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Breeding the Amboina King Parrot

by Sheldon Dingle
Norco, CA

In 1977 ten Amboina king parrots (*Alisterus amboinensis*) were acquired through a commercial quarantine station. They were wild-caught birds that came from somewhere in or near Indonesia. There are six subspecies that range from Peleng Island, the Sulu Islands, Indonesia, east through the Moluccas to the western Papuan Islands and western New Guinea. The age of the birds, of course, was completely unknown when they were acquired but they all were in adult plumage.

Although the birds are monomorphic (both sexes look alike) upon close examination I found a slight difference that divided the group of birds in half. The lesser under wing-covert feathers are a deep blue color. The birds' shoulder where the wing attaches is bright red. On half of the birds examined I found a very slight "bleeding" of the red color about one half to one inch along the lesser under wing-coverts beginning where the wing attaches. Lou Schumacher, I think it was, suggested this slight difference might distinguish the sexes so the birds were paired up that way.

Nowadays, of course, there are several scientific ways to positively sex monomorphic birds. Subsequent events, however, suggest that this "bleeding" is present on females and not on males but don't bet your breeding success on it.

The birds were paired up and put in their various aviaries. Shortly thereafter I had occasion to move so during the moving and building process various pairs of birds were farmed out thither and yon.

When my own facilities were ready I brought the Amboinas back and put each pair in a 4 x 8 aviary alone. The subject pair appeared to be in good health but in rather poor feather. In any event, they gradually feathered out to perfection and adapted to their new home.

All time considered, this pair of birds was housed together alone for about three years before they bred. During most of the three years the hen stayed in the nest box—sometimes days would pass without a sight of her. Unfortunately, no courtship display has ever been observed although the male would sometimes disappear into the nest box also—sense of propriety and modesty, no doubt. There is no interaction between this pair and the other kings on the property as they are housed in separate banks of aviaries.

In view of the general inactivity of the Amboinas and the fact that the hen lived in the nest box, we gradually forgot about them. They were always the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We fed and watered them according to routine and thought nothing more about it.

Then, on a happy day in August of 1980, my wife was putting some apple in the king's cage and she heard a strange noise from the nest box. She put her ear up to the box and heard the unmistakable sound of a baby parrot begging for food. She quickly informed me and we examined the box. It contained one baby about ten days old and one egg that proved to be clear. The hen alone incubated but the male assisted in the feeding. He would fill up on apple or another treat and immediately disappear into the box.

My wife and I then entered combat regarding handfeeding versus parent birds feeding out their own young. I prefer the parents to feed the chicks, my wife prefers to handfeed the babies after they reach two weeks of age. As usual, I had to beat a hasty but dignified retreat in the face of the wife's heavy artillery consisting of written or spoken opinions from Rosemary Low, Ramon Noegel, Dave West and various other heavy guns in aviculture.

She hand raised the little beast. In Susan's opinion no parrot, not even the cockatiel, is easier to hand feed than the Amboina king. She has used several different diets in handfeeding and there hasn't been a nickles worth of difference. The king diet, though, was rather heavy on fruit. Those of you interested in the precise formula she uses may inquire of us by mail and we'll send you a copy. If your own formula works for other parrots, however, it ought to work for kings also.

Living in Southern California does have its blessings, one being the ease of maintaining outdoor aviaries. This pair of Amboina kings is housed in a bank of nine adjoining aviaries each being eight feet long by four feet wide. The aviaries were constructed by H. Richard Mattice out of steel tube welded into frames. There is a sheltered aisleway with doors opening into the shelter of each aviary. The shelter consists of painted plywood screwed to the steel and comprising half of the total aviary. The other half is an open flight covered with ½ x 1 inch welded wire also screwed to the steel frames. The shelters are four



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A pair of Amboina king parrots. The male and female are exactly alike in coloring. Although it doesn't show in this photo, the Amboinas have a deep blue mantle and back. In this they differ greatly from the Australian king (see page 37).

feet by four feet by eight feet high. The flights are also four feet square but only seven feet high. The whole structure is situated on a concrete pad but two inches of decomposed granite covers the cement in each aviary. There are, of course, no

plants.

At each end of the flyway, that is, the near end of the shelter and the far end of the open flight, there is a natural, multi-branched perch cut from our stand of large eucalyptus trees. On these perches

the birds can choose the angle and diameter of branch they prefer to use at any given moment. The nest box is hung inside the shelter and is made of plywood. It is twelve inches square by thirty inches deep. The entrance hole is near the top

and is six inches in diameter (which is two inches bigger than I ordered). There is a wire ladder from the hole to the bottom of the box. The bottom is covered with about six inches of dampened and hard-packed pine shavings and cymbidium orchid potting soil (just a medium I had on hand, not, I think, essential). Only the one box was offered and it faces the back of the shelter giving the utmost privacy. On the next bank of aviaries we put up I think I should like to provide a wider aisleway so the boxes can be attached to the outside of the aviary with an access hole through the wall of the shelter. Bob Berry likes that method and I think he's right for several reasons.

Our feeding and husbandry techniques are rather simple. In the shelter and again in the flight there are steel-framed wire bottom shelves. A large seed bowl is kept on the sheltered shelf and contains a mixture of seeds including safflower, canary, oat groats, millet, milo, niger, wheat, and sunflower. The mixture varies somewhat as I mix my own and the percentages are not measured precisely. I generally strive for about twenty percent safflower, ten percent sunflower, twenty percent canary and the other seeds in lesser amounts. We feed the birds a *small* amount of seed at a time and force them to eat nearly everything that is offered. If, for example, a certain bird loves sunflower best he will eat it first. But its seed won't be replenished until it has eaten most of the other seeds as well. In this manner the birds get a variety of seeds like it or not. My wife insisted on this method of feeding and now I agree with her.

The shelf at the end of the open flight contains a water bowl, a "goodie" bowl, and a wooden block with a nail sticking up through it. Apples, corn on the cob etc., can be impaled upon the nail for easy access by the birds. We supplement the Amboinas' seed diet with daily feedings of apple, soaked rolled corn (which is mixed with a small amount of Wayne dog meal slightly moistened), romaine lettuce or chard and occasional treats of various vegetables. The greens and fruits are fed more heavily just preceding and during the breeding season. For a number of years now we have not fed sprouted seed but next spring we will resume it. All things considered, I think sprouted seed is worth the extra effort.

Unfortunately, my wife and I service and feed the birds ourselves. Good help, you know, is so difficult to keep these days — especially since we don't pay. We would both prefer to *observe* our collection while directing an army of atten-

dants in the birds care — a la the Duke of Bedford. When I'm the Duke, my wife, alas, is the attendant and vice versa. It's the best we can do. At least it gets us out amongst our birds.

Though we both tend to them, my wife has a much better rapport with the king parrots than I have. She talks to them and can check the nest box with little difficulty. They are more tame towards her also, often coming right down to her to receive tidbits. The little fellow she raised last year is now a beautiful fully feathered Amboina king parrot and it seems incongruous to see him fly out the door of the holding pen and land on her head. He then drops to the ground and tugs at her shoe with his beak. As she moves up and down the aisle doing her work "King" (the next one she raised is called "Kong") digs his claws into the ground and really pulls at her shoe. He would growl like a dog if he could. When the chores are over he flies back into his pen.

Our aviaries are very private. We very seldom have the pleasure of sharing our collection with others so we take our pleasure where we find it. Susan's joy centers around very warm, personal relationships with some of the birds. The Amboinas are among her favorites because she gets on so well with them. They come to the wire to see her when she passes by.

Though Amboinas tend to be docile and, with Susan at least, downright tame, that does not hold true among themselves. When I had ten of them all together in one large flight two of them were attacked and killed by one or more of the others. I am aware of several instances where one of a seemingly compatible pair suddenly turned upon its mate and killed it. Usually the female is the aggressor but not always.

The Amboina king parrots are excellent aviary specimens for experienced breeders. They seem to be a bit difficult to get going but if the aviculturist remains patient, chances for getting a pair of Amboinas to breed are quite good.

This strikingly beautiful parrot was imported for we American aviculturists. We are morally bound to breed it to the point of abundance lest we be accused of ravaging nature. Only our unceasing efforts to breed our birds and the diligent building up the the A.F.A. Annual Bird Registry can insure our avicultural future.

Oh! By the way, at this writing, we have one hand fed baby Amboina just being weaned and two more in the nest about ten days old. We'll let the parents raise their second clutch.

Bracken Bird Farm

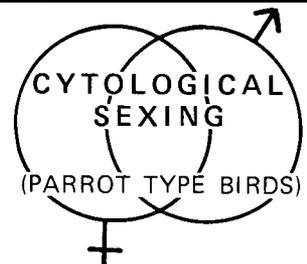


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