



Male red-legged honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*)

Mr. Red-legs

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Meet Mr. Red-legs! Technically speaking, he is a red-legged honeycreeper—*Cyanerpes cyaneus*. He is about 5.5 inches long and has a curved bill about .7 inch long. His crown is iridescent turquoise blue; his forehead, lores, stripe around the eye, and upper back are black. The rest of his body is cobalt or purple blue with black wings that have inner webs of canary yellow feathers. The tail and undertail coverts are black and, of course, his legs are red. He moults

after the breeding season and assumes an eclipse plumage which is very similar to the coloration of the female, that being dark green above and pale green streaked yellowish white underparts.

He is from the northwestern part of South America, namely Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador. In this natural habitat, he would be part of a flock which moves through the forest canopy searching for flowers and insects.

He would also frequent areas where the forest has been cleared and through second growth where berry producing shrubs flourish.

However, since Oklahoma is not known for its forest canopies, Mr. Red-legs eats mealworms (often from my hand), a variety of fruits, and drinks nectar. He is rather particular about his fruits. He likes chopped fruit cocktail to which some softbill food has been added, grapes and berries. His favorite dish is pound cake soaked with nectar. Thank goodness for Sara Lee as he will not eat my home-made pound cake!

Now, back to some personal observations about this distinguished avian gem. Beautiful, yes—but I should not say gentle, in that he killed his first mate or at least contributed to her death. They had lived together for the better part of a year in a 30'' x 21'' x 22'' cage. Then one day, we noticed that he was courting her. Standing on a perch, he would stretch out toward her, extending his legs as if he were standing on tip-toe, and make a soft tee-tee-tee sound. It looked and sounded as if he were whispering sweet nothings in her ear! Whatever he said was not what she wanted to hear for about a week later she was found dead in the cage.

Consequently, Mr. Red-legs was moved into a smaller cage next door to a yellow-legged honeycreeper, who was herself a widow. After a few weeks, we noticed Mr. Red-legs talking to the yellow-legged honeycreeper through the bars, as it were, rather than across the fence. This went on for some time. Finally, we decided to put them together, just to see what would happen. Well, within a week, they were begging for a nest, so we obliged. They immediately set-up housekeeping and two eggs were laid. We waited patiently but not too expectantly for the eggs to hatch. They did not and so were removed. However, not to be deterred, the pair started over. We tried putting them in an aviary by themselves, but they did not like that at all. So it was back to a 15'' x 31'' x 29'' cage. When the baby died trying to get out of the shell, a discouraged Mr. Red-legs began to moult. We separated them during this time.

This red-legged honeycreeper is persistent! Through the months of his eclipse plumage, he chatted quite frequently with the female yellow-legged. When he colored-up again, we put the pair back together. He is, at present, waiting and hoping to become a father. Even if he does not become a father, he will always be the arrogant, amorous, completely delightful Mr. Red-legs. ●