

Keeping the Ultimate – Fruit Doves

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For many years, fruit doves and pigeons were no more than a picture in a book. A few were kept in zoos, most of which were the Imperial Green and Nutmegs. Very few colorful *Ptilinopus* or *Treron* were ever seen, let alone bred — always the pictures and the longing.

In 1984, I went to Jakarta to try to find another gorgeous pigeon, the Pheasant Pigeon. This bird had not been seen in the U.S. since the early 1930's. As I was told by Jean Delacour, a pair was owned by a Mrs. Black in Long Beach, California. From the picture, it was something to behold . . . but that's another story. When I shipped the Pheasant Pigeons, I also included Celebes Quail Doves, Golden Hearts, White Face Black Cuckoo Doves, and Superb Fruit Doves (*Ptilinopus melanospila*). I knew very little about fruit doves at this time. This was a very interesting challenge. Everyone I talked to said they were difficult to keep and that a chance of breeding them was very poor.

In 1984, I received first the Superb and the Black Nape; in 1985, the Pink Neck (*Ptilinopus porphyrea*) and Black Back (*Ptilinopus cincta*); in 1986, Pink Neck *Treron* (*Vernans*) and Thick Bills (*Treron curvirostra*). Since then I quit importing and have added Jambu (*Ptilinopus jambu*), and Yellow Breasted (*Ptilinopus occipitalis*). In 1991, I added the Beautiful (*Ptilinopus pulchellus*) and Wompoo (*Ptilinopus magnificus*).

It was a pleasant surprise that maintaining fruit doves was not the great problem that I expected. Diet was not that difficult because I practiced what I preach — read, study and think. Little was written on fruit doves, but what was written pointed to a great versatility in food. Where are the birds found? Answer: tree tops, where very little high protein in the form of insects is found. A simple diet of chopped fruit such as apples, pears, peaches, or

any other stone fruit, yams or sweet potatoes, bananas, pomegranates, kiwi or whatever is available. I do not use citrus fruit. I always try to use at least three or more of the above fruits and vegetables. To three parts of fruit I add one part raisins (soaked overnight) and one part cooked brown rice. The fruit is cut up in approximately 1/4" cubes. To this I add a finely ground powder made up of one cup of racing pigeon pellets, 1/2 cup of dry dog food, two tablespoons of dry vitamins, 1/2 teaspoon of vitamin E and 1/4 teaspoon of calcium. I sprinkle this over the fruit, enough to coat the fruit and make it sort of dry, as fruit doves love to dive right into the food. This prevents the birds from getting all messed up.

I personally feed in late afternoon as the fruit mixture will dry out and by feeding late in the day they will feed in the evening and early morning before it has a chance to dry. The amount I feed varies from pair to pair, but I try to make sure the fruit is eaten up every day. All bowls are cleaned daily as mold, *salmonella* and other problems grow very fast in stale food. I do not believe in any additional protein supplement as I feel that too much protein can cause very serious problems.

As to breeding, fruit doves are very easy to get to nest but to raise to maturity is another problem. My Superbs, Black Napes, Pink Neck *Ptilinopus*, Jambus and Yellow Breasted use very little nesting material. All have used an open basket in about every place in the aviary — no special place but they always use the same one over, whereas the Pink Neck Green Pigeons and Thick Bills use about everything that is available, but mostly sticks. The nest can be 3" to 6" high with the eggs perched on top. Oh, yes. I almost forgot. *Ptilinopus* lay one egg, *Trerons* lay two eggs. They all seem to be tight sitters — hens at night, cocks in the day, although my Pink Neck *Ptilinopus* leave the nest when they first hear me coming.

Now the problem. Baby *Ptilinopus* fruit doves are very small and leave the nest when quite young — Black Napes as young as seven to nine days. They have a full set of wing feathers and little else. The parents are quite attentive and stay close. The problem is, if it rains or if the little ones become

separated from their parents, they chill fast and the mortality rate is high. I find this to be true to some extent with all *Ptilinopus*, whereas the *Treron* young stay in the nest until they are well developed. No special food is given with the young — only more.

As to housing, all of my fruit doves are kept in a mixed collection with other doves and pigeons. By the way, if you are not sure, a dove is a small pigeon and a pigeon is a large dove. As fruit doves are aerial, they mix well with the ground doves and pigeons. You must remember that birds, like people, do not always get along so you must watch personalities of each. The best solution, in a well-planted aviary of 6' x 12' x 8', would be one pair of fruit doves, one pair of Quail Doves, and one pair of smaller doves, but not Diamond Doves as they seem to want everybody's nest.

I have a large aviary 30' x 75' x 12' that has five types of fruit doves, five or six other types of pigeons and doves, and a small group of Suni Antelope. All seem to get along fine and I have raised three types of fruit doves and most of the other doves and pigeons in this aviary. I have four fruit trees growing in it and there is plenty of space for the birds to escape each other.

As to weather, I live in one of the best climates in the U.S. Summers get to the high 90's with two or three days a year that it may go higher, and winters have a low from 45 to 60 degrees with only a very light frost one or two times a year. I would not recommend fruit doves and pigeons to be kept outdoors where any prolonged frost or freezing occurs, but summer would not affect them as long as shade and water were available.

I feel that the fruit dove has long been neglected. There are fruit doves that will compare with the most brightly colored parrot but without destruction of landscaping and pens. They are, for the most part, quiet. They breed freely and don't eat their young. You can check them without losing a finger and in a large aviary a number of pairs can be kept together. There are 50 known *Ptilinopus* and 35 known *Trerons*, plus many others in the fruit dove and pigeon family, most of which we have not seen, so the opportunities for something new and exciting will be there for many years to come. ●