

The Zimbabwe Eight

(Now What Are We Going to Do?)

Part II

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[Editor's Note: In June, 1997 CITES added eight birds to its Appendix II which, in affect, cut off the importation of these species into the U.S. In Lindholm's first part of this report (Watchbird, November/December 1997) he dealt with four of the species—the Straw-headed Bulbul, Silver-eared Mesia, Pekin Robin, and the Emei Shan Liocichla.

He treats an additional three species here to bring us up to seven of the Zimbabwe Eight and his comments on the final bird will appear in the July/August issue. SLD]

Superb Tanager *Tanqara fastuosa*

Of the eight species of birds added to CITES Appendix II, at Harare, Zimbabwe, in June, 1997, this is the most obvious candidate. In fact, it ought to have been placed on Appendix I years ago. Not only has there been no legal trade in birds from Brazil since 1967, this endemic species of the severely reduced Atlantic Coastal Forest (home of so many endangered animals) has been considered at risk for a long time (King, 1981).

Yet specimens arrived in Europe through the 1970s and '80s. The German veterinarian Werner Steinigeweg (1988) stated this tanager "is regularly offered for sale."

Rumors persist that specimens showed up in the U.S. as late as 1997. However, while this bird was one of the standard tanagers in aviculture in the early decades of this century (Delacour, 1923), and exhibited by such American zoos as San Diego, St. Louis, Brookfield, and the Bronx, before the Brazilian export ban, I am not aware of any in this country in at least 20 years. I do not believe it has ever hatched here. Jean Delacour



Java Rice Birds.

(1923) was fairly certain several were hatched by the French aviculturist de Lacger. The only public zoo breedings I am aware of took place at the Natureland Marine Zoo, in Skegness, Britain, where one was hatched, but died, both in 1972 and 1973 (Zoological Society of London, 1974-75). As of 30 June, 1997, the only Superb Tanagers listed by ISIS (1997) are four unsexed birds at the London Zoo, which, following the crisis of its near closing around 1991, has concentrated on programs for threatened species.

Java Sparrow *Lonchura [Padda] oryzivora*

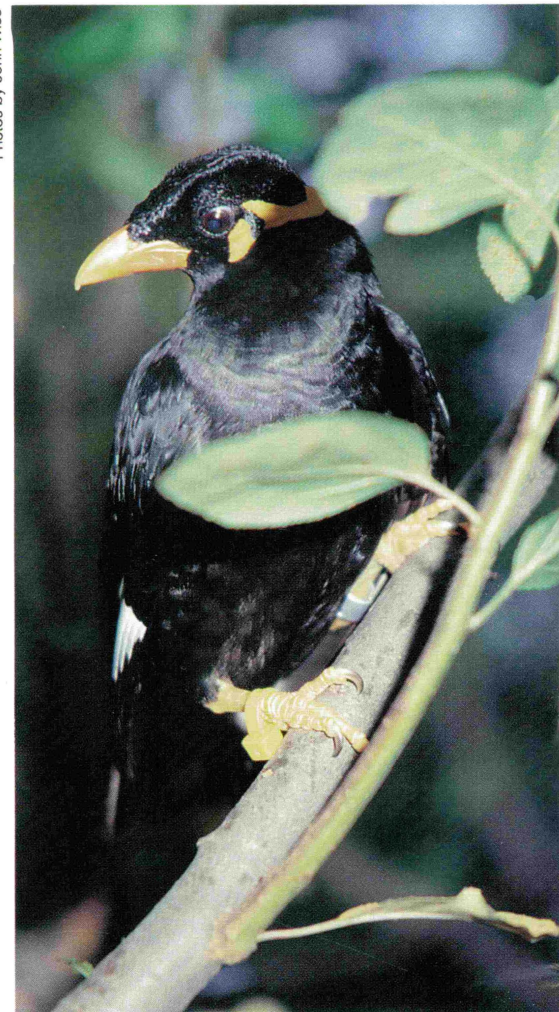
Of the 1997 additions to CITES Appendix II, this is the species most likely to raise eyebrows. It has for years been feared as a crop pest and has been illegal for possession by non-licensed persons in California for a long time. It not only has a wide range across tropical Asia, but has been long established in odd spots around the world: the Fijis, Zanzibar, Puerto Rico,

Florida, Hawaii, and other places. It is also one of the few non-Australian Estrildids firmly established in Aviculture, having been bred in Japan for centuries, with resulting mutations that fortunately, for the time being, don't appear to have interfered with the availability of wild-type stock.

However, its natural range is restricted to Java, Bali, and the tiny islands of Bawean and Kangean, and its recent decrease in its first two locations has been drastic. MacKinnon and Phillips (1993) observe that the Java Sparrow was "formerly one of the common birds of cultivated areas in Java and Bali, ...but is now rather scarce as a result of massive capture for the pet trade."

Despite its prohibition in California, the Java Sparrow is well established in American aviculture though no longer common in pet stores. Bates and Busenbark (1963) wrote "In the United States the Java Rice Bird as a caged household pet is perhaps exceeded in

Photos by John Wise



Hill Mynah

number only by Budgerigars and canaries." This is certainly not the case at present.

It may take some inquiry now days to find a source for Java Sparrows, but once obtained they prove prolific breeders, especially in cages, and are excellent beginner's finches, their two drawbacks being their potential aggressiveness towards smaller birds, and the difficulty in sexing them. It is timely that Stash and Carol Anne Buckley (1997) published an excellent summary of their husbandry.

This species is far less common in zoos than it once was. As of 31 December 1996, ISIS (1997) listed only three U.S. zoos holding any: The Hogle Park Zoo in Salt Lake City with seven, the San Diego Zoo with two, and Mickey Ollson's World Wildlife Zoo in Phoenix with seven.

None of these places hatched any in 1996. Over a 21 year period from 1959 through 1992, more than 251 were hatched from among 13 U.S. zoos (Lindholm, 1996, Zoological Society of London, 1960-1994).

This is a good sturdy bird for mixed aviaries, especially with softbills. When the San Diego Zoo opened its Tropical Rain Forest in 1960, 350 birds of 101 species were released into it. Along with toucans, aracarís, cocks of the rock, and other large birds, there were 25 Java Sparrows (Anon, 1960). The late K.C. Lint told me that by the time (shortly thereafter) that this aviary held 1,000 specimens of more than 200 species, there were 300 Java Sparrows which bred freely.

I will take the opportunity to correct a misconception. I have elsewhere surmised in print (Lindholm, 1996) that the Zanzibar population of Java Sparrows might have been introduced hundreds of years ago by Indonesian or Arab traders. I subsequently found that no less an authority than Sir Richard Francis Burton maintained that the introduction was achieved by "Captain Ward, the captain of a Salem ship, in about 1857" (Long, 1981).

Hill Mynah *Gracula religiosa*

The 1997 CITES meeting at Harare will be remembered for the listing of mainstays of the pet trade. Along with

the Pekin Robin and the Java Sparrow, Hill Mynahs were ubiquitous features of pet stores. Until the 1990s, practically all specimens were wild caught. The first captive breeding took place comparatively late, as starlings go: In 1957, at the Keston Foreign Bird Farm in England (Boosey, 1957). The first U.S. zoo breeding did not occur until 1970, and that chick, hatched at the National Zoo, did not survive. The first U.S. zoo success was not until 1975, when Toledo hatched and raised four. Overall, from 1970 through 1991, there were 12 years when Hill Mynahs were hatched in U.S. public collections. Twelve institutions produced 46 chicks of which only 11 failed to survive (Zoological Society of London, 1972-93, Lindholm, 1996).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s this was a ubiquitous zoo bird, though perhaps most often seen as a single specimen in a small cage in the children's zoo. (Zoo lore is rife with stories of Hill mynahs kept strictly out of public sight and sound, as a result of having acquired a vocabulary calculated to draw the unfavorable attention of those easily shocked).

As of 31 December, 1996, ISIS (1997a) listed only 14 U.S. zoos holding Hill Mynahs, with a total of seven males, nine females, and 10 unsexed birds. None were hatched in 1996. However, one hatched in the first six months of 1997, in Honolulu (ISIS, 1997b). This species was not recommended for zoo programs by the AZA Passerine Taxon Advisory Group, in favor of Asian Starlings with smaller ranges.

While, as a whole, this wide-ranging bird is not considered threatened, there is great concern for local populations, especially in Bali and most of Java, where "it is now rather rare due to trapping and habitat loss." (MacKinnon & Phillipps, 1993).

Aside from several at the San Diego Wild Animal Park, considered to be *G. religiosa mertinsi* from Flores in the Lesser Sundas, I believe all the current U.S. zoo specimens are *G. religiosa intermedia*, the standard talking mynah of pet stores, exported in great numbers from Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s. There has certainly been a great deal of deforestation over its

wide range, from the foothills of the Himalayas through Indo-China, and that situation needs monitoring. However, the more seriously threatened Java Hill Mynah *G. r. religiosa*, found also in Bali, Borneo, Sumatra, the southern Malay Peninsula, and surrounding small islands, warrants immediate concern, as commercial trapping and lumber operations proceed at full blast in most of these areas.

The Java Hill Mynah has traditionally maintained a special reputation in aviculture, well summed up by Bates and Busenbark (1963), "This rare and expensive species [sic] has an overall larger size... The Java Hill Mynah is a superlative talker and is worth its price. Not often available, it usually finds a ready market when it is imported."

In recent years, a number arrived in this country, collected, I believe, in Sumatra, where they remain fairly common for now.

As it happens, there has been much published on this subspecies, as well as *G. r. intermedia*, in recent issues of this magazine, thanks to the initiation of a column devoted to Hill Mynahs and their propagation, by Suzanne Howse (1997), with subsequent contributions by Lynda Scott (1997a&b), and Gayle Anderson-Nixon (1997). These three aviculturists are determined to establish both subspecies in this country through the efforts of private individuals, and are encouraging the recruitment of talking pets into the breeding population. Hopefully, the CITES listing of all Hill Mynahs will serve to further encourage their propagation in North America. ➤

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