

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BEHAVIOUR AND CARE OF THE CHINESE PAINTED QUAIL

by Janice L. Pappas

For almost 15 years, I have been involved in aviculture. After reading a magazine article about 'Button' Quail, I became interested in raising these birds. Of course, I soon found out that the article actually referred to the Chinese Painted Quail *Excalfactoria chinensis*. I did extensive research at university libraries trying to find out everything I could about these fascinating little birds. This led me to articles in the *Avicultural Magazine* by E.G.B. Meade-Waldo (1898), C.J.O. Harrison (1968, 1973), C.J.O. Harrison, *et al.* (1965), J.J. Yealland (1962), and G.E.S. Robbins (1979).

From earlier times to the present, my experience with these quail has been very rewarding. I have over the years kept records of the behaviour of my Chinese Painted Quail. Here I would like briefly to share my observations of what I consider to be contrary or unexpected behaviour by these birds and some of my experiences caring for them.

One of the more interesting aspects involved one of my silver females. On a number of occasions, she would give the tid-bitting call. Her male partner in the same cage would stop and look at her. I cannot say if he was confused or merely pausing. To date, she is the only non-male to enunciate this call. In contrast, I had a silver male (brother of the aforementioned female) which would give a call of high-pitched notes in rapid succession. This is the same call I have heard many times coming from my female quail when they were incubating eggs and their male partner came near. Another silver female (the mother of the aforementioned female and male) had been plucked down the middle of her back by another quail at the breeder's home where I bought her. After pairing her with my oldest silver male, she proceeded to do the same to him in the very same way. A third, normal-coloured female, was expert at aiming for the small door to her cage. The door was about two-thirds of the way up from the bottom of the 2½ft (76cm) high cage. If I left the door unlatched, she would judge the opening perfectly and hop out of the cage. I have a silver male which likes to ring a little bell suspended on a wire attached to his cage. He jumps up on his little platform where he can reach this bell and pecks at it to ring it.

I have talked with breeders who have had a great deal of trouble with females that will not brood their eggs. Over the years, I have been fortunate in that most of my females have brooded their eggs. In fact, one broody

female raised three hatchlings all by herself. In other cases, I have assisted the female with her duties.

In terms of caring for them, I have seen many health conditions manifested in my little birds. I would like to recount some of these conditions and the treatments involved in trying to keep my quail in top shape. With the females, I have had to be vigilant in making sure that they consume oyster shell or calcium supplement to offset the constant egg laying that occurs.

The very first female I had died as a result of insufficient calcium, despite being fed this supplement, as well as a superb diet. Upon examination by a veterinarian, she was found to have reduced bone mass. She was losing weight and not metabolizing calcium because this was going to producing the eggshells. In addition, the female was not metabolizing nitrogen. Consequently, she was accumulating nitrogen in the form of ammonia in her body. The ammonia acted as a toxin which caused her death. Her behaviour belied her condition, for she acted normally and produced perfect eggs. I only discovered this problem because I found her in her cage with a broken wing. Since then, I have had another female which laid well-developed eggs and two which produced thin-shelled eggs. All three died as a result of becoming egg-bound.

More recently, another female was acting lethargic and had, I discovered, a swelling in her abdomen. Over the previous few months, I had noticed that the female, which was only a little over one year old, was laying eggs with thin shells. I decided that she had an impacted oviduct. I gave her an antibiotic which reduced the swelling considerably but not entirely. I read in a veterinary manual that peritonitis may result from an impacted oviduct. After I tried for about two weeks to remedy her situation, she died.

In isolated instances, I have had quail infected by pox via mosquitoes, infected by *Capillaria*, and develop tumours. The *Capillaria* infection was in most instances treated successfully with an anthelmintic drug. Whenever I have had a quail develop a bacterial infection, treatment with various antibiotics has produced recovery. Whenever I have a sick quail, initially, I place the bird in an isolated, comfortable setting, with a heat source. I feed the bird an electrolyte solution to remedy dehydration and a soya-based baby formula to increase calorific intake. Subsequently, I feed the bird a peanut butter/cornmeal crumbled mixture which also has vitamin and mineral supplements added. I have also found that small, whole, cooked peas are an excellent dietary supplement.

I would like to conclude by mentioning my two male quail which would be considered to have been elderly birds. A short time prior to its death,

one developed cataracts and therefore could no longer see its food. The other ate only mealworms for the last two and a half months of its life. It had stopped eating seeds and was losing weight, however, when I offered mealworms, it chose these as its means of subsistence. Both males lived to be about six years old. Neither was interested in crowing during the last few months of their lives, despite being active, happy, little birds.

Chinese Painted Quail are some of the nicest birds to raise. Their interesting behaviour and calls are a constant source of delight. Because of their diminutive size, their health problems are not always easy to treat. However, it is well worth the effort to keep and raise these wonderful little birds.

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THE RED-BROWED AMAZON PARROT EEP SCHEME

by Roger G. Sweeney

The Red-browed Amazon Parrot *Amazona rhodocorytha* is endemic to Brazil, where it is found in a narrow strip along the eastern coast. It is found in the state of Alagoas and from Bahia and eastern Minas Geras, south locally to Rio de Janeiro. Its preferred habitat is generally lowland humid forest, although it has also been recorded at altitudes of up to 1,000m (3,280ft) in undisturbed forests. Most reports refer to this species being located mainly in primary forest, with little sign that it can adapt to areas which have suffered large scale disturbance.

The primary threat to its survival comes from long-term habitat clearance. A trade in wild-caught birds existed in the past, but Brazilian national legislation has now stopped any trade in the exportation of these birds from Brazil. A local trade in nestlings for sale as pets has continued in recent years but only in very small numbers and this is also being more tightly controlled now. Probably the most clear need for *in situ* conservation of this species is to secure the protection of some of the key regions of its habitat. The most important region, Bahia, is protected now but other parts of its range are still vulnerable to disturbance. The Red-browed Amazon measures about 36cm (14in) in overall length and weighs about 450-480g, making it one of the largest *Amazona* species found in mainland South America. The coloration of this species is particularly beautiful. As with most *Amazona* species the main body plumage is green, with the most striking feature being the lovely head coloration. The forehead and crown are red, and the cheeks and throat are blue. Between the red of the forehead and blue of the lower face is an area of yellow which covers the lores. The extent of this yellow is highly variable, some birds have only a few yellow feathers, while others have all the lores and the top of the cheeks completely yellow. In our experience of a large number of these birds, the amount of yellow varies from bird to bird and is not an indication of sexual dimorphism.

The Red-browed Amazon was only ever exported in small numbers and has always been rare in aviculture. The captive population in Europe is therefore based on only a small number of founder birds, which have been in captivity for many years. Only a very small number of these have reproduced during this long period of captivity. The small number of founder birds which have bred, have done so consistently for several years, but have produced a first generation population which is very closely related. These first generation birds were sold by the main private keeper who was breeding this species, often with little information about their exact parentage. As these birds have passed from keeper to keeper, often a new



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