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Suzanne "Bird" Howse
Fort Pierce, FL

Over the Hill Mynahs

Greetings from "The Mynah Messenger." I love mynahs; they are magnetic mystic and marvelous. They are mischievous in aviculture. Personally, even if they did not "steal our voices" I would still be utterly captivated by their personalities.

They are no longer common as pets as they were in the 1950s and '60s but everyone remembers a friend that had a mynah. It would be great to see a resurgence of those days but, unless we emphasize breeding efforts with the remaining U.S. and Canadian mynah owners, a secure domestic future will be hard to come by.

I checked Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary's definition of "mynah: mynah: mina: any of a group of tropical birds of southeastern Asia related to the starling family. Especially those that have the ability to mimic human speech. And is often kept as pets."

That definition is what the average person perceives. Mynahs are so much more, however, and with the help of the Watchbird journal we can get out information, have a forum for questions and answers, help people locate mates for their birds and learn about our favorite "Black Chickens" as my husband, Gene, so fondly calls them.

My mission is to help you get the pertinent information you'll need to decide whether to purchase or breed mynahs. Your mission is to

respond with questions and your stories.

Even little bits of information can go a long way—like no avocado and no chocolate in mynah diets. You've all probably heard that before yet I still hear horror stories concerning this one point.

So, Mynah Maniacs—let's hear from you. I don't have all the answers but there are some great owners and breeders out there from South Florida to California to Connecticut and in between that would be proud to be of assistance via the Mynah Messenger.

Until next time - Fly right!

Suzanne "Bird" House 8201 Paso Robles Blvd. Fort Pierce, Florida 34951 - Voice - (813) 8917083, Fa.x (561) 465-3368. There is also a mynah newsletter. Write to: Mynah News, Linda Leger 641 Invader, Sulphur, Louisiana 70663

Mynahs are magnetic! Whenever you see or hear one, you are immediately drawn in for an eye-to-eye look. Closer inspection of what appeared to be just a black bird reveals a veil of iridescent violet, blue, green and purple that glimmers when caught by the light. Black mynahs have a hallmark white wing patch and a bright bill of candy-corn orange and yellow. Sides of the head are decorated with bright yellow flesh ribbons, called wattles, varying in length and pattern with subspecies.

But looks aren't all that the Hill Mynahs (*Gracula religiosa*) have going for them. They are a complete home entertainment unit—intelligent, curious, haughty, comical to watch and capable of playing games to amuse themselves and you. They are the happiest and hoppiest birds around, able



Male Java Hill Mynah, two months old.

Photo by Gene Howse

to cover a vast amount of territory without ever lifting a wing, especially when it is time to go back to their cage. Their ability to mimic is unsurpassed in the avian world.

In the past, mynahs were imported in great quantities; they were quite popular and inexpensive. This popularity has decreased in recent years. We have a strong desire to help regenerate the hill mynahs' popularity and availability as domestic, hand-reared birds, not as wild caught imports. We have a responsibility to the mynahs to successfully breed them in captivity and to stabilize their populations so mynahs can survive.

As a case in point, we have two Java Hill Mynah males and are having a "mynah boggling" time finding hens for them. Ninety percent of the domestic Java Mynahs are directly related to one pair (owned by Lynda Scott) which have produced 21 living offspring to date.

If we had two unrelated pairs breeding successfully, it would contribute greatly to the Java Hill Mynah gene pool. It may be difficult for someone to give up their pet to participate in a breeding program, however, exchanging an adult bird for a captive-reared baby has its advantages. The baby will be tame and will readily learn to talk. Upon reaching maturity, the bird could again be traded for a baby and the adult could be paired with an unrelated mate to begin a whole new cycle of mynahs. Former mynah pets can start teaching their babies to talk while still in the nest. Who knows, perhaps talking to the eggs will affect the developing embryos, too.

The hill mynahs are distributed throughout India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Once numerous in these areas, their numbers are now dwindling rapidly due to deforestation and loss of habitat.

Mynahs' Ability To Talk

Sunny, a two year old Java Hill Mynah, was taken from the nest at five days of age for hand-rearing. At five weeks, he said "hello" and has not stopped talking since, except for an occasional hiatus when he seem so be thinking things over. In the beginning,

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we used a 15-second continuous tape to teach the mynah to talk, but with no success. The mynah leaned to talk from the people in the house and even picked up more vocalizations from the resident Yellow-naped Amazon, Pepe, and the Maroon-tailed Conure, Surfer Bird.

Some of the phrases Sunny repeats are: "I'm a mynah bird; I'm a mynah birdie doggie; Good Morning, SuSu; Well... Open the door; I'm a rock 'n roller; What-cha doing; Hi Buddy; Wowiee!" He also sings scales, has five fancy whistles, barks and is learning more all the time. The bird has three distinct voices—Suzanne's, the Yellow-naped Amazon's and the Exorcist's.

Our other Java Hill Mynah, "Scotty" was captured from the wild. He was previously owned by a Malaysian gentleman, so he speaks Malayo-Polynesian most of the time. This mynah is about three and a half years old and has started to pick up English phrases from the rest of the flock.

Suzanne Boyer of Julian, California, owns wild-caught adult Java Hill Mynahs that are also learning to talk. Boyer's first chick hatched in 1994—new hope and new bloodlines.

We had two wild-caught Greater Hill Mynahs, one of which learned about a dozen words, proving that adult birds can still learn to talk. These two birds were sent to Linda Scott for use in her breeding program. Scott's pet female Java Hill Mynah, Georgia, has a wonderful vocabulary, part of which is: "Hello Daddy; Come here, boy; Georgie wants to talk to you (to the dog); Wowiee; Charlie, watcha doing; Where's Michael (Scott's husband); I'm a mynah bird, I am, I am; hello Boo Boo (to Scott); Do you want to buy a mynah bird?; I love you Daddy; Hello Sweetheart; Don't forget to lock the door; Oh Boy, Oh man; What's that for Georgia?" When a parrot yells, Georgia says, "That's terrible" or "That's horrible" and constantly adds to her repertoire. She speaks in Michael's voice and in Lynda's Boston accent.

Arrival of the First Java Mynah

In the Spring of 1994, Gayle Anderson-Nixon was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the first Java Hill

Mynah baby of the season from Linda Scott's pair. She fretted and worried about getting the unweaned mynah safely to Colorado from Florida. In her telephone conversations with Howse, who also lives in Florida, she constantly kidded her about taking a flight to Colorado for a visit so she could bring the baby mynah with her on the plane.

On May 17th the first egg hatched and about two weeks later, when Nixon listened to her phone messages she was surprised to hear, "Hello, this is Suzanne Howse. Life's too short. I'm taking time off from work and coming to Colorado. Can you pick the baby mynah and me up at the Stapleton Airport next Monday?"

The passengers on the plane "oo'd and ah'd" as Howse fed the little 17-day-old Java Hill Mynah during a long layover in Orlando, Florida and also several times during the flight. Nixon quickly located Howse at the airport terminal because she could hear the hungry cry of a baby bird. Looking around the lobby she saw Howse holding a small container that held the crying mynah baby. They exchanged quick hellos and rushed to find a quiet area in the nearest ladies room to feed the chick.

The baby mynah was named Tesla, after the famous scientist. Nixon's husband, Dave, said, "This is the best Father's Day gift I've ever received."

To escape the hot temperatures of Colorado Springs, the Nixons took Howse and their new baby mynah to their A-frame home located in the mountains. Tesla made friends with a mother Stella's Jay who frequented the ledge outside one of the windows of the house. Whenever the little mynah cried for food, the Jay would sit on the window sill looking in and after the baby quieted down, would leave.

At four weeks of age, Tesla learned to sing like the neighbor's male cat who romanced outside the Nixon's bedroom window at night. By five weeks the mynah had learned to say "hello" and from then on he has been learning to speak in much the same way a young child does. The Scotts (breeders of the bird) had suggested that the Nixons repeat the vowels of the English language to the mynah baby so it would learn the sounds of

our language. When the mynah is learning something new, it comes out like garbled English but gradually intelligible words are formed. The Java Hill Mynah imitates the voices of the Nixons' two Amazon parrots perfectly.

Mynah Mania Begins

Since acquiring Tesla, the Java Hill Mynah, the Nixons now watch every ad in the newspaper for mynahs. Late in the year they found in a local Thrifty Nickel ad, a mynah bird for sale. It turned out to be a Greater Hill Mynah. This mynah looked like a female, and trusting their intuition, they purchased "Harvey" thinking the Scotts might need another bird for breeding.

It was evident that Harvey had been owned by a man at some time in its life. The deep voice and sinister laugh emitting from such a small bird had everyone laughing. As soon as the mynah knew someone was awake in the morning, she would imitate the sound of a window shade rolling up and flapping around at the top, then make the squeaky noises of someone washing glass. A tape recording could not have rendered it more realistic.

Harvey could say: "How are you?; What-cha doing?; Hu-low; Harvey; I love you." She also made other phrases, including the sounds of a man shaving and coughing. But her rendition of doors opening, motors revving up, alarms going off and noises of other inanimate objects were so phenomenal, it would not have mattered if she ever talked.

Harvey had lived in at least three homes before the Nixons found her. They changed her name to "Harvette" within a short time because every time Dave walked into the room she would flick her wings and position herself for breeding, which seemed to indicate that this mynah was a female. Soon Harvette began laying eggs, which meant it was time for her to breed. She was sent to Scott in Florida where she was paired with Charlie, a male Greater Hill Mynah.

The Nixons had become very attached to Harvette and it was difficult for them to part with her. They knew, however, that she must be placed in a breeding program so the species could propagate. ➤