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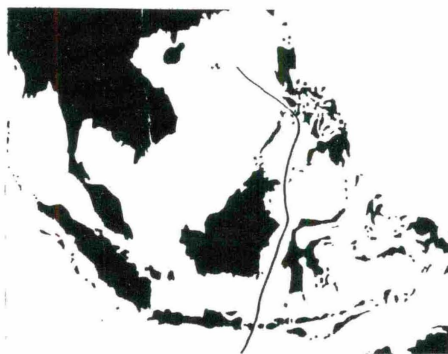
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the Philippine Red-vented Cockatoo

Cacatua haematuropygia

by Susie Christian
Morro Bay, California

What a charming little cockatoo the Red-vented is! I was thrilled to be able to get photos of them and also handle one of the tame males. In spite of their rarity, these cockatoos are no different than any of their other white cousins in their personalities and likes. They love to be touched and have their heads rubbed just like all the rest.

When the opportunity presented itself to write an article on them, it was a stroke of luck for me to be acquainted with two breeders in my area who have these birds. The breeder I visited for the photos has a whopping group of seven. Unfortunately, he also grapples with the age-old cockatoo problem. He has five males, two hens and is in a constant search for more unrelated hens to make up the pairs he needs.

With nine years of Red-vented Cockatoo breeding experience under his belt, I was told by the breeder here on the Central California Coast their breeding season is late April to May. The chicks hatch in early June. Incubation of eggs lasts 25 to 28 days and the clutch size is one to three eggs,



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Red-vented Cockatoos are small but very diligent woodworkers. Note the chewed up entrance to the nest box.

but usually two. The eggs are the approximate size of Goffin's eggs. All eggs are parent incubated and hatched. No matter the size of the clutch, only one offspring from each clutch ever survives. The parent birds let the other baby or babies die. Even if the weaker babies are pulled for hand-feeding they never last more than two weeks and expire. Occasionally the pairs double clutch but that is a rarity. One clutch per year is the norm.

The males are described as extremely aggressive during the breeding season and protective of the hens. They have been known by this breeder to attack him, his dog, or whoever happened to be in the way. He keeps the male cockatoo's wings trimmed during the breeding season to slow him down a bit. Pairing Red-vented Cockatoos at the time they are very young would be ideal but almost impossible given their short supply.

Even though it is quite evident these cockatoos make excellent companion birds, because of their rarity it is not recommended. They are not often

kept as pets.

This species of cockatoo was readily available 25 years ago at reasonable prices but the its numbers have dwindled, making it a very rare bird. In addition, the Red-vented Cockatoo isn't nearly as common to its native Philippines as it was at one time. There are some still on the Island of Palawan.

During the 1980s when there were greater numbers of this species, the Red-vented was devastated by psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD) contributing to the decrease of its numbers in captivity. In fact, during the last 15 years it has become one the Philippines' most threatened birds as well, second only to the Philippine Eagle.

My first impression was that the Red-vented resembles a Goffin's Cockatoo in size and overall appearance. But when I caught a glimpse under the tail I saw the big difference. What a flash of color! The covert feathers under the tail are a bright red, edged with white and the under tail feathers are brilliant yellow. What an amazing contrast to the



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It is easy to see how the Red-vented Cockatoo got its name. It is also called the Philippine Cockatoo.

overall rich off-white color of the rest of the body.

The relatively short, backward-curving crest of the Red-vented is small, cap-like, and white in color with a yellow to rose-pink shade at the base. The ear coverts are tinged with a subtle yellowish-pink and the bare periorbital skin around the eyes is whitish, but occasionally has a bluish tinge. Pale yellow suffuses the undersides of the flight feathers while the tail feathers become a deeper shade of yellow. The males and females are similar in plumage color but the males have darker brown eyes and the hens have soft reddish brown eyes, the color of a milk chocolate Hershey bar. The Red-vented's beak is greyish-white with the legs being the usual cockatoo-grey shade.

Measuring roughly a foot in length, these cockatoos are noted for making a loud raspy harsh croaking vocalization with two syllables. Of course half the specimens I came into contact with recently, eagerly said hello to me in a very pleasing, loud but sweet voice. Their talking ability appears to be equal to that of a Goffin's or Ducorps's.

The Philippine Cockatoo is native to the Philippines as its name implies,

including islands in the Sulu Archipelago and Palawan Group. The greatest concentration of numbers of this cockatoo currently can be found in the western districts of Palawan, where there are expanses of coastal mangrove (when editor, Sheldon Dingle, searched the central district for them a few years ago, he didn't find any).

This species has undergone a dramatic decline in numbers during recent years due to trade, extensive deforestation, and habitat loss plus an outbreak of psittacine beak and feather disease. Fifty years ago the species was very common and was still fairly plentiful until the 1970s. This cockatoo is presently absent from probably 98% of its former range. Accessible nest holes and roosting sites are easy targets for thieving trappers.

Philippine Cockatoos are listed in CITES Appendix I and there are about 20 of these lovely little white birds in zoos, 300 in private aviculture, and a maximum overall world population estimate of a shameful, mere 4,000.

With the knowledge of these figures in my head, I am very impressed that I was able to hold one of these beautiful lovelies and give his sweet little rare head a fondle. 