

# An Impossible Situation

by H.D. "Hank" Brawley  
Dallas, Texas

I have had Pionus now more than five years; have had almost all the species and to date have had success with four species. I chose the Pionus because as I approached the city regarding a building permit for an aviary, I hit the first brick wall. Absolutely not! No birds, poultry or anything in my neighborhood. There may even be a bag-limit on kids. After much hassling and many trips, I finally found two employees on duty one lunch hour. Neither knew what an aviary was, so they okayed the plans and issued the permit. Wow!

Believe me, *that* weekend I had a contractor pour the foundation. As the picture will show, I have five flights attached to the south side of a double garage. A three foot hallway runs the length of the building with a door entering each flight. The 1/2 x 1 inch wire enclosures are 3 ft. x 6 ft. x 6 ft.



Photo by Evelyn Brawley

*The big bird on the left is Hank Brawley, a strong voice among Pionus breeders. On his arm are Jack and Ruby, the first captive bred pair of dusky Pionus in the world. They were hatched in the aviaries of Ramon Noegel in 1983.*

Three feet of the enclosure is under the roof portion and three feet is exposed to sun, rain, etc. One very dumb carpenter and I, plus my son and various neighbors, had the thing 'bird livable' in about 30 days or so. Prior to that I had birds stacked all over the house and a mad wife.

Usually in Dallas we have very mild

winters, maybe a few days of 20° weather, but then the sun pops out and we range in the 40-65° type of weather. The first winter the birds were out, we had the most severe winter in 100 years of record-keeping. There were 296 consecutive hours of below freezing during which the sun did not appear *one* time. The temperature went down to 5 degrees two nights in a row. I could stand it no longer and brought the birds all in the house again.

My son and I, in sub-freezing weather, finally located a roll of Hart-O-Glass which is actually screen overshot with plastic, and we applied that to all outside surfaces. Then we found a blower-type electric heater and set it at 40° and replaced the birds in the aviaries.

There is the ground work, now I'll tell you the story. Nothing about the birds seemed to be damaged except on one dusky male (*P. fuscus*). In 60 days, he had lost every toe he possessed. I call him "Stubby". By that time, the white crowns had eggs so the only damage was to Stubby's feet.

Now when Pionus breed, they are not the mounting type bird. They sit side by side and more or less turn their rears to each other for contact. As you can imagine, this takes toes and toenails to hang on to a perch. This spelled doom for Stubby as a breeder. But, I reasoned, I did this to him so it's up to

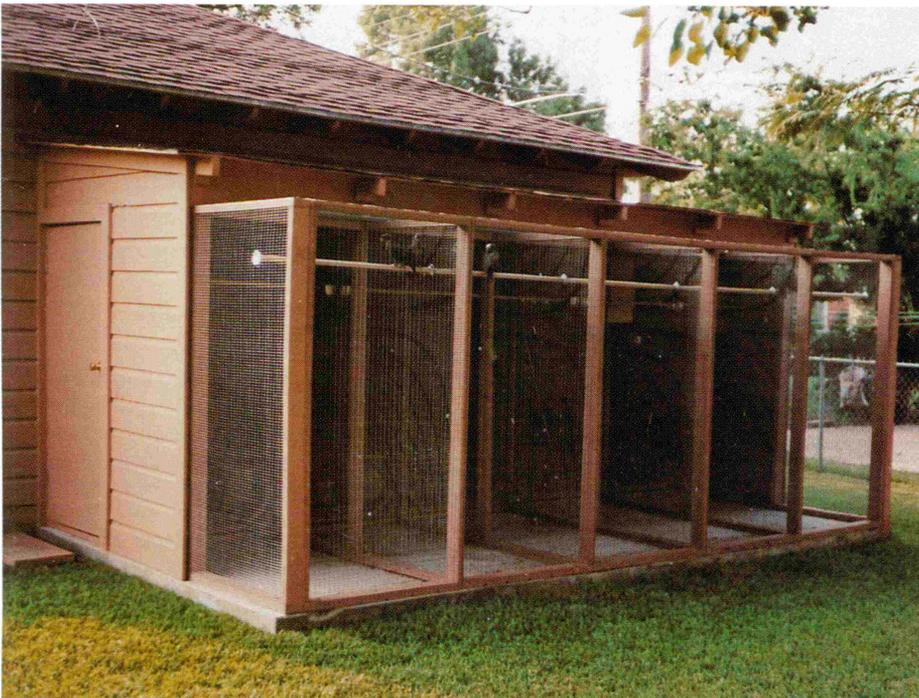
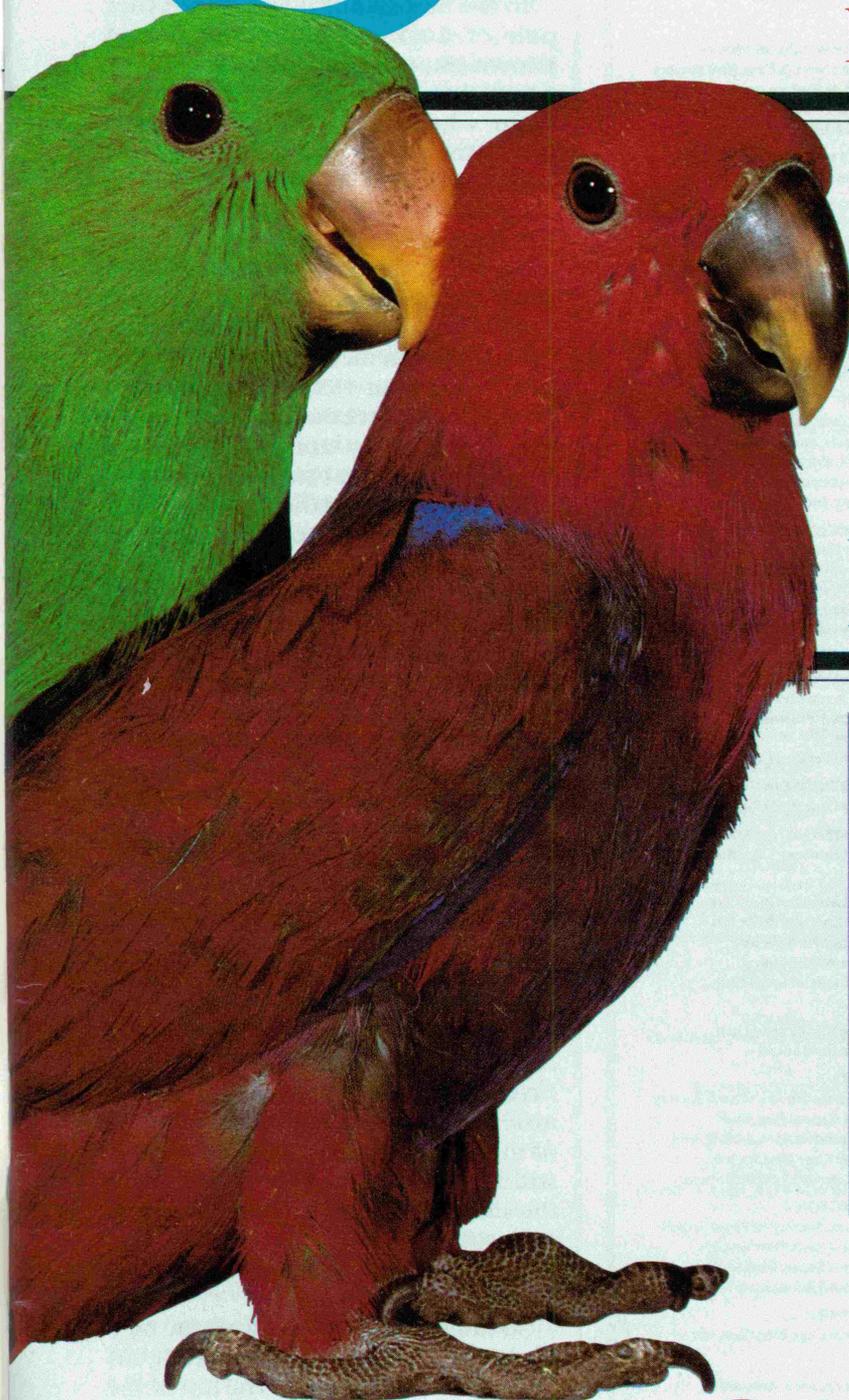


Photo by Hank Brawley

*A very simple but effective complex for breeding small parrots. This sort of aviary works well and can be built at small cost by any handy person.*

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me to take care of him — not deprive him of his mate. They are seven years old and both will fly to me to land on my arm and eat treats, as will most of my birds.

Anyway, they went through the breeding rituals this year and she laid the first egg on July 21. I kept checking the box every four or five days and no more appeared. I figured it as a 'fluke' nest and thought, oh well, if it makes her happy — what the heck!

In the meanwhile, I bought another pair of dusky breeders that I had known since 1981 and put them in my usual "break-in" cage in the front room, where they get the full treatment of TV., the phone, and usual household noises. I am a strong advocate of "the gentler a bird is, the quicker he'll work for you," so I try to indoctrinate every pair in this manner. I have a regular #125 Hendryx cage very near my favorite chair, and the birds are about three feet from me in my chair. I like to give them about 45 days of this before going to the breeding pens. Usually they become very tame, and I let them fly about the room often.

About this time, the new pair was breeding regularly and looking for a place to nest. Suddenly, one day I decided to bring Stubby and his mate inside and put the new pair out in the aviaries. At the nearest pet store, I found a ready-made Cockatiel nest box just right to go through the door in the Hendryx cage. I cut the entrance hole larger. Then I caught up each pair of dusky Pionus and placed them in carrying cages while I cleaned up the outside flight and the cage — all this time, I had Stubby's egg in my shirt pocket. I filled the *little* nest box (usual Pionus is 10" x 10" x 20") with about four inches of cedar shavings, fashioned a depression in it and placed the box in the left rear corner of the cage. I removed the Bar-B-Que grille first. I put Stubby and his mate in the inside cage and talked to them a couple of minutes so they would know I was still around. She, at once, went down the side of the cage, looked in the box and got right back on her egg. The thought hit me then that this is crazy — *Parrots* don't do that!

So things rocked along with the new birds outside with Stubby feeding his hen and she still setting. The top of the nest box became filthy from droppings. As I would change the paper in the bottom, I would scrape the box as best I could with a putty knife but I still didn't like it in there. I checked my calendar to see when the egg was laid



— I counted the days because in the box's position I couldn't get to it to check the egg for hatch but I knew it would just be a throwaway job anyway so I said, what the heck, this coming Saturday I will clean out the whole mess.

Saturday came, and I took out the main perch — slid the tray out so I could get the nest box out of there — opened the top lid, and had about a three day old chick.

I could not believe it. *Impossible* for him to mate, moving their complete location, strange nest box, noise and usual foot traffic through the living room, but there it was!

I wanted this unusual happening to be known among parrot breeders. This shows that (with any type or species) don't bet your last dime on anything — *anything* can happen with parrots.

On another subject, often after I read of 'first breedings,' I wonder a year later what ever happened to the youngsters. Some of you may remember the write-up on Ramon Noegel and the first hatching and raising of the dusky Pionus. This happened on May 10, 1983. Actually, Ramon had two pairs for a number of years. They happened to lay and hatch at the same time. One pair had one youngster, and the other three. The youngsters were hand fed by Gregory at Ramon's aviaries.

Not long after that I got the chick from the single nest and one of opposite gender from the other nest. They are doing fine and laid their first clutch of eggs at the age of 23 months. All four eggs were fertile, but one egg was pierced by a toenail and the chick died in the shell about 1/3 formed — none of the other three were able to break out although they were fully formed. We had extremely dry weather about that time and I guess they couldn't break the shell. They were fully formed, I washed them and examined them under a magnifying glass and all were perfect chicks — just could not make it. At least, I was gratified to see the excellent fertility and I have every reason to think they will do okay this coming spring. The enclosed picture of these two birds and me was taken by wife, Evelyn. She cares little for my Pionus and has a couple of African greys for pets in the house.

So you know now about that first breeding. In Stoodley's book, "*Pionus Parrots*," he has a picture of these two Pionus and declares them to be a "world's first captive breeding" so I guess the little "beasties" are famous birds. I'm glad I have them. ●

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