack anyone or anything they feel is a threat to you,

regardless of size. In my case Max's loyalty and willingness to sacrifice his own life to protect mine actually saved my life. While we were living in South Africa two armed men broke into my home one night. Max launched himself at them claws scratching and beak squawking with such fury that they ran for safety. I don't know what they had in mind but it was thanks to my precious birds that I never had to find out. That was one of the events that triggered the move overseas. The choice of country was dictated by quarantine regulations for the birds. Ireland and the UK were the two places where quarantine was not too long or stressful for the birds. So your birds will have to endure a lot of changes with you as your life moves on. Consider them in your decisions and you will have many happy rewarding years together. Macaws are very protective and will attack anyone or anything they feel is a threat to you, regardless of size. In my case Max's loyalty and willingness to sacrifice his own life to protect mine actually saved my life. While we were living in South Africa two armed men broke into my home one night. Max launched himself at them claws scratching and beak squawking with such fury that they ran for safety. I don't know what they had in mind but it was thanks to my precious birds that I never had to find out. That was one of the events that triggered the move overseas. The choice of country was dictated by quarantine regulations for the birds. Ireland and the UK were the two places where quarantine was not too long or stressful for the birds. So your birds will have to endure a lot of changes with you as your life moves on. Consider them in your decisions and you will have many happy rewarding years together.