

BREEDING THE WHITE-EARED BULBUL

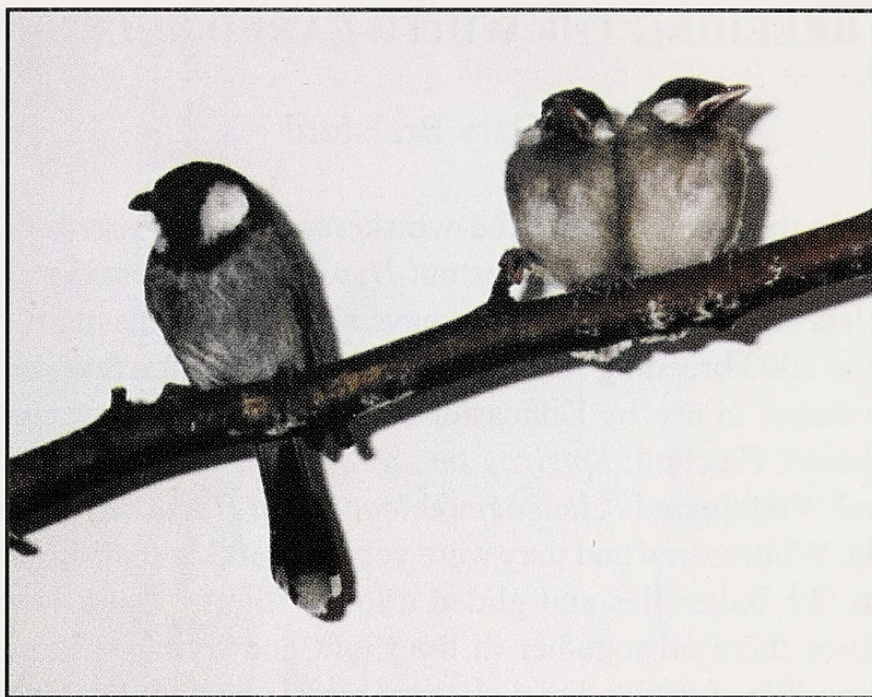
by Gary Bralsford

Having in the past bred the Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* and had near misses with the Chestnut *Hypsipetes castanotus* and White-headed *H.leucocephalus*, I decided to have a pair of bulbuls in my collection again for the 2003 breeding season. I looked around for a few weeks until I saw that a dealer in nearby Doncaster had a few different species for sale: Red-whiskered, Finchbill *Spizixos semitorques*, White-headed, Chinese *P. sinensis* and White-eared *P. leucogenys leucotis* or *P. leucotis* (see below). I watched the White-eared and they were very graceful in their flight patterns, very much like butterflies and glided a lot in flight. There were about a dozen (12) of them all together in the flight and trying to sex them was nearly impossible. I decided to pick three birds; one with large white cheek patches and two with a little less white on the cheeks.

My birds have hardly any crest to speak of, white cheek patches and an otherwise black head (see photo). Whistler (1941) and Woodcock (1980) treated this bird as a subspecies of the White-cheeked, calling both the White-cheeked Bulbul, *P. l. leucogenys* and *P. l. leucotis*. The latter is described as being found in light woodland, gardens, the neighbourhood of towns and villages, scrub and mangrove. Grewal, Harvey, Pfister (2002), however, treat it as a full species, calling it the White-eared Bulbul (White-cheeked Bulbul) *P. leucotis*, a common breeding resident of the plains of Pakistan and north-west India, that also occurs in western Asia. It eats berries and other fruits and will take insects and nectar, and in captivity will take a coarse softbill food such as Bogenia or Nutriluxe Red.

My birds were put in a flight in my shed. The flight measures 8ft long x 4ft wide x 6ft high (approx. 2.4m long x 1.2m wide x 1.8m high) and all three birds were released into it at the beginning of March. I had fixed up several nest-boxes and wicker baskets, and hung up two wallflower baskets and two hanging baskets all of which were filled with indoor plants. I had also put wicker nest pans in each basket. The bulbuls settled down and came into breeding condition fairly quickly. Soon afterwards I noticed a few feathers scattered on the floor and on watching the three bulbuls, noticed two had paired-up, isolating the other one. I removed the odd one, which proved to be a male, that as soon as it was caged began to have singing contests with the male in the flight.

Having decided that the two in the flight were a true pair, I provided lots of coconut fibre and horse hair in salad racks hung on the flight walls. The female started carrying nest material to one of the wicker baskets and within three days had finished making a nest. No eggs were laid in it, instead the



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The female with two of the three chicks (August 7th 2003).

female started to build another nest in a half-open nest-box fixed to the back wall. I was a little worried by this, as the box was close to the next flight in which my Red-crested Cardinals *Paroaria coronata* had a nest with three eggs. The bulbuls laid four eggs in the half-open box at the end of April and the female did most of the sitting, with the male taking his turn at night. They sat for 14 days.

All but one of the eggs hatched, the fourth was fertile but the chick was dead in the shell. I provided waxworms, crickets and white skinned mealworms. All went well until the fifth day, when I found one chick dead on the feeding platform, followed by another the next day and the third on the seventh day. All three had full crops but around their beaks there was bruising and blood, as though the parents had tried to force feed them. I came to the conclusion that the chicks had died from e.coli or something similar and had been removed from the nest after they had died rather than having been thrown out of the nest because the parents had become bored or because the diet I had provided was inadequate.

The parents went back to nest three weeks later after I had moved the nest-box to the side of the flight away from where the cardinals were nesting. The bulbuls laid another four eggs and again sat for 14 days. All four eggs hatched. One chick died on the second day and the other three were all reared to maturity. This time I provided the parents with waxworms and crickets but decided against giving them mini mealworms, instead I provided buffalo worms and I think these did the trick and led to the successful rearing of the chicks.

The pair went to nest a further three times and I eventually ended up with six young bulbuls, which I fitted with size K rings. I believe bulbuls

are a species of softbill that we in aviculture could breed in sufficient numbers to maintain self-sustaining populations. I have recently found an unrelated female, so this breeding season I will try to breed from two pairs of White-eared Bulbuls.

With restrictions on the import of birds from Asia and other parts of the world, we need to specialise in particular species. As I mentioned in my account of breeding the Chestnut-backed Thrush *Zoothera dohertyi* (*Avicultural Magazine* Vol.109, No.4, pp. 150-153 (2003)), I have chosen mostly Asiatic softbills. Among those I specialise in are bulbuls. They are relatively easy to cater for both with regard to their diet and housing, with the best birds to begin with being species such as the Red-whiskered and the Chinese. If you keep one pair to a flight, you have a better chance of breeding bulbuls. I tried showing bulbuls but found that their bouncy personalities were a disadvantage when showing them. Bulbuls will not settle down quietly for long periods, in addition to which they are soft feathered (like the closely related leafbirds *Chloropsis* spp.) and will often damage their tail feathers.

I hope more aviculturists will keep bulbuls. Here in the UK, Asian softbills will often start breeding in March and may have three or four clutches. They are likely to start to moult in late July into August, and if you are planning to show current-year-bred birds, they should look great by early September.

References

- Grewal, B., Harvey, B., Pfister, O. 2002. *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of India Including Nepal, Sri Lanka, The Maldives, Pakistan, Bangladesh & Bhutan*. Christopher Helm, London.
- Whistler, H. 1941. *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds*. Third Edition Revised and Enlarged. Gurney and Jackson, London and Edinburgh.
- Woodcock, M. 1980. *Collins Handguide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal*. Collins, London.

Surprisingly perhaps there appears to be no record of Pycnonotus leucogenys leucotis or Pycnonotus leucotis having previously been bred in Great Britain or Ireland. If you know of an earlier breeding please inform the Hon. Secretary.

BREEDING THE RED BIRD OF PARADISE AT CHESTER ZOO

by Roger Wilkinson, Wayne McLeod, Darren Langford
and Paul Morris

The Red Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea rubra* occurs only on the islands of Waigeo, Batanta, Saonek and may possibly also be found on Gemien off the north-west coast of Papua (the Indonesian governed western half of New Guinea; formerly Irian Jaya). The Red Bird of Paradise lives in lowland forest and is considered near-threatened in the wild because it has a very restricted distribution and is currently threatened by both habitat destruction and trapping (BirdLife International, 2000). Birds are trapped for their skins and from recent reports are also entering the illegal wild bird trade.

History of birds of paradise at Chester Zoo

Chester has a long history of working with birds of paradise. In May 1965 a consignment from Sir Edward Hallstrom of 29 birds of paradise of 10 different species was received at Chester Zoo. This consignment comprised of four Princess Stephanie's Astrapias *Astrapia stephaniae*, four Ribbon-tailed Astrapias *A. mayeri*, five Magnificent Birds of Paradise *Cicinnurus magnificus*, pairs of Superb Birds of Paradise *Lophorina superba*, Raggiana Birds of Paradise *P. raggiana* and Blue Birds of Paradise *P. rudolphi*, two male Carola's Parotias *Parotia carolae*, four male Lawes' Parotias *P. lawesii*, three Brown Sicklebills *Epimachus meyeri* and one Loria's Bird of Paradise *Cnemophilus loria*.

A further consignment of birds of paradise, also from Sir Edward Hallstrom, was received in December 1966. Birds then received were three Raggiana Birds of Paradise, two male Blue Birds of Paradise, pairs of Ribbon-tailed Astrapias, Lawes' Parotias, Superb Birds of Paradise and Brown Sicklebills, as well as five more Magnificent Birds of Paradise and one Carola's Parotia.

An avicultural highpoint in this period was the successful fledging of the Superb Bird of Paradise in June 1968 (Timmis, 1968, 1970). One of the female Brown Sicklebills built nests but no eggs were laid (Timmis, 1972). A male Lawes' Parotia was transferred in 1970 to Tierpark Berlin. In February 1971 four of the remaining 11 birds of the Hallstrom consignments were stolen, leaving Chester with three Lawes' Parotias and only single examples of four other species.

In 1972 Chester Zoo acquired a female Red Bird of Paradise and in 1973 received a second female Red Bird of Paradise and two Wilson's Birds of Paradise *C. respublica* from Rotterdam Zoo. One of the Wilson's Birds



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