



# If It's Smaller, Why Call it Greater?

(And Other Mynah Bird Questions)

by Gayle Anderson-Nixon,  
Manitou Springs, CO

**myna** or **mynah** \mi-na\ n Hindi *matna*, fr. Skt *madana*: any of various Asiatic starlings (esp. genera *Acridotheres*, *Gracula*, and *Sturnus*)—Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

There is confusion as to which common name to call each of the two mynahs of the *Gracula* genus found in aviculture today. The Java, or Java Hill Mynah, *Gracula religiosa religiosa*, averaging 12 inches in length, only one inch longer than the Hill Mynah, *G. r. intermedia*, has a longer head and beak, and stockier body, giving it the appearance of a

much larger bird. The smaller of the two is referred to in various books and articles as: the Hill, Greater, Greater Hill, and the Greater Indian Hill Mynah. It most likely acquired the name "Greater" as it was larger than the Lesser Hill Mynah, *G. r. indica*, which was rarely imported into the pet trade here or in Europe. If any Lessers remain in captivity in the U. S., it is certain their numbers are insufficient for a viable breeding population.

Many owners are uncertain as to which species they have. While researching information in the

Colorado library system, I was disappointed to find incomplete and, sometimes, incorrect information. For example, the Marshall Cavendish International Wildlife Encyclopedia, V15, New York, New York: M. Cavendish Corporation, 1993, incorrectly states, "The largest, measuring 15 inches long, is the Indian hill mynah, sometime called the Greater Hill mynah, popular today in many parts of the world as a talking cage bird. Often referred to in India as a grackle, it is a glossy black with yellow wattles." Only the Nias Island Mynah, *G. r. robusta*, reaches 15 inches in length and is not available in the pet trade. In this book, as in most books, the only mynah of the *Gracula* genus pictured is *G. r. intermedia*.

No mention is made of any of the approximately 11 subspecies of *Gracula* in the Eyewitness Handbook, *Birds of the World* by Colin Harrison and Alan Greensmith, New York, New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1993. Only one mynah is pictured, the "Hill Myna" and the species is described only as *Gracula religiosa*.

Although the information regarding diet and care in *Mynahs*, by Martin Weil, Neptune, NJ: T. F. H. Publications, 1981, is obviously outdated, and, judging by some of the hairstyles, some of the pictures are probably from the 50s, it is the only book found to have photos of the three mynah subspecies mentioned above, plus drawings of a few others.

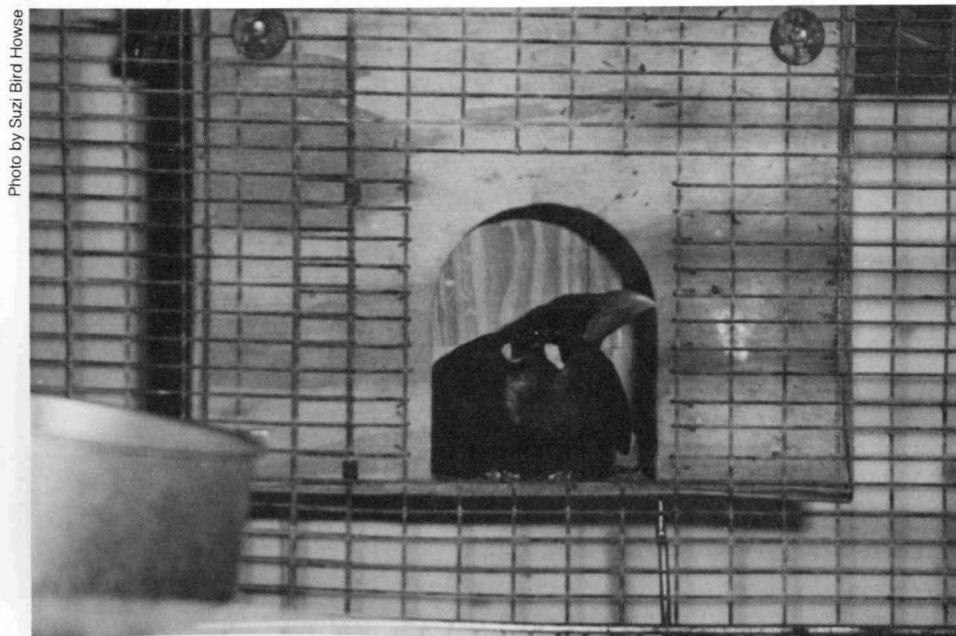
For simplicity it is suggested that the common names of these mynahs be referred to as:

- Hill Mynah (*G. r. intermedia*).
- Java Hill Mynah (*G. r. religiosa*).
- Lesser Hill Mynah (*G. r. indica*).

## You Don't Know What You've Got Until It's Gone

The majority of the mynahs imported into this country has always been the smaller *Gracula religiosa intermedia*, the Hill Mynah, not the larger Java. As Indonesia has imposed a total ban on exporting Javas, those that reside in the United States and Canada constitute the only gene pool available for breeding future generations.

Now that the door is closed and interest in the Java is increasing, avi-



The male Java Hill Mynah at home.

Photo by Suzi Bird Howse

culturists are discovering that these intelligent, raucous, extroverted members of the starling family are not the easiest of birds to breed. The number of people I know who have a producing pair of Javas can be counted on one hand.

If we can have at least 100 Javas, documented as unrelated, there may be hope for having healthy generations to come. It won't benefit the birds in any way if we become backed into a corner by inbreeding—the result will be a situation such as that of the cheetah wherein all individuals in the U.S.A. are so closely related that there is no possibility for genetic diversity in the future.

We must not wait until committees are formed, funds are allocated, studies done, and the Java is finally placed on the endangered species list—it will be too late then. The time to initiate a Java consortium is now.

Those who have adult pets are encouraged to pair them, if possible, or sell them to a breeder, or donate them in exchange for future hand raised babies. If, in a reasonable amount of time, a breeder is unsuccessful in raising chicks from a pair, it would be best if the birds were loaned to a successful breeder. There just isn't time to waste speculating and experimenting as these birds grow older. If people will set egos aside and work together, we may continue to enjoy the company of the Javas. If nothing is done, this mynah will disappear from aviculture in one or two more generations.

Even though we do not know everything about the dietary requirements of the Hill Mynahs, we know more than we did 10 years ago. Since many adult Java Mynahs have been fed incorrectly (dog or cat food, monkey chow, etc.) their lifespan will be shortened and breeding years limited. If these birds can be given a better diet of fresh fruits, vegetables, quality pellets and insects, and housed in optimal conditions, an experienced keeper may be able to extend their lives long enough to produce another generation.

For information about the "Mynah Leagues" newsletter, contact: Linda Leger, 641 Invader, Sulphur, LA 70663.

## Mynah Questionnaire

I'm Gayle Nixon and I'm writing a book about the Hill and Java Mynahs. If you would take a few minutes (or as much time and as many pages as you care for comments, anecdotes, etc.) to answer questions applying to your bird(s) on another sheet of paper, I will appreciate it greatly. I believe the time is overdue for an up-to-date book that will teach people how to care properly for these wonderful birds. Humorous, true stories will also be included. I hope I don't scare you off with the number of questions it's the only way I can gather more information without taking another mortgage out on the house to pay for my phone bills. You don't have to answer all; just whatever you can.

### Please Mail Your Answers to:

GAYLE ANDERSON-NIXON,  
PO BOX 423,  
MANITOU SPRINGS, CO 80829

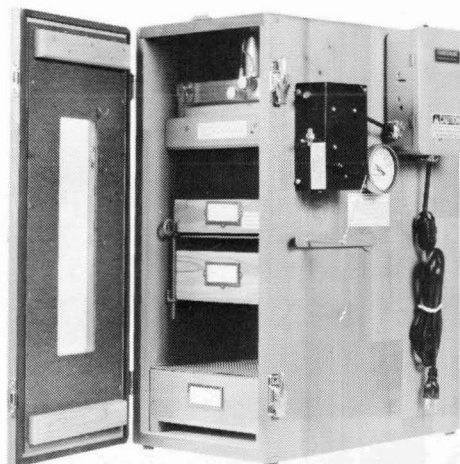
Please tell me about all of these birds you own now and owned in the past (including deceased). If I use quotes, first name and state only will be used. Addresses or phone numbers will not be published.

## About Your Bird

- 1- Species.
- 2- Name of your bird and the meaning or significance, if any.
- 3- Length and actual weight (grams), if known (no guessing).
- 4- Sex and method of determination used.
- 5- How did you obtain your bird?
- 6- Price paid Do you think it reasonable? What do you feel they should cost?
- 7- Domestic or wild-caught bird's age (if known) or years in captivity.
- 8- Degree of tameness.
- 9- What do you like about the bird?
- 10- What don't you like about it?
- 11- Is your bird territorial about its cage or other areas it frequents?
- 12- Has it ever attacked anyone or a specific body part? Who, what and any ideas as to why?
- 13- What happens when you reach in the cage?

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14- How does it react to family members and strangers? Does it have a favorite person?

15- If your bird talks, when did it begin speaking, how did you teach it and what is its vocabulary?

16- What does it whistle? Do you encourage whistling? Do you discourage it from whistling, and if so, how? How loud is it (rate from 1- 10, with 10 the loudest)?

17- Do you discipline your bird and if so, how?

18- Does your bird do any tricks? Describe.

20- Does it follow you around the house; sit on hands, shoulder, take showers with you, etc.?

### Food

21- Majority of food offered? What fresh foods do you feed?

22- Do you offer pellets? Brand used.

23- Do you ever offer mealworms, crickets, pinkie mice, etc.? Which?

24- Do you add calcium and/or vitamins to food? How often? Which brands?

25- Do you offer acidic foods (tomato, orange, etc.)? When and with what other foods?

26- What are the bird's favorite foods?

### Housing

27- What is the cage size (length, width, height).

28- What materials is it made from? Give brief description of design.

29- What substrate is on the bottom of the cage (i.e., wire, paper, gravel...)?

30- What toys of you provide and which are the favorites?

31- What does your bird sleep in?

32- How many perches, shelves are



Photo by Suzi Bird Howse

*Compare the wattle pattern of the Java Hill Mynah above with that of the Indian Hill Mynah to the right.*

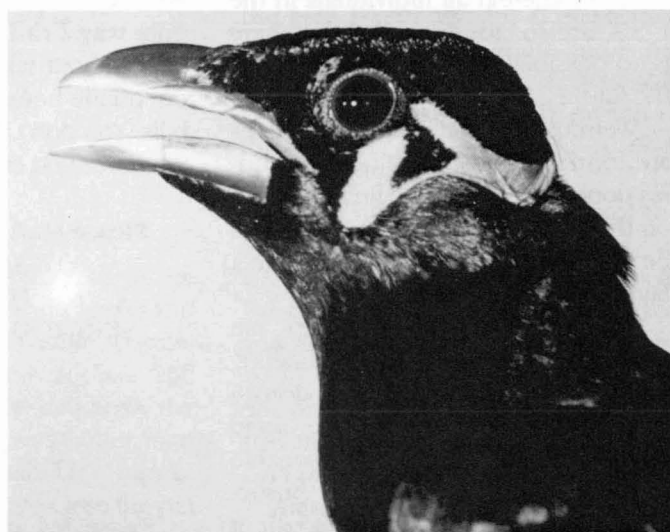


Photo by Elaine Kodroff

offered, and of what material (branches, dowels, wire, etc.)?

33- Any plants in cage? How many and if real, species? Does the bird eat the plants or soil?

34- Composition and size of water, food, and bathing vessels you've found are best?

35- How do you control the temperature changes in your bird's environment (if outside)?

36- How much does the temperature vary in your bird's environment during summer and winter: average highs and lows?

37- Do you monitor the average humidity in your bird's environment, and if so, how and what is the average?

38- Do you use a full-spectrum light? Brand? Natural lighting? What results have you observed?

39- If kept outside, what are the temperature ranges that they experience before you add heat or cooling systems? Have you ever lost a bird from a temperature extreme? If so, what was it?

### Health

40- Do you keep the bird's wings clipped? One or both?

41- Has your bird ever had external or internal parasites, and if so, what were they? How were they eliminated?

42- Any illnesses? How were they cured? If deceased, what was cause of death?

43- How does the bird react to stress: car rides, moving, earthquakes, lightning, etc.? What are the physical signs and how do you calm your bird?

44- Do you have a regular avian vet and are you pleased with him/her?

### Breeding

45- Are your birds set up as single pairs,



multiples? Any problems? Do you have other species housed with them; what are they; and any problems?

46- If your birds are set up for breeding, describe the cage, nest boxes (number provided) sizes and composition.

47- What nesting materials do you offer and which are their favorites?

48- What special diet do you give your breeders and how long before and after chicks are reared?

49- Eggs: number infertile, fertile. Incubator hatched?

50- Number of chicks hatched? Died: age of death and cause, if known. Number alive at one year?

51- Banded? Open or closed? At what age? Any problem with bands?

52- Have you allowed parents to rear chicks? Were they successful? If not, when and what happened?

53- If parent-hatched, at what age do you remove chicks for hand-rearing and what food do you use?

54- How often do you feed? Is it by the clock or on demand?

#### Questions and More Questions

55- What do you think would be a reasonable price for a Mynah/Starling book?

56- Would you rather keep the cost down by having fewer color photos or pay more to include them?

57- I have other subjects covered in addition to the above. Are there other topics you want me to discuss? Suggestions are welcomed and encouraged.

If you have any good, clear color or B/W photos of your mynahs to include in the book, I'd love to see them. Because of the large amount of paperwork, I can return only those photos with a SASE included.

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer questions and giving your input. ➤

## Linda S. Rubin of Boston Visits Australia

by Graeme Hyde, Australia

The American Federation of Aviculture's long time [now retired] Northeastern Region Director, Linda S. Rubin, of Boston, Massachusetts, traveled to Australia earlier this year as the guest of the Brisbane-based Australian National Cockatiel Society and the Sydney-based Native Cockatiel Society of Australia. The two cockatiel societies decided to share their resources to bring an experienced aviculturist from the U.S. who was knowledgeable in the genetics of cockatiel mutations.

As a result, they invited Linda Rubin to Australia to speak at two specially convened meetings; the first in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, and the second in Sydney, the capital city of New South Wales.

Linda's two one-hour programs in each city were titled "*Recent Mutations in Cockatiels*" and "*History of Cockatiel Husbandry in the United States*." Mike Anderson of Brisbane, the coordinator of Linda's trip to Australia, said: "Linda's four lectures were professionally presented, highly informative, and

illustrated with excellent colour slides."

Following her commitments to the cockatiel societies Linda flew to Melbourne, Victoria (Australia's most southern mainland state), where she was met by Warwick Remington and Graeme Hyde, who were hosting the final part of her trip "Down Under." We had met Linda Rubin in 1994 when, together with Barry Hutchins, we were the three speakers representing Australia at the AFA's Twentieth Anniversary Convention held in Knoxville Tennessee.

As secretary of the Avicultural Society of Australia I arranged a special meeting of the ASA in Melbourne in our regular venue, for Friday May 30, 1997, with Linda as the "Overseas Guest Speaker" on the subject "*Keeping Parrots and Cockatiels in American Aviculture*."

One hundred members enjoyed Linda's colour slide presentation, which was followed by a 30 minute question and answer segment, after which members had the opportunity to talk with Linda informally on a one to one basis during the extended supper time. ➤



Linda S. Rubin is welcomed to the Avicultural Society of Australia by President John Buchan

Photo by Graeme Hyde