

## Delightful Birds are Doves

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, CA

**B**elieve it or not, doves are considered very fine gamebirds and in several states the dove season has an important economic impact. On the other hand, there are many dove species that no one would ever shoot at. Many of these more exotic species can be beautiful additions to almost any collection of birds.

In fact, most collections — be they parrot, finch, or pheasant — have a sprinkling of doves scattered throughout. Of course, the most common dove is the Barbary Dove or the Sacred White Dove. A close second for popularity among aviculturists is the tiny Diamond Dove with its plaintive coo. Diamond Doves fit very nicely into a Cockatiel flight. They add warmth and music to a parrot or finch pen.

If one is careful, the beautiful but timid Cape Dove can be kept in a mixed collection. They are so timid though that I almost lost a pair that was in a Zebra Finch pen. The tough little finches kept the doves away from food and water. Capes do well with gentle parrots in a large flight. I kept some with a breeding pair of Princess of Wales Parrots and everyone got along quite well.

Doves have a reputation for being gentle but anyone who keeps doves knows that is not always true. Doves can be extremely aggressive — but usually with their own species only. The Galapagos Doves are great fight-

ers. I had two pair in adjoining Cockatiel flights but the males fought so much through the wire that they did not breed well. When I separated the pairs each male commenced trouncing his female. They just love to fight I guess.

Doves such as the magnificent bleeding-heart species will receive more attention than the parrots who share the pen. The bleeding-hearts spend almost all of their time upon the ground so there is little or no conflict with the parrots or finches who stay on the perches or in the trees. A beautiful bird in the upper reaches of your pen and an equally delightful bird on the ground provide a scene that is hard to walk away from.

If you have a huge walk-in flight pen covering an acre or so — fine. There is just the dove for you — the giant Victoria Crowned Pigeon. On the other hand, if your largest flight is four by eight feet, the tiny Diamond Dove will think it room enough.

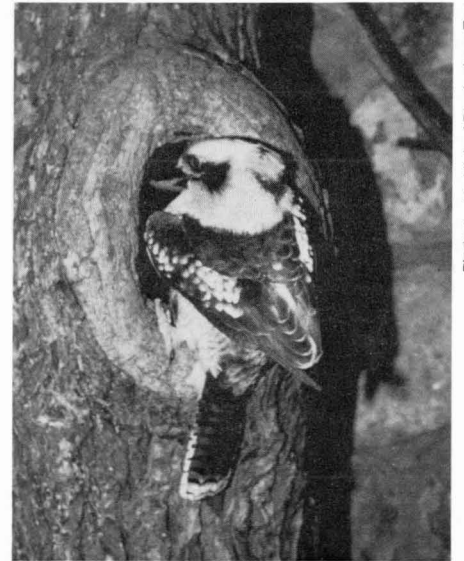
Delightful birds are doves. Their cooing is eternal and very soothing. They become very tame and friendly with their keeper. They have color from the most subtle grays and violets to the most gaudy greens and reds. Most doves breed well and they are hardy.

All things considered, your collection of birds is not complete if there are no doves gracing it. ➤

## Hand Rearing and Parent Rearing the “Laughing Jackass”

by Greg Bockheim, Fresno, CA

Greg Bockheim specializes in breeding the *Poicephalus* parrots and is the supervisor of the bird department at the Chaffee Zoo, Fresno, California.



Adult Kookaburra at nesting hole.

**N**ot only bird enthusiasts are familiar with the Kookaburra, *Dacelo novaeguinae*, affectionately called the Laughing Jackass by many Australians. The calls of the Kookaburra can often be heard as jungle background sounds in many old and new movies and television programs. Most of us can also recall learning the clever children's song about the Laughing Kookaburra. In Australia it is an unforgettable sight to watch and hear the neighborhood Kookaburras assemble in the areas tallest tree and together begin to sound off. The Kookaburras' "laugh" reveals its zest for living. Observing the Kookaburra, one gets the feeling that while we are amused by their audacious call, they also look down and laugh at the bumbling humans below.

While caring for this very large member of the kingfisher family, I found that very little information was available about its care and breeding. I therefore attempted to mimic the Kookaburra breeding environment I

Photo by Liz Hicks / Birmingham Zoo

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observed while living in Australia. The pair I was working with was between seven and nine years old. They were very calm and sedate birds, but became excited at feeding times in the early morning and late afternoon when they would suddenly stand at attention and begin their incredible vocalizations.

The accommodations for this pair included an indoor cage measuring 3 feet square though the pair rarely entered this heated indoor space, not even when the outdoor temperatures were well below freezing. The outdoor aviary was 6 feet square and 9 feet in height. The birds had access to a mulch and pine chip covered floor. The once a day feeding consisted of two adult mice per bird. A large rubber water bowl is available for them to drink and bath in which they did frequently.

From observing four separate active nesting sites in Australia, I found that the birds appeared to prefer shallow, nearly horizontal cavities. These cavities allowed the incubating bird to look directly out of the nesting chamber (or clearly at the nest entrance), not being so deep that the incubating parents bill or tail was not visible. Nest entrances had varied from six feet to 12 feet from the ground. I therefore offered the pair a shallow, natural hollow with a mulch and pine sawdust mix bringing the floor of the nest to just three inches below the nest entrance. The nest log entrance was less than five feet from the ground. When disturbed, the incubating or brooding birds were able to "rocket" from the nest, just as in the nests studied in the field. A shallow nest also allows the parents to quickly feed the chicks, saving them the time and energy of climbing down into a deep cavity. No aggression was encountered between the parent birds and myself when inspecting the nests in the field or in captivity.

To stimulate the adult pair and bring them into breeding condition, I began feeding them live food randomly throughout the day. These feedings began in February and consisted of young mice (hoppers and pinkies), mealworms, crickets, and waxworms. The birds were also observed eating the slugs from beneath the water dish

when it was removed for cleaning. When fed live food the pair would kill the food item and then begin their laughing call while they held the food in their bills. The food did not seem to interfere with the volume or rhythm of their vocalizations.

Within the first month of being fed live food, the male began to pursue the female, presenting her and feeding her with the food held in his beak. At six weeks there were signs that the pair had entered the nest log; shavings were seen on the ground below the

nest. On March 26, two eggs were seen in the nest (almost two months from being offered the nesting site). Because the birds were said to have eaten their young the first time they had bred, the eggs were pulled on April 1 (after the 3rd egg had been laid) for artificial incubation and hand rearing. The pair double clutched, laying the first egg of the second clutch within two weeks.

**Handreared Kookaburras**  
The Kookaburra eggs were incubat-



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Table 1

Age in Days	Brooder Temperature (Degrees Fahrenheit)	Weight in Grams		
		Chick No 1	Chick No 2	Chick No 3
1	98.5	22	23.4	19.6
2	"	23.5	24.9	25.5
3	97	30	32.5	33
4	96	38.1	42	42.7
5	"	46	56	50.2
6	95	53.6	66.4	62.1
7	"	70	75.1	73.1
8	"	87.5	89.8	87.6
9	94	115	106.5	102
10	"	136.5	126.7	119.5
11	91	149.8	141	131.5
12	"	169.5	159.3	142
13	88.5	185	167	159.3
14	85.5	192.7	177	194
15	84	196.5	191.2	206.6
16	"	212.2	213.0	221.0
17	"	233.3	226	238
18	"	249.0	234	251.5
19	"	259.0	255.0	263
20	"	270.0	267.0	264
21	82	285.5	284.0	270.0
22	"	287.0	281.0	270.8
23	"	285.0	280	270
24	"	286.0	275.8	273
25	81	290.8	273.0	280.0
26	"	283	274.5	271.5
27	"	287.5	279.0	278.0
28	Room (80)	291.0	268.5	260.5
29	80	292.0	271.5	270.0
30	80	290.0	271.5	269.5
31	80	271.0	269.5	270.0

Table 2

### Kookaburra Chick feeding Details (Hand reared)

Chick Age in Days	Feedings Per Day	Housing	Fed in Rotation throughout day First and Last feedings "dipped"	Size / Food Items
1 - 3	6 8am-9pm	Brooder	First, midday, last feeding, plus one other	1/3 / Chopped and crushed mouse pinkie
			Fed between above food items	Crickets-legs removed and heads crushed, wax worms
4 - 15	5 8am-9pm	"	First, midday, and last feeding	1/3 / Chopped and crushed mouse fuzzy
			Fed between above feedings	Crickets-legs removed and heads crushed, waxworms
15-20	4 8am-9pm	"	Mix of food items at each feeding	1/4 / Chopped and crushed rat fuzzy, whole pinkies & insects
21-28	3 7am-5pm	"	Mix of food items at each feeding	Bird of Prey and mealworms added to above menu
Birds transferred to 20"x 20" wood cage-wire ceiling and front, low perching and heat lamp.				
29-35	3 7am-5pm	Cage	Mix of food items at each feeding (More meat items than insect) Food items no longer "dipped"	Whole mouse/rat fuzzies and pinkies. Chopped rat pups.
32-40	1 - 2x/day	"	As above. Food items placed in front of chicks on cage floor and in bowls. Fed occasionally by hand when appear to not be eating well. Birds become very spoiled and prefer hand feeding.	As above. Move to smaller whole mice after 40 days old.

Birds transferred to out door aviary. Outdoor temperature range 60 to 90.

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ed at 99.5° F. with a wet bulb reading of 80° F. The first egg began to pip on April 18 and was hatched and dry on April 19. Incubation was between 25 to 26 days. A hatch weight of 22g was recorded for the first chick, 23.4g for the second and 19.6g for the third. Chicks hatch completely naked and blind. Chick number two took over 48 hours to completely hatch; when it did hatch, its left eye appeared to be flattened. This deflating of the eye orbital was believed to be caused by compression against the egg shell during the lengthy hatching process. After 24 hours the eye had noticeably improved and after seven days appeared to completely heal. A dramatic size difference existed between the eldest and youngest chick. Because of its small size the third chick was placed in a separate brooding container when placed along with its siblings in the brooder. See Table A for chick brooding temperatures and weight details.

Kookaburra eggs require 24-26 days of incubation. The artificially incubated chicks took up to 20 to 48 hours to completely hatch once the egg had pipped. Within only a few short hours after hatching, the Kookaburra chicks had such strong feeding responses that we began feeding them at four hours of age. This first feeding consisted of a mouse pinkie, chopped into fourths, crushed, then dipped in pedialyte. For only the first day the chicks were fed every three hours. See Table 2 for feeding details.

While developing, all of our chicks went through a skin peeling or sloughing stage which was cause for great concern. The chicks began peeling at around five days of age and the sloughing took nearly six days to complete. Believing the cause to be dehydration, all food items were then dipped in an electrolyte solution before feeding. At each feeding the first food items were dipped in calcium and then an avian multi vitamin. When only two and four days old, the tips of two chicks beaks appeared not to be completely aligned. A 1/4 inch piece of surgical tape was placed on one side of the end of the beak, bringing the beak tip together and in line. The tape was replaced after each feeding, and

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after 36 hours the birds beaks were corrected.

Kookaburra chicks feed less aggressively after the third week. While very young the chicks show an unusual feeding pattern; when housed in the brooder together, the chicks will actually "beat down" any chick within range while reaching for food. So strong is their feeding response that they will eventually cause serious injury or death to the smallest chick in the nest with their persistent attacks. I feel that this intense feeding response and "beating down" of nest mates was the cause of death of one of our parent-reared chicks. Once given a food item a chick will usually drop its head while the food is swallowed, this takes several seconds. This gives its clutch mates enough time to be fed without the fear of being attacked by those chicks already fed. The chicks produced their first casting at four and five days of age. Throughout the hand rearing process chicks will often refuse any food item offered and at other times chicks will appear that they cannot be fed enough. Although this up and down feeding behavior was initially cause for alarm, fluctuations in weight gains became stable and the chicks physical appearance did not seem to wane.

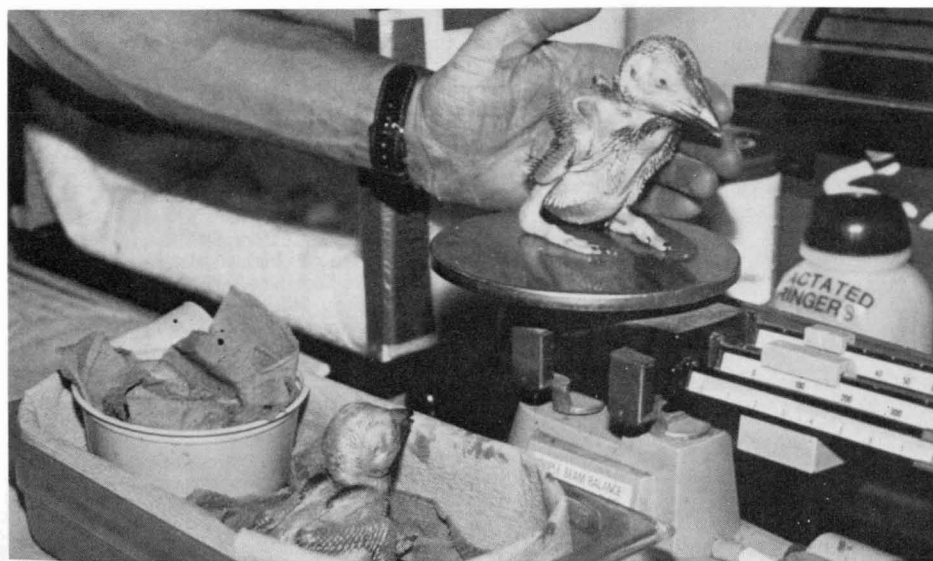
At nine days the chicks' eyes began to open and were completely open within two days. At eight days of age the chicks' pin feathers began to erupt from the skin and by 11 days the

chicks were heavily pin-feathered. At 28 days the chicks were transferred to a 20 in. x 20 in. x 20 in. cage with very low perching. At first the chicks appeared "shocked" by their new accommodations but soon came around when handfed. A towel was placed over half of the cage and a heat lamp 16 in. above.

The chicks were moved to a 6 ft. square outdoor flight at 70 days of age. Initially they appeared to be very stressed by their new surroundings but soon calmed down. They became good fliers and accurately dove to the food dish or floor for their food. The chicks are very calm once they are in your hand, or resting on your arm, but until they become comfortably perched they are quite flighty and aggressive regardless of their being handreared. The amount of handling throughout the handrearing process would likely dictate the tameness of the birds in the end.

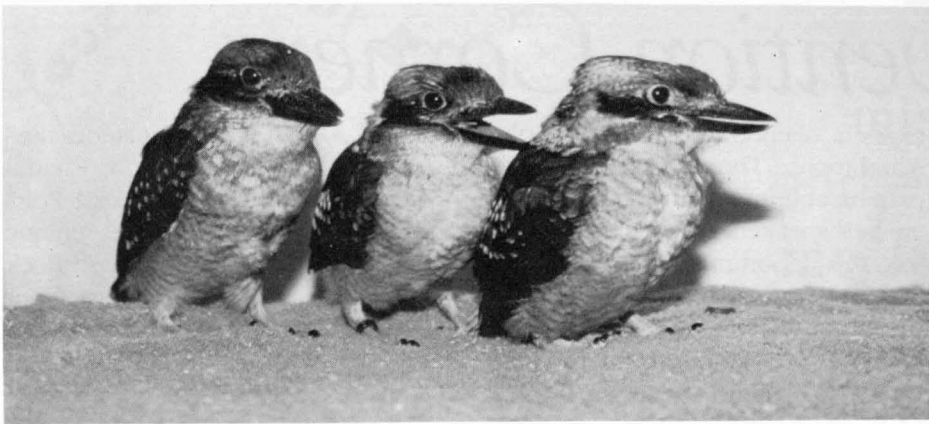
### Parent-reared Kookaburras

After the first clutch of Kookaburra eggs was pulled for artificial incubation on April 1, the breeding pair started laying their second clutch on April 14. By April 18 the pair finished their clutch of three eggs. The birds sat tight on the eggs, only leaving the nest when live food was offered. During incubation the birds showed very little interest in the bird of prey diet offered. The first two chicks hatched on day 25, the third 26 days after the eggs were



*Weighting of chicks is very important for monitoring correct weight gains or for catching early bacterial problems. This chick is nine days old.*

Photo by Liz Hicks / Birmingham Zoo



Three juvenile Kookaburras approximately 28 days old.

laid. The adult birds were fed three times a day between 7:30 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. These feedings consisted of live mealworms, waxworms, crickets, and chopped mouse pinkies. Whole live mouse pinkies and pinkie size pieces of bird of prey diet were added in the second week.

It must be remembered that Kookaburras are not capable of tearing apart their food. Food items must be small enough that they can be directly fed to the chicks and swallowed. On two occasions we found chicks 20 and 23 days of age attempting to swallow adult mice. Finding that they were not able to swallow such large food items the chicks would sit there incapable of extracting the mouse from its own beak. It is not known as to whether the parents would have come to the aid of these chicks. I theorize that in the instinctual frenzy of feeding, the captive parent birds become oblivious to the improper size of the food item, and feed whatever they can find or that which is available. I promptly removed the mice from the chicks' mouths.

The male Kookaburra of the pair more avidly tended to the chicks about the same as he did to the female while courting her. After 10 days the parent birds spent less time brooding the chicks during the day, the outdoor daytime temperatures being near 75° F. When feeding the adult Kookaburra pair, the birds would accept food from the hand and did not appear to become stressed when the nestlog was inspected. In fact, by standing next to the nestlog entrance (within 12 inches of the birds) we could observe the parent birds feeding the young. The chicks fledged at 37 and 39 days of

age. Their first couple of days were spent sitting motionless on the ground or on a low perch while both the parents avidly fed them. Their fledge weights were 280.1 g and 261 g. After three days the chicks were observed chasing the parents begging for food. Seven days after fledging, the first chick was observed feeding on its own. One month after fledging the chicks largely fed on their own but would still beg from a parent with food. No aggression was ever observed between the chicks or the parents after fledging. ➔



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