



The young of this species are similar to the adults except they have lighter plumage.

Breeding the Collared Finch-billed Bulbul

at Tracy Aviary

(*Spizixos semitorques*)

by D. Grenville Roles, Curator
Salt Lake City, Utah

Inhabiting suitable hill-scrub country in east, central and south China and Taiwan (*S.s.cineriecapilus*), Collared Finch-billed Bulbuls are one member of a family of about 120 species ranging throughout Africa and tropical Asia.

Approximately 8 inches long with greyish-green upperparts, (greener wings and tail) and yellowish underparts with black head and terminal tail band; the face is lightly streaked with white on the cheeks and spotted with white on the nostrils and base of the lower mandible. A broad white collar separates the black head from the olive breast. Eyes and feet are dark while the thick, finch-like bill is ivory.

Reputed to feed in the wild on seeds, beans and fruit (de Schauensee, *The Birds of China*), our birds are offered Vitabird Finch mix in addition to chopped fruits, hard-boiled egg, bird of prey diet, mealworms and crickets.

We obtained four birds from Chris Johnson in Atlanta in July of 1987. All of the birds appeared fit and healthy, although one bird had a droopy wing, and after a three-week period in quarantine we released them into their new home in the Pheasantry.

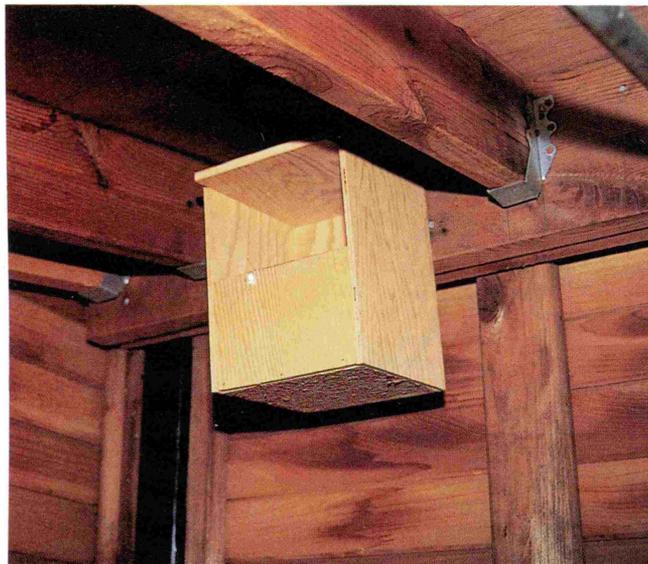
Our Pheasantry is a range of 13 large aviaries arranged in two blocks. Each block is built on a large mound or burm and is heavily landscaped and planted with trees and shrubs of Himalayan origin. Each individual aviary has its own partially open-fronted shelter, fitted with a water and heat source (infra-red lamp).

The Bulbuls' aviary is 15 feet square and 19 feet high at its peak; planted with Birches, Viburnum, Cornus, Dwarf Pines and Star Magnolias. Most of the ground is covered by grass, with large rocks and tree

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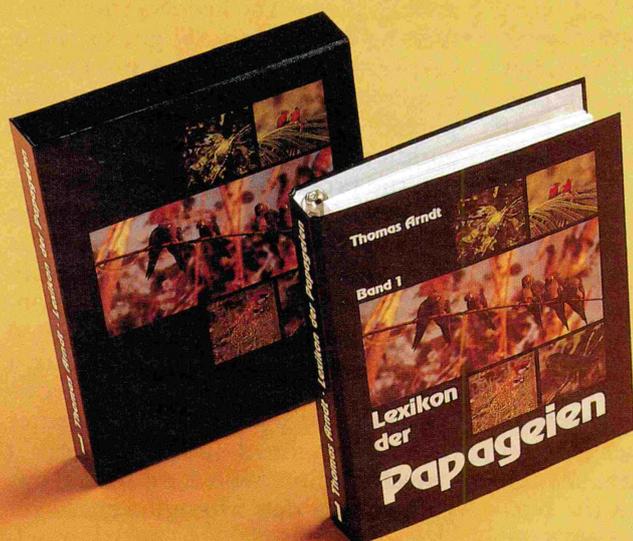
The Collared Finch-billed Bulbul was bred in a large, planted outdoor aviary at the Tracy Aviaries in Salt Lake City.



A small wooden nest box was used by the Collared Finch-billed Bulbul. Bulbuls usually will use an open nest.

Thomas Arndt

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branches providing a variety of perching.

The Bulbuls share their aviary with Pekin Robins *Leiothrix lutea*, Lace-neck Doves *Streptopelia chinensis* and Chinese Bamboo Partridge *Bambusicola thoracica*. No bickering has ever been observed between species but the Bulbuls have been seen to chase each other on occasion.

The heat lamps were left on for the first winter the birds experienced here, but they were never seen to seek out the warmth on even the coldest day, so subsequently the lamps have not been switched on. Winters in Salt Lake City can become extremely cold with temperatures regularly dipping (and often staying) below freezing. We actually have bird-bath heaters immersed in all of the Pheasantry water bowls to prevent them from freezing solid (they still freeze around the edges, however).

On 4/19/88 we discovered two birds missing from the aviary. A quick check revealed a small hole at the junction of the wire mesh frame and the redwood baseboard. Formerly below ground level, it had been exposed by the activities of the Bamboo Partridge scratching and digging in the ground at that spot. I was not terribly worried since both birds could be seen exploring the giant Cottonwoods in the vicinity of their aviary, and we have almost always retrieved escapees. I remembered being told, too, of a Collared Finch-billed Bulbul which lived at liberty for years at San Diego Zoo.

Unfortunately though, we were

able to recapture only one of the birds, the other I suspect was taken by one of the Cooper's Hawks which nest annually in Liberty Park. Almost exactly one year later, the birds attempted to breed for us for the first time. In mid-April, birds had been seen carrying very fine birch twigs rather aimlessly around the flight, but did not appear to be attempting any construction. However, a check of the half-open-fronted wooden nest box (5' square, 7' high and packed with hay) revealed a clutch of three eggs; markedly pyriform, basically pink and heavily marked with maroon spots and dots and dull mauve splotches.

These were discovered on 4/13/89. The birds must have been extremely wary and alert to the approach of keepers, for they were never seen on or around the nest box at any time.

On checking the nest box the next day, two eggs were found to have hatched, the new chicks having dark, bruised looking upperparts and pale pink underparts. Live food supplies of crickets and mealworms were immediately increased together with the number of spot checks on the adults' behaviour.

It was seen that the (presumably) unmated bird was being chased around a bit (though not seriously harrassed) and the bird with the drooped wing appeared to be the male — perching prominently and vocalizing. One bird was also seen to hawk for insects. On the 15th, one of the birds had the temerity to buzz the curator, its beak snapping loudly as it zipped by my ear lobe!

It was with some surprise, not to mention disappointment, that all of the chicks were discovered dead and thrown out of the nest on the 23rd of April, 9 days after hatching.

Thus began a series of four failures in 1989 to rear the Bulbuls. Fertility was excellent, the birds hatched perfectly, were fed and appeared well for a week or so and then died. There appeared to be no neglect of the chicks or damage to them; they would have food in their intestine but no nasty bugs to be cultured. We added waxmoth larvae, tried out fruit flies and doubled the Bionate dusting — nothing made any difference.

The birds overwintered without problems, laying their first clutch of the year at the end of March 1990. All three eggs hatched which, after 48 hours, were taken to Kerry Singleton, a local aviculturist who hand-feeds

our Psittacines with great success. The chicks did well for a week and then died.

The birds continued to try throughout the summer to raise a family — but repeating the same frustratingly awful pattern. The keepers tried hand feeding but could only get so far. In desperation I took a chick myself, fed it religiously, kept it spotlessly clean, petted and preened it, kissed and cuddled it and altogether watched it like the proverbial hawk! It may have been all of this concentrated attention and my years of experience, or, as every one else assures me, just plain luck, that I got a survivor. This non-descript, drab little bundle, hatched 7/14/90, came to know his daddy, I mean keeper, and would beg unceasingly for just a little more, no matter how much he'd just engulfed. I started him off with hard-boiled egg yolk with a dab of yoghurt, cricket abdomens, chopped, white mealworms and a tiny quantity of soaked dog food. After a couple of days, I stopped the yoghurt and fed the crickets whole but without the hind legs, increased the dog food and introduced fragments of Bird of Prey diet.

The chick continued to do well, feathering out into a dull greyish above, whitish below with dark bill, eyes and legs.

At that same time, I also acquired a Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrohyncha* (hatched in the incubator) and raised it along with the Bulbul, carrying them both home at night and keeping them in a small incubator/brooder there. I would feed every two hours, until 10.00 p.m. or so.

The chicks were very companionable until the day I put them both into a wire cage next to my office instead of the large cardboard box they had become used to (the birds were about 5 weeks old). I had just released the birds into their new cage and returned to my office, when I heard sounds of murder. On rushing back, there was the Bulbul being held down by the Blue Pie who was trying to split his skull as quickly as possible. I had to pry the Blue Pie's toes apart one at a time to release the Bulbul who was obviously terrified. The bird was not permanently damaged, however, but they were kept separated after that.

At three months old, the Bulbul chick is virtually identical to its parents and continues to thrive. ●



A case of mis-association . . . the photo by Jack E. Taylor of Thick-billed Parrots on page 28 of the April/May 1991 issue should have been placed on page 26 or 27 with author Jack F. Taylor's article.

Photo caption on page 61, June/July 1991 issue should have read, "The juvenile plumage is greyish-black, and assumes the adult appearance in the SIXTH year of life."