



Breeding the Java Hill Mynah

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[Editor's Note: There are numerous subspecies in the genus Gracula. The common names, however, are confusing since two subspecies are called Greater India Hill Mynah and up to five subspecies are called Java Hill Mynah. It is important to pay attention to the scientific names in these mynah articles. The scientific name will accompany the first use of the common name, thereafter just the common name will be used. SLD]

What bird has personal style, has *that look* that makes it stand apart from the rest? We have to be talking about the distinct mynah bird that captures everyone's attention with its uncanny ability to out-talk the best parrot.

Java Hill Mynah

The Java Hill Mynah (*Gracula religiosa religiosa*), the subject of this article, comes from southern Burma, Malaysia and the Indonesian Islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali as well as Borneo. The bird measures 12 inches in length. The plumage in the adult is black with an iridescent purple and green sheen. A band of white appears across the center area of the flight feathers. Head feathers are short with a velvety texture. The beak resembles Halloween candy—bright orange fading to yellow on the tip. The tail is square and about 2 ½ inches. The feet and legs are yellow. The chief distinguishing features are the wattles which are fleshy patches of bare skin that dangle over the nape of the neck. The wattles are bright yellow, a vivid contrast to the surrounding black feathers. The Java Hill is larger than the Greater India Hill Mynah (*Gracula religiosa intermedia*), especially in the head and the thick beak, even though it is

only one inch longer.

This large heavy-bodied bird is the aristocrat of the pet mynahs. More rare and expensive than the Greater India Hill Mynah, it is not consistently available. There are fewer than 10 known pairs set up for breeding in United States and only four pairs are known to have produced babies. It is considered the best talker of all, even better than the African Grey Parrot.

The Greater India Hill Mynah

The Greater India Hill Mynah comes from northeastern India, the Himalayas, Burma and Thailand. A natural mimic, it will imitate a variety of natural sounds in the wild and a handfed baby is usually a marvelous talker. This is the mynah that most people remember in the pet shops.

While both are similar in appearance, one distinguishing difference is in the wattles. The Greater India Hill's wattles begin at the broad area below the eyes and extend backwards around the head, covering most of the lower facial area, but not extending below the lower mandible. Narrowing at the nape of the neck, the wattles almost meet at the back of the head but are separated by a small triangle of velvety black feathers. The Java Hill Mynah has a wide connecting line instead of a triangle.

The same pattern holds true in the yellow flesh area below the eyes. The Greater India Hill Mynahs have a small triangle of black feathers, almost an inverted T, the Javas have a wide connecting line.

In this article, I will answer the

question that begs to be answered—can mynahs be successfully bred in captivity?

Can Captive Mynahs be Bred?

I'll be the first to admit that my husband, Michael, and I knew nothing about raising mynahs when we started. I was, understandably, a bit apprehensive about raising a flock of baby mynahs. Could we do it and would there be a demand for them? We had already successfully bred and handfed Cockatiels, conures and African Grey Parrots but there was very little information available on breeding of mynahs in 1991—and what was available was very inaccurate. We decided to go ahead with our plans and have never regretted it. It has been a challenge well worth the effort.

The Java Hill and the India Hill Mynahs are the only two varieties of mynahs that we raise in southwest Florida. We live in a subtropical area with winter temperatures averaging in the 70s and summer temperatures averaging in the 90s with high humidity, and a long rainy season—perfect conditions for raising mynahs, we hoped.

Our first producing pair of mynahs were the Java Hills that we purchased in the spring of 1991. I believe they were about six months old. We found them in a local pet store and were amazed at their size and beauty. We were very fortunate that they turned out to be a pair and we had no idea just how rare they were. Unfortunately, we never found another pair for sale.

Mynah Menu

They were and still are fed a diet of

mynah pellets, fresh fruit, including apples, bananas, peaches, pears, guavas, papaya, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, watermelon and a few grapes. We don't give them raisins as they are high in iron. We also feed them unthawed mixed vegetables, cooked sweet potatoes, carrots, beans, squash, hard boiled eggs, rice, pasta and whole wheat bread. They prefer their daily banana left whole and their apples just halved so they can tear out the pulp. They love spices, dairy products, cottage cheese, shredded cheese, and sour cream.

You may also give them white chicken or turkey, fish, tuna packed in water and peanut butter as added protein. We give them no red meat nor any dog or cat food products and no monkey biscuits as most are high in iron or nutritionally deficient and no raw meat (bacteria). We do not give them citrus as it is too acidic for a mynah. A cuttle bone is hung in the flight which they may or may not touch until the urge to breed begins. They have a bowl of apple juice or whole milk every day. We later discovered that milk is preferred when breeding and, yes, they can digest it. It provides them with vitamins A, C and D as well as calcium to lay eggs. Milk also helps to inhibit iron storage in the liver which is a main problem for many softbills.

Mynah Mansion

The Javas were extremely timid, flighty and we knew they would never breed in a cage so we designed a building where they would have plenty of flying room and have the privacy they needed. It is octagon shaped, 14 ft. in diameter, 10 ft. tall. We used 1/2 in. x 1 in. wire with a covered roof and later screen was put around the cage wire to keep out mosquitoes, bees and wasps. A long shelf was placed five feet high on which we placed three Cockatiel size nest boxes with the holes made two inches larger. The pair has used all three. The hen, however, seems to prefer the first one.

Being large birds, they sleep in separate nest boxes at night. The male sleeps in the one next to the hen although it has no bedding in it. It is as he prefers it. Pine straw is provided on

a continuous basis and he constructs the intricately weaved nest for her. I also give them shredded newspaper and they will line the inner part of the nest with the paper. Breeding begins shortly after the nest is completed and the first blue speckled egg appears about one week later. Either two or three eggs will be laid each clutch. Both parents take turns sitting on the eggs for an incubation period of 14 days.

There are many perches placed high and low in the aviary. A feeding station is at one end and a bird water bath is on the other side with water dripping in it continuously. It is a delight to see the birds flying and voicing their wild bird calls. The aviary was heavily planted with non poisonous plants inside and out so they would feel more at home. They quickly ate all the plants inside so we do not plant inside anymore. We do keep tall bushes around the aviary and it helps the birds feel secure.

The mynahs do not do well with other birds, therefore, they are the only two occupants in the building. I tried Button Quail on the ground but the mynahs apparently thought the new born quail were live food hatched for them.

The first Java Hill Mynah eggs (three) were laid in September, 1991, one egg each day, just a few months after being placed in the new building. Unfortunately the three eggs were infertile and no more breeding activity took place that year, however, it was a beginning. We were treading in unknown territory, with very little knowledge available on the breeding of mynahs and we were very excited.

The First Babies

On June 14, 15 and 16, 1992, the first clutch of the season was laid. The parents would not sit on the eggs when we were in the building so we quickly fed them and left. Two babies were hatched on June 29th and June 30th. We were thrilled. Since incubation is 14 days for hatching, we knew the first egg was infertile. The parents fed the babies for 14 days on meal worms, which we supplied in a large bowl of dry oatmeal, fresh papaya, bananas, apples, peaches, pears,

soaked mynah pellets, soaked whole wheat bread and apple juice. They also fed the babies cooked potatoes and vegetables, mashed fine.

The parents were very gracious in allowing me to check on the babies each day. We took the babies in for handfeeding at two weeks old. They each weighed 125 grams, had black on the tips of their duck like yellow beaks, had the purest, white rubbery legs and were still very bald. Very prehistoric looking. They were placed in a small square plastic flat container which we lined with a cloth towel and wrapped the babies, individually, in small towels to keep them warm. They were then placed in a brooder with the temperature kept at 92° F. with a cup of distilled water in the brooder for moisture. We continued to provide heat until three and a half weeks of age.

At four weeks, the youngsters began to fly and were placed in a 4 ft. long cage with three perches for hopping. At that point, we gave them a nest box with the hole cut larger to sleep in, lined with only paper towels. They love the softness of the towels. They will have accidents in the night until they are a few months old, so change the paper daily. They will sleep in the nest box even during the day for cat naps as they are cavity dwellers in the wild and this instinct seems to come naturally to them.

We fed them Exact handfeeding formula mixed with a little papaya baby food until three weeks of age when we began to introduce soaked mynah pellets and small pieces of fruit and soft vegetables as well. We do not use kitten chow as it is high in iron. Young mynahs have large gaping mouths and will beg for food every time they see a keeper. They have no crop and seem to be hungry all the time. We placed their brooder and eventually a cage in their own dark, quiet bedroom and feed them every two hours, beginning at around 7 A.M. to 11 P.M.

Between two and four weeks old, they grow in the majority of their feathers which is quite stressful, therefore we keep them on the high protein handfeeding formula, giving them all they want. They wean off of the formula between seven to nine weeks.



The Greater Indian Hill Mynah (*Graculosa religiosa intermedia*) has a distinctive pattern on the yellow wattles.



The Java Hill Mynah (*Graculosa religiosa religiosa*) is larger than the Greater Indian Hill Mynah and has a different wattle pattern. The Javas are very uncommon in American aviculture.



It is a wonderful sight to see young Java Hill Mynahs domestically bred and banded.

The black on their beaks slowly fades away to let the bright orange color come shining through by three months and the skin on their legs becomes light orange. On their legs and feet they develop a layered scale similar to the scales on a chicken's legs.

The first bright, curious baby hatched still lives with us. She stole our hearts. If you should call, Georgie will be glad to speak with you. She is a wonderful pet, an excellent talker (actually a ham) and loves to speak over the telephone. She was her daddy's girl and totally devoted to my husband, Michael, until Ollie came along five years later but that is another story.

END OF PART ONE



TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT WATCHBIRD



Daily fruit dishes for the Java Hill Mynahs. This is in addition to pellets, juice and milk.