

Breeding the Dumont's Mynah

by Anthony Niznik and Paul Vinett
Overbirdened, Norwalk, Connecticut

Our introduction to the Dumont's Mynah was in April 1991 at a bird wholesaler's in Mount Vernon, New York. The striking beauty of the Dumont's resulted in our quick purchase of the single bird. We recognized it as a mynah bird and it was caged with Indian Hill Mynahs, but we did not know which species it was. The wholesaler did not even know the name of the species or the type of mynah until he looked it up in an outdated mynah handbook. He told us that the mynah we had purchased was a Papuan Mynah.

Call it the Yellow-faced Mynah, Papuan Mynah or the Dumont's Mynah. It is the same bird, *Mino dumontii*, native to the islands of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago. There are relatively few Dumont's Mynahs in captivity. They were never imported in the same numbers as the Indian Hill Mynahs. Perhaps because of the rarity of the Dumont's in captivity very little information has been published concerning their care, habits and breeding.

The Dumont's Mynah is about the same size as a Greater Indian Hill Mynah. The lengths of our birds have varied from 10 to 12 inches. The adult weights have ranged from 240 to 290 grams. It shares the same glossy plumage and the white barring in the flight feathers. The similarities end there. The Dumont's has a large yellow skin patch surrounding the eye. We have found that the eye patch varies from yellow to bright orange and that it also varies in texture from smooth skin to what looks like a grated orange peel. The differences in color and texture are a result of age, diet and exposure to natural sunlight. The Dumont's that we have collected and those that we have seen in person all have a

solid black iris and pupil. There are a few photographs in books that show an orange iris but we have not come across one yet. The bill is a solid orange color and it matches the leg coloring. The Dumont's wears a collar of slightly ruffled feathers interspersed with what appears to be pin feathers that are called "leaders." The upper and lower tail coverts are white. The feathers on the lower abdomen are bright yellow.

The voice of the Dumont's is nasal sounding and their calls consist of quacks and crackles. Unlike the Indian Hill Mynah, the calls are monotone and less shrill. They also do not seem to have the ability to whistle. Our captive bred, handfed Dumont's have learned to talk and mimic sounds.

We had our first Dumont's sexed through Avian Genetics of Tennessee and it was determined to be a male. A fellow aviculturalist and friend, Dr. Ubaldo Leli, found an unsexed Dumont's Mynah in a Boston pet store and we purchased it in November 1991. A third bird, also unsexed, was

found at a pet store in New Mexico in December 1991 through the AFA Fast Ads. Our goal was to have a true pair and begin breeding the Dumont's. The first and second birds were introduced to each other in a large enclosure. They kept their distance within the cage but coexisted peacefully. It was later determined that the second bird was a male also. We introduced the third bird while awaiting the sexing results for it. The third bird was immediately greeted by the two males with loud calls. The third bird paired up with the larger of the two males which was the first bird purchased. We assumed that by the friendly behavior that the third bird was a female. Our assumption was later confirmed with the sexing results. All of the introductions took place with our supervision. The second male was immediately removed from the fight cage.

Preparations For Breeding

The pair of Dumont's was set up in May of 1992 in our finished basement aviary. They shared the aviary with

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Pionus, aracarís, turacos and lovebirds. The standard cages measured 5 ft. long by 3 ft. tall by 2½ ft. deep and were manufactured by Corners Limited. They were stacked units two cages high. The bottoms were solid, removable trays. There were two service doors on the front of each cage. Full spectrum lighting was in the ceiling and inside of the lower cages, all on automatic timers. The basement had an air circulation and exchange system.

Since the mynahs were the least calm of all the birds in our aviary we placed their cage in a secluded corner for their benefit and the benefit of the other birds. We cut a hole in the front, top center of their cage and hung a wooden nest box on the outside of the cage. The box had a 4 in. square inspection door. The nest box was grandfather clock style, 12 in. by 12 in. by 24 in. deep. The entrance hole was a 4 in. square with a perch outside. There was no ladder on the inside of the nest box. We placed 4 in. of pine shavings in the box. Artificial vine plants were attached to the front of the cage and to either side of the nest box to provide privacy. To minimize disturbance, plus for ease of maintenance the water bowl was placed below the access door. A large bowl was used since the mynahs like to bathe frequently. For nesting material we provided a few handfuls of straw, fine hay and shredded paper on the bottom of the cage.

The daily routine in the aviary was morning feeding of fresh fruits and vegetables. We make it a point to check all of the birds during the feeding time. Since we both have jobs outside the home the bulk of the maintenance

was done during the evening. This included the daily paper changing, fresh water and refilling of dry food. We were in the aviary for two to three hours each evening.

The diet specifically for the Dumont's at that time consisted of Wayne's brand dry dog food provided at all times. One and one half cups of diced fresh fruits and vegetables was served on a 6 in. paper plate and fed only in the morning. The fruits we used were bananas, apples, seedless grapes, pears, peaches, kiwi, blueberries and the occasional papaya and mango. The vegetables used were thawed out frozen peas, carrots and corn. We dice and cook sweet potatoes and grate fresh carrots some of the time. Fresh greens were also included; kale, dandelion, collard greens and romaine. We gave all of the birds egg food daily, mashed hard boiled egg mixed with wheat germ and bird vitamins. A small amount of diced tofu was offered. One cup of dry food was given out during the evening, at the time of paper changing, and it would last until the next evening. The purpose of the feeding routine was to prevent waste and yet to have food available at all times. A dozen meal worms were enjoyed daily by the Dumont's.

The pair of Dumont's became accustomed to the daily routine. Within two weeks of being placed in the cage both the male and the female began the process of nest building, ripping apart paper, gathering straw and displaying the material to each other. We inspected the nest box daily for eggs and at the same time watched them complete their nest. The mynahs

excavated a hole into the nesting material on the bottom of the nest box. They added straw and ripped paper to the nest and placed it along the inner walls. On June 28, 1992 a turquoise blue egg with brown speckles was visible in the nest. A second egg was laid the next day. We did not know what to expect since there is very little information about breeding mynahs. In one publication we had read that mynahs in general will eat their eggs and/or their chicks.

The hen started sitting with the first egg and did the majority of the sitting. She would exit the box when we entered the room but return to it within minutes. She would also leave the nest when we serviced her cage. She remained in the box while we serviced the other bird cages. After the first week of incubation we noticed that the male would sleep in the box with the hen at night.

Raising Dumont's Chicks

With the arrival of the two eggs we doubled the amount and frequency of meal worms given to the mynahs. Wax worms and frozen thawed crickets were added to the diet. On July 13, 1992 at 6:00 P.M. one of the chicks began to pip. By 9:30 P.M. the chick had hatched completely. The chick had bright pink skin and a large yellow bill. Twelve hours later the chick had dried and there was a small amount of gray down on its head and back. It weighed in at a full 9 g. The chick was from the second egg. The first egg was fertile but had a small crack in it and did not hatch. The incubation period was 14 days.

On the day of hatching we increased the feeding of live food to four feedings per day. Instead of dry food we soaked the Wayne's dog food in water and served it soft. A second meal of fruit and tofu was served in the late afternoon. On July 15 we decided to start supplementing the chick's feedings with IAMs soaked kitten food, cuttlebone shavings and bird vitamins. Every other day one drop of cod liver oil was given to the chick as a vitamin A supplement. The parents did feed the chick regularly but we felt that the chick was not getting enough nutrients since the parents fed it mostly the live

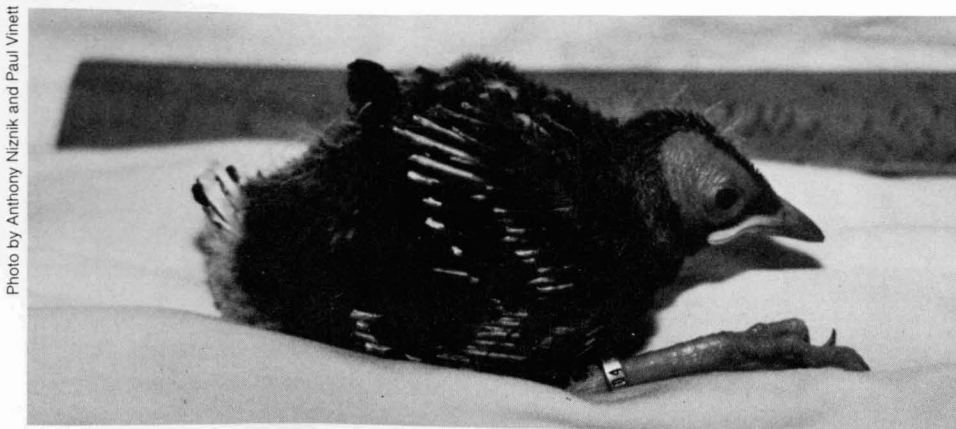


Photo by Anthony Niznik and Paul Vinett

Chick at three weeks of age.

food and tofu. The supplemental feeding was during the morning. The chick was removed from the nest, weighed, fed and then returned to the nest through the inspection door. The parents remained out of the box during the feeding and seemed agitated so the process was done quickly.

The chick grew very fast. At seven days the eyes were beginning to open and the skin on the wings and head had begun to darken with pin feathers. The chick weighed 52 g. Nine days after the chick hatched we noticed that the parents were ripping paper on the cage bottom. No nesting material had been added to the cage after she laid the two eggs. The pair continued to feed the chick and at the same time behaved as if they wanted to nest again so we pulled the chick for hand feeding. We banded the chick with a number 10 closed band that day. It weighed 92 grams.

The chick's new nest was a small rounded bowl. We had heard that baby birds can develop splayed legs without support in the nest. To keep the chick supported and its legs under it we shaped a cradle made out of paper towels within the bowl. A small amount of straw was also placed in the make-shift nest. This allowed the chick to grasp with its feet. A 10 gallon aquarium with a brooder top and thermometer completed the new nest. The temperature was maintained between 78 and 80°F. The chick seemed comfortable at that temperature, sleeping most of the time. To add humidity we simply placed a small open container of water in the aquarium.

Feedings started at 6:00 A.M. each day and continued at half hour intervals until midnight. Each time the baby was fed eight to 10 pieces of IAMs Kitten Food soaked in water and warmed. We used tweezers to feed the chick. We did continue to add vitamin and mineral supplements once a day to the food. Giving food to the chick was easy since it begged readily, stretching as tall as it could with its bill opened wide. Clean-up was as easy as feeding. Baby mynah droppings are released in a fecal sac. The release coincides with feedings (or shortly after) and the chick's bodily motions leave no doubt as to what is about to

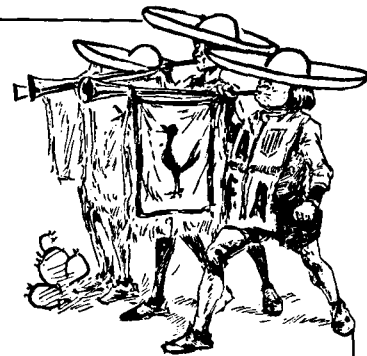
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come!

Before each day's first meal we would record the chick's weight. By day twenty-two the chick weighed 196 grams and was hopping around the inside of the aquarium. It was flying out of the aquarium six days later, the same day its parents laid their first egg of the second clutch. Being fully feathered, beginning to fly and learning how to eat on its own, the young mynah moved into a small cage. Weaning was completed at about eight weeks of age when the young mynah weighed 220 grams. The mynah still begged for food but we noticed that it did eat enough food on its own and maintained its weight. It was now fed the same diet as the adults.

We allowed the pair to nest three times and four Dumont's Mynah chicks were hand raised in 1992. After the third clutch the nest box was removed and the adult pair rested during the winter. In May 1993 the nest box was returned and the same pair went to nest immediately. The first clutch of 1993 produced two chicks for

hand rearing. Since the pair had proved to be good parents we decided to leave a second clutch for them to raise and wean. On day 10 the second clutch was closed banded and returned to the nest box. All went well until the chicks were two weeks of age when sadly we found the adult male dead on the bottom of the cage. The hen continued to dutifully feed and tend to the chicks by herself. They fledged at seven weeks and remained with their mother until they were three months old. Shortly afterwards the hen also died. Necropsy of both adult mynahs showed that they had enlarged internal organs, mainly the heart and liver due to iron storage disease (hemocromatosis).

Changes Over Time

At the end of 1994 we found ourselves changing the focus of our bird collection from hookbills to softbilled birds as well as changing where we lived. We still enjoy keeping a few pairs of parrots but we find the softbills challenging, interesting and very pleasant to listen to and they create the bulk of our flock now. It took a full year for the birds to recover from the move and to settle into their new home.

Since the time we acquired our first Dumont's mynahs we have purchased the few single birds that we have come across. In 1993 an importer brought in some Dumont's and we were able to add new blood. We were able to buy a domestic Dumont's raised by our friend John Kovacic of Illinois. The birds are now comfortable and one of our pairs of Dumont's has produced five chicks this year. These new chicks will be paired with unrelated birds and hopefully will provide us with second generation chicks.

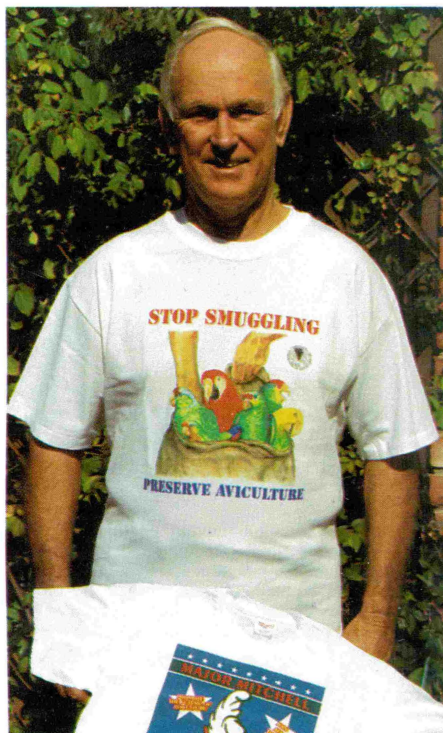
We have made several changes over time and with each clutch of chicks. Anyone who raises birds knows that there are no set rules, other than if it works for you than that's how you do it but always look for improvements. The most time saving improvement was finding that the chicks could be fed every one and one-half hours instead of every thirty minutes. Kaytee Exact mynah pellets are used as the basic dry food for the entire softbill collection. The chicks are now hand

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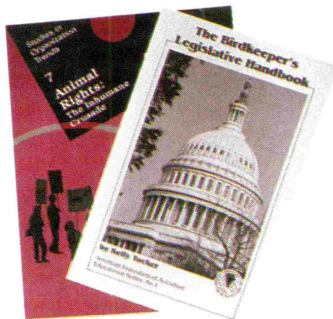


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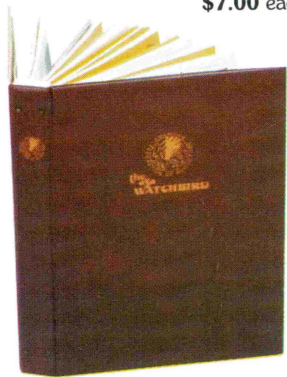
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What a face! Our first chick at three weeks of age.



Dumont's (Yellow-faced) Mynahs. Our first producing pair, with male on the left, female on the right.

fed with soaked Kaytee Exact pellets. While the chick is in the nest and being fed by the parents the soaked pellets are given to the parents. The mashed hard boiled eggs are now mixed with soy protein isolate.

There are several factors in deciding whether to hand feed a chick(s) versus allowing the parents to raise the chick(s). While we would prefer to leave the chicks in the nest it is not always in their best interest. If the chicks are not being fed enough food by the parents or if there is any sign of physical injury, the chick is pulled immediately. Sometimes the parents want to go back to nest and show aggression towards a chick. Depending upon how old the chick is would determine if it is pulled or allowed to fledge on its own. A third factor, and one that needs some explaining, is whether there is one or two chicks in the clutch.

The first two Dumont's chicks that we hand raised were single chicks. When they were mature enough to be placed with another mynah we noticed that there was some aggressive behavior on the part of the hand raised bird. The chicks that were parent raised or that were hand raised with siblings did not display aggression to the same extent. One of the first 1991 chicks was recently placed into a flock of six mynahs and the aggression has not been noted, so they may outgrow it.

Some things have changed over time, but our fondness for the Dumont's Mynah has remained steady.

We always look forward to speaking or corresponding with other mynah breeders. If anyone wants more information about the Dumont's Mynah or has a story (or bird) to share they can write to us at:

One Oakfield Road
Norwalk, CT 06854.

We are also members of and subscribe to the Mynah News Letter, a quarterly publication of information submitted by mynah owners and breeders. Subscription information can be obtained by writing to:

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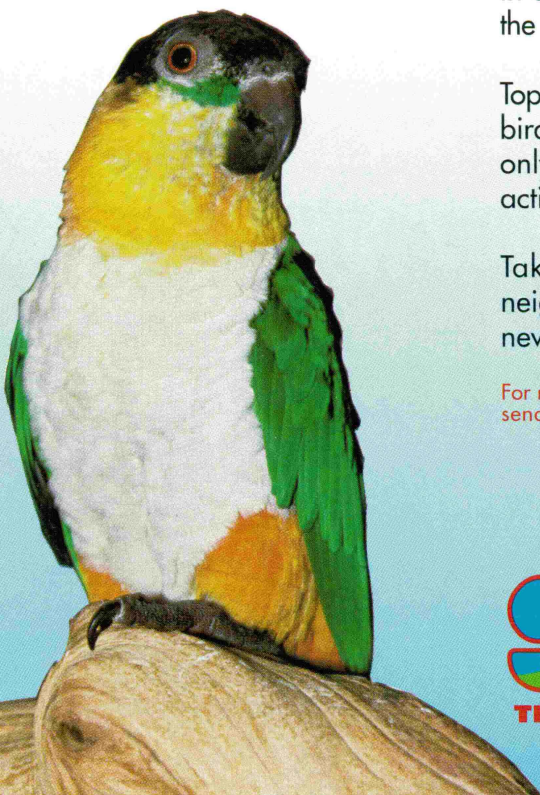


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