



Breeding the Java Hill Mynah

By Lynda Scott, Naples, FL

BEGINNING OF PART TWO

[Editor's Note: The last issue of Watchbird carried Part I of this account of a breeding pair of Java Hill Mynahs (*Gracula r. religiosa*). It told how the pair was located and purchased, the special aviary built for them and their first successful breeding and hatching of two chicks. Part II now follows with the pair going to nest again. SLD]

The pair laid their second clutch on July 20th, 21th and 22nd. Again, two babies were hatched on August 2nd and August 3rd, the third egg being infertile. This time the parents fed them for 18 days.

The third clutch was laid on September 4th and 5th. This time, only two eggs. On September 18th and 19th, the parents threw the eggs out of the nest to the ground. They seemed to know how to count to 14 days. The eggs were infertile and they knew it.

We had taken the pair of mynahs into the house the last week in August, shortly before Hurricane Andrew hit southwest Florida. We had been told that the Hurricane would pass directly through Naples and therefore took all our birds inside to ride out the storm. We were extremely lucky as the Hurricane missed us only by 40 miles to the south. We had high winds, some rain and by late afternoon, we were able to return the birds back to their homes outside. We believe we interrupted their breeding cycle and that is why those eggs were infertile.

The fourth clutch was laid on October 13th and 14. Again, only two eggs. I certainly was surprised when I found the first egg that late in the year.

The eggs were fertile but did not hatch due to chilling weather from a northern cold front.

Prolific Parents

We hatched four babies that year and successfully raised all. We certainly felt quite a bit more confident. We also subscribed to the Mynah League newsletter which was started that year by Linda Leger. At that point, we began searching for mynah breeding information and began sharing what we knew with others.

I was also very fortunate to find Phyllis Martin, a renounced bird breeder in Tampa, Florida, who had raised mynahs in the past and is now editor of Cage Bird Hobbyist. It was Leger and Martin who guided me through my first year of breeding mynahs.

In 1993, the pair laid six clutches, beginning on May 27, ending on October 18th. They laid a total of 11 eggs, eight hatched and five lived. We lost one in the nest from a spider bite at five days old and another from the next clutch in the nest at three days old. At that point, we began to take all babies in the house at two to five days old—all judgement calls.

Again, in October, the weather became cool so we took the last two chicks of the season in at 12 hours and 24 hours old. That proved to be a challenge in itself. The brooder was set at 97° F. for the first six days and we gradually reduced the heat as the babies grew older. Humidity was provided as usual and feeding began on an hourly basis, beginning at 7 A.M. and ending at 12 midnight.

The babies were fed handfeeding formula, pedialyte instead of water for

the first three days, with lactobacillus added once a day. The formula has to be very thin for the first three days, becoming gradually thicker as days progress. The formula is fed one drop at a time, waiting until the baby swallows before giving it anymore. It is extremely easy to aspirate a baby at that age. That is exactly what happened to the youngest chick and a lesson learned the hard way.

The chicks stretch their long necks and cry all the time they are eating. This helps them to swallow the food. You can actually see the food going down and no more should be placed in their mouths until the food disappears.

In 1994, the Java Hills produced five clutches of babies. They laid 11 eggs, seven of which were fertile and hatched. I took all the babies out of the nest at two to four days old and all survived. The hen began laying on May 17th and laid her last egg of the year on October 28th.

One Year—Ten Clutches ?

In 1995, February was unusually warm and to our surprise, the now, very experienced parents, laid their first clutch of eggs on February 24 and 25. As a precaution, I left plastic wrapped around their aviary, opening it some in the day and closing it at night and kept a quartz heater running on low to maintain a temperature of 75° F. That year they laid 10 clutches, 20 eggs and hatched nine babies. All the babies were taken in the house at two to four days old. Each year the pair seems to improve with age and experience. Our last baby of 1995 was hatched on December 31. We

wrapped the aviary again with plastic and used two quartz heaters to keep the building warm as the weather was very cold. Again, all survived.

Again, in 1996, they laid their first clutch of eggs in February, their last clutch in December using the same methods as the year before. One chick hatched and was taken in at four days old. Spring was unusually cold and the weather did not actually warm up until May therefore we decided to artificially incubate the next clutch of eggs. We incubated two eggs in a Roll-Ex incubator at 99.5° F. and hatched two chicks exactly 14 days to the hour after they were laid, one each day.

We watched the chicks hatching which was very exciting and then our real work began. They babies were put in small containers, wrapped in warm towels, and not fed until they were six hours old. We gave them only pedalyte the first 24 hours, one drop at a time. They took four drops each feeding. They were kept in the brooder at 99.5° F. overnight then moved to another brooder set at 97° F.

The next day, we mixed a little hand feeding formula and lactobacillus into the pedalyte. They took a few more drops with each feeding and by the end of the week were eating one to two cc's each feeding every two hours. The temperature was then reduced to 93-94° F. We raised eight babies last year.

All incubators, brooders, feeding instruments, pipettes or syringes, cups, containers and towels were disinfected after each use. It is very easy to transmit bacteria to a very young chick. Bacteria are the major cause for poor hatches and survivability in mynahs. Using a good disinfectant that will kill gram positive and gram negative micro-organisms will help to eliminate this problem. After disinfecting feeding instruments and cups, they are placed in a bath of Novasan and kept there until used. Do not wash the Novasan off. We also keep all eggs or clutches separate in different incubators and brooders until the chicks are at least three weeks of age.

Twice a year the parents are treated with Albon 58 suspension for internal parasites as a preventative precaution—a few drops in each juice cup each

day for a week since they live outside.

All babies are closed banded at 10 days of age. We use a size 9½ on the Java Hill Mynahs.

A hand fed Java Hill Mynah makes a wonderful pet. They are curious, attentive, loveable hams. Once they begin speaking, they will talk to anyone, at anytime and probably in your voice. They are capable of actually speaking in many different voices, depending on who lives in the house. They love to imitate sounds, and almost carry on conversations as they grow older. They also enjoy singing. If you sing off tune, so will they so be careful.

We suggest a cage with a minimum length of four feet for hopping back and forth. Height is not as important as length. A healthy mynah is full of energy and needs the exercise. Provide a nest box at one end and a shelf made of cage wire on the other for feeding in dishes. We place a large bowl with about two to three inches of water on the cage bottom for bathing as mynahs love water. They love safe hanging toys, shiny objects and some, a swing.

With good care and diet, most mynahs today should live for 25 years. They begin speaking as young as two months old and continue to learn throughout their life.

Mynah News

Note: for information about the Mynah News, and to be put in touch with other mynah bird lovers contact:

Linda Leger
641 Invader Street
Sulfur, LA 70663
318-527-7641

To register your Java or India Hill Mynah in the official studbook, send a SASE to Gayle Anderson-Nixon P.O. Box 423 Manitou Springs, CO 80829.

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ESTRILDID FINCHES IN AVICULTURE...

Black-bellied and White-bellied Crimson Finches

by Stash and Carol Anne Buckley,
Magnolia, NJ

When discussing avicultural skills needed for breeding Australian finches, one generally has in mind Gouldians (*Chloeba gouldiae*), Shaft-tails (*Poephila acuticauda*), and the like—birds which require a level of talent and expertise on par with those required for eating a hamburger. However, the Black- and White-bellied Crimson Finches (*Neochmia phaeton phaeton* and *Neochmia phaeton evangelinae*) are usually not included in such discussions in this country due to their perceived difficulty in aviculture.

Black-bellied Crimson Finch

The Black-bellied Crimson Finch is not often imported and when it is, commands a high price—\$600 to \$800 a pair. Coupled with the fact that it has a bad reputation as being hard to breed or even keep alive, it is usually ignored by American aviculturists. Also, most of the literature regarding this bird is either misleading or downright incorrect. This has further muddied the water. In fact, most published reports declare this to be a community bird, nests being found in Pandanus Trees and gutters of houses and such. One of the first things one learns when housing these birds is that this is a very aggressive species. The aviculturist walks away scratching his head wondering how his charges can be so belligerent in captivity yet so laid-back in the wild.

Recently we discussed this with Mike Fidler who has done much research in Australia on the behavior of estrildid finches in the wild. We were hoping he could shed some light on this subject. Fidler said that occasionally something will appear in print that is not true and that this misinformation may be repeated over and over

