

## CONSERVING THE RED-VENTED COCKATOO

By Rosemary Low (Gran Canaria)

The Philippine or Red-vented Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* is now among the 20 or so most critically endangered parrots in the world. Once widespread throughout the islands of the Philippines, not until two or three years ago was it realised that this distinctive cockatoo had suffered a massive population decline as a result of deforestation and trapping. Between the 1930s and the 1980s, 80% of the forests were destroyed - and the destruction continues. Now the cockatoo is known to survive only on the island of Palawan.

This cockatoo has never been common in aviculture. Export of wild-caught birds has not been permitted since it was placed on Appendix 1 of CITES over a year ago. When it was exported mortality in recently trapped birds was high. Unfortunately, females were always in the minority and the number of breeding pairs in existence is very few.

The first step towards preserving this species in aviculture was taken last year with the formation of an EEP (European breeding programme). Everyone who keeps this species (even only a single bird) is urged to contact the co-ordinator of this EEP, Marc Boussekey, Espace Zoologique, St. Martin-La-Plaine, 42800 Rive-de-Gier, France. Recording the location of as many birds as possible is now very important.

This breeding effort has been linked with a conservation programme for this species in the wild. An agreement was signed recently between Espace Zoologique and the government of the Philippines. The zoo funded and produced a poster in English and in two Philippine languages for distribution throughout the islands. It emphasises that the cockatoo must be protected. Prints of the poster artwork, beautifully depicting a small flock in the wild, are available in a limited edition of 200. The price is 100FF each (about £12.50 plus postage and packing) payable to Association Zoologique at the above address. All profits from the sale of this print will go directly to the conservation of the Red-vented Cockatoo.

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## HUSBANDRY AND REPRODUCTION OF THE RED-FACED MOUSEBIRD

By Michael Macek and Bruce Bohmke (St. Louis Zoo.)

Mousebirds represent the order *Coliiformes*, the only order of birds endemic to Africa (Fry, 1988). According to Fry (1988) this order is comprised of two genera, *Colius* (four species) and *Urocolius* (two species). All six species have been kept and bred in captivity, mostly those of the genus *Colius* but few have bred consistently. The following observations are of the Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus*.

The St. Louis Zoo acquired six wild-caught Red-faced Mousebirds in December 1985. The birds were placed in a large open flight aviary where Speckled Mousebirds *Colius striatus* have bred successfully. The aviary measures approximately 9 m x 6 m x 6 m, is well planted and receives natural light. By 1988 only one pair remained which bred for the first time in May of that year. Their first nesting resulted in two chicks but their subsequent breeding attempts were unsuccessful until 1990 when they were moved to a smaller aviary.

The birds are offered a mixture of chopped fruit (apple, orange, banana, grape), diced canned vegetables (corn, black-eyed peas, carrots, and beets), Apple Jungle Pellets (Marion Zoological Inc.), and insects (crickets, waxworms, and mealworms). Colour is maintained by the use of a 10% canthaxanthin solution (Quintrex) mixed with the food. Food and water are offered once a day unless young are being reared when a fresh food supply is provided in the afternoon. The birds feed from an elevated platform but willingly come to the ground if a platform is not provided.

The smaller enclosure measures 3 m x 3 m x 3.7 m. It also receives natural light. This aviary has a piano wire front of which the wires are spaced 1.25 cm apart. Live plants, branches, and honeysuckle vines, in which the birds spend most of their time climbing around, are provided. Small woven baskets (12.7 cm diameter) are normally used for nests although the birds have also built their own from fine grasses and wool. The mousebirds have sometimes shared their aviary with a single Barbary Shrike *Laniarius barbarus* or a Brown-breasted Barbet *Lybius melanopterus* both of which were aggressive and were removed. A pair of Cape Thick-knees *Burhinus capensis* now share the aviary with them and as



ground birds present no threat.

Fry (1988) reported seasonal nesting with peaks in late summer and early autumn. In captivity nests have been recorded in every month. Eggs are usually laid 48 hours after the female commences sitting in the nest and chicks have been found 15 days later. Hence, the incubation period is somewhere between 12 and 14 days. This agrees with Fry (1988) and observations of the Blue-faced Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus* by Gibson (1979). Clutch size averages 1.76 eggs (1 - 3 eggs, 26 clutches). Fry (1988) found wild clutches averaged 2.55 eggs (1 - 7 eggs, 80 clutches). It has been suggested that mousebirds are co-operative and sometimes communal breeders (Fry, 1988) and therefore these large clutches may be the result of more than one female laying in the same nest. Only one reproductive pair has been housed in the same aviary at the St. Louis Zoo. Eggs of *Colius* species are uniformly white (Fry, 1988; Grant, 1962) but the two species of *Urocolius* produce white eggs with spots and scrawls of reddish brown.

Both the male and the female and sometimes a helper (a juvenile from a previous clutch) incubate the eggs. However, the female does most of the incubation. When a helper incubates it always sits beside one of the adults. The eggs are often left unattended for brief periods when the female leaves the nest to feed. The male has never been observed feeding the female on the nest as was the Blue-naped Mousebird by Gibson (1979). Unsuccessful nests are always abandoned after 15 days incubation although Berman (1985) reported Speckled Mousebirds incubating for as long as 22 days before abandoning the nest.

Normally one or two young hatch (of 16 nests, six resulted in two chicks and 10 resulted in one. The chicks are fed by both parents. The juvenile helpers defend the nest and brood the chicks but have never been observed feeding them. Chicks leave the nest when they are 10 - 14 days old. They return to the nest frequently for the first day or two but by the fourteenth day are fully fledged. The female often returns to the nest and begins laying another clutch within 48 hours of the chicks fledging. The chicks are then fed by the non-incubating adult but soon begin picking up food on their own. Because of their co-operative nesting habits, the chicks are left with the adults until at least one subsequent clutch has been reared. This period can range from 8 weeks to almost 6 months. The carrying capacity of the aviary seems to be approximately six birds as reproduction has decreased or stopped altogether when this number has been exceeded for a while.



In 1991 a second pair of mousebirds were housed in an off-exhibit enclosure which measured approximately 1.5 m x 1 m x 1m and was suspended 1.2 m from the floor. Visual barriers were placed on two sides of the cage as the birds appeared more easily disturbed in this smaller aviary. The pair consisted of a 2½ year old male from the original pair and a 3 year old female from Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington. Three chicks were reared by this pair. To date the St. Louis Zoo has produced 24 Red-faced Mousebirds.

Mousebirds are unique. They are relatively hardy and will breed in a variety of exhibit types. They can be kept in groups the number in which depends on the size of the exhibit. Although they compete with some perching birds for space they will co-habit with ground species. All six species are currently kept in captivity. Recent ISIS abstracts report none being maintained in sufficient numbers to support a long-term population, with the possible exception of the Speckled Mousebird, and the genetic viability of this population is uncertain. If this order of birds is to be maintained in captivity it may be necessary to concentrate on one species giving particular attention to its genetic management.

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#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

With reference to Mr. Paul Irven's article in Volume 99, Number 3. He wishes to know if Cape Barren Geese have been kept with any other mammals or birds. For the last 12 years I have kept a pair in an enclosure measuring 250 ft x 50 ft ( 76.25 m x 15.25 m ) with a pair of Polish Mute Swans and two pairs of Parma Wallabies, and all of them have bred without problem.

Yours,

Ken. Dolton

\* \* \*



## NEWS AND VIEWS

### PHEASANT PIGEONS BRED

Although the Pheasant Pigeon *Otidiphaps nobilis* has been represented in the collection at Birdpark Avifauna (Alphen aan den Rijn) for 12 years, it was only in 1993 that these striking-looking birds were bred there. Purple-tailed Fruit Pigeons *Ducula rufigaster* and Black-chinned Fruit Doves *Ptilinopus lechlancheri* also reared young.

Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber* enjoyed a successful breeding season and by mid-September 33 young had been hatched, while five Straw-necked Ibis *Carphibis spinicollis* were also hatched. Other species to breed in the park during 1993 included Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*, East African Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum gibbericeps*, Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* and African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*.

In the park's Tropical House, White-collared Kingfishers *Halcyon chloris* laid a second clutch of eggs but only one hatched. A single Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* also fledged.

Hans van der Sluis

\* \* \*

### SUCCESS WITH FRECKLED DUCK

Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa* in The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's Slimbridge collection had an extremely successful breeding season in 1993, producing 23 young. Magpie Geese *Anseranas semipalmata* also bred, while for the first time in more than a decade Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* laid fertile eggs. Ringed Teal *Callonetta leucophrys* and Fairy Bluebirds *Irena puella* reared young in the Tropical House

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### KAGU REINTRODUCTION

The flightless Kagu *Rhynochetus jubatus*, New Caledonia's national symbol, is the subject of a reintroduction programme at the Provincial Park of Rivière Bleue.

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### FIRST WITH BROADBILLS

The world's first successful captive breeding of the Lesser Green broadbill *Calyptomena viridis* has taken place at San Diego



Zoo in 1993. Two chicks of the northern subspecies *continentis* left the nest on 13th and 16th August, respectively. Curator of Birds, David Rimlinger feels the success was partly the result of removing the cock from the pair's enclosure as soon as the hen laid her eggs - thus creating a less stressful environment. The eggs were incubated for 17 days in a domed nest made of palm fibres, Spanish moss and goat hair.

\* \* \*

## KESTRELS PROSPER

More than 200 Mauritius Kestrels *Falco punctatus*, including at least 42 breeding pairs, are now flying free in three areas of Mauritius - the Bambou Mountains, Moka Mountains and Black River Gorge. When the Mauritius Kestrel Conservation Programme began in 1973, only four individuals remained in the wild.

\* \* \*

## LAMMERGEIER PROJECT

The Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis* is sparsely distributed throughout Kenya, with a maximum of about 20 - 30 pairs. The best known and most easily observed pair used to nest on the main rock-face in what is now Hell's Gate National Park, eight miles south-east of Lake Naivasha. However, breeding there ceased in 1975 and in 1983 the pair disappeared, probably driven away by the substantial amount of human activity close to the nest site.

Now, Simon Thomsett hopes to stop rock climbing and similar pursuits in the immediate vicinity - as well as perhaps enlarging the nest ledge and hacking back some young Lammergeiers, possibly in the next two years. First, though, he must overcome opposition. He has been asked either to relocate the proposed nest site or allow climbing to continue on the rock-face. Rightly, no doubt, he feels that such activities should themselves be moved elsewhere if his plan is to succeed.

Simon has undertaken rescue work with other birds of prey, including completing recently a similar programme with the rare Madagascar Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*. Any member who can offer help or support should contact: Simon Thomsett, P.O. Box 42818, Nairobi, Kenya.

Malcolm Ellis

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## IBIS REDISCOVERED

Two specimens of the Giant Ibis *Thaumatibis gigantea* have been observed in Laos by members of the Laos 92/93 Expedition, joint winners in the Tropical Rain Forest category of the 1992 ICBP/FFPS Conservation Expedition Competition. The species had not been seen for 30 years.

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## FIRST CAPTIVE HONEYCREEPER

A young Crested Honeycreeper *Palmeria dolei*, dislodged from its nest during a storm, was taken to the Olinda Endangered Species Propagation Centre on Maui when efforts to restore the two-weeks old nestling to its parents failed. It is the first bird of the species held in captivity and reports say that efforts are to be made to obtain a mate for it.

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## LICURI PALM SCHEME

Plans have been made to plant 20,000 - 30,000 licuri palm trees in Bahia, eastern Brazil. The nuts of the licuri palm are the main food of the rare and endangered Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari*, of which just some 65 or so are known to be living in the wild in thorny scrubland in the Brazilian state of Bahia. The macaws have to fly considerable distances to their feeding grounds where each bird is reckoned to eat about 350 nuts each day.

As land is cleared for cattle, the palms often are left standing - but only so their dry leaves can be used as fodder during the long dry season. Not surprisingly, the continual loss of leaves causes the palms to deteriorate and some die. In areas where goats range, few seedlings and young palms manage to regenerate. Forced to forage even further afield, the macaws may even descend to the ground in search of food. They become increasingly easy targets for hunters, who may shoot them for food or try to capture them.

For a donation of £10 (US \$20) sent to 'A Palm for a Parrot', The World Parrot Trust, Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HY, England, the donor will receive an inscribed certificate suitable for framing. The story of Lear's Macaw and its struggle to survive is described on the back of the certificate.

Malcolm Ellis

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## SET-ASIDE VICTIMS

A report in *New Scientist* says that in the UK hundreds of thousands of birds' eggs and nestlings were destroyed in 1993 because the government allowed farmers to start ploughing set-aside fields in order to control weeds at the height of the breeding season in May. Several species, including Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Skylark *Alauda arvensis* were attracted to nest in more than 240,000 ha of the land left fallow under the scheme.

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## STUDBOOK PUBLISHED

The 1992 European Studbook for the Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*, recently published by Rotterdam Zoo, shows a captive population of 135 birds (64.64.7).

East African Crowned Cranes *Balearica pavonina gibbericeps*, enjoyed an excellent breeding season in 1993 being hatched in at least nine collections with a total of over 30 reared.

Dave Coles

\* \* \*

## VISITS TO MEMBERS' COLLECTIONS

After a positive start, visits to members' collections have failed to attract much support. A visit to Flimwell Bird Park last year was initially of interest to nine members - but on the day, not one turned up.

This was both upsetting and disappointing for Dr. and Mrs. Player who had gone to considerable trouble to arrange tea and to organise a good day for the Avicultural Society.

Can we therefore ask members, if they take a ticket for one of these visits and subsequently find they are unable to attend, please advise their host to that effect. The Society is entirely dependent on the generosity of members who are willing to open their collections to fellow enthusiasts and their kindness should not be abused.

A visit to three Essex collections planned for September was cancelled due to lack of support.

\* \* \*



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Despatch will be approximately 12 weeks from receipt of payment. Please mark your envelope "Blue Snow Chat Print" and forward request, as soon as possible, printing your name and address clearly in block capitals to: The Society Co-ordinator, The Avicultural Society, c/o Bristol Zoological Gardens, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 3HA, England.

February 1994

## **Centenary Souvenirs**

To mark the Society's Centenary year, commemorative ties and head squares are offered to members subject to demand. The ties are of woven polyester in dark blue with a single motif in white depicting a Cock-of-the-Rock and the words Avicultural Society 1894 - 1994, at a cost of £9.99 including postage and packing. Similar ladies' head squares are also available for £7.99 including postage and packing. There is a minimum order requirement from the manufacturers of 150 (ties) and 24 (squares) and delivery would be in approximately 10 weeks. Please indicate your interest as quickly as possible to: The Society Co-ordinator, The Avicultural Society, c/o Bristol Zoological Gardens, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 3HA, England.

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Low, Rosemary. 1994. "Conserving The Red-vented Cockatoo." *The Avicultural magazine* 100(1), 48–48.

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