



Bali (Rothschild's) Mynah

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(Leucopsar rothschildi)

by Dick Schroeder
Los Angeles, California

Sometimes called Rothschild's Grackle or Bali Starling (in Indonesia it is called Jalak putih bali). By any name this has to be the most beautiful of all the starlings. Sexes are alike, especially when immature, although the male is somewhat larger and has a noticeably longer crest. The snow white bodies have black tips to the tail and wingfeathers. The eyes are surrounded by a bright blue mask of bare skin that tapers to a point on the side of the head. The feet are blue-grey, as is the bill with a yellowish tip. Length is about 10 inches (25 cm).

As its name implies, this mynah is found only on the Indonesian island of Bali, which lies just off of the east-

ern tip of Java. It was unknown until 1912 when it was discovered by Dr. Stressemann. It was nearly 20 years later that it was first bred in captivity by Mr. A. Ezra of England. It's a good thing that these birds are relatively easy to breed, as currently there are thought to be fewer than 30 individuals left in the wild!

The remaining wild birds are confined to Bali Barat National Park where they are, of course, protected. This hasn't deterred poachers from using mist nets and bird lime to trap them. The birds are said to be a status symbol in some parts of Indonesia. Others are smuggled to Europe where they hopefully wind up in the hands of aviculturists.

In November of 1987, the AAZPA (American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums) sent 20 pairs of U.S. bred stock to Surabaya Zoo in central Java. These birds are to be held in captivity and their offspring released into Bali Barat National Park. The poaching will have to be curbed before this occurs. The released birds are to be the responsibility of ICPB (International Council for Bird Preservation), while the AAZPA will be responsible for the propagation center at Surabaya, Java. The AAZPA Bali Mynah Studbook is under the direction of Species Coordinator Bob Seibels of Riverbanks Zoological Park in Columbia, South Carolina. The 1989 Studbook showed 390 Bali Mynahs held by studbook participants. Of these birds, only nine are founders, or wild caught birds, and these are all nearly 20 years old and no longer reproducing. New founder stock is being sought in Europe and the United Kingdom.

We have kept and bred Bali Mynahs since 1984. In order to keep these birds, a CBW (Captive Bred Wildlife) permit is necessary from the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. Here in California we are required to have an Injurious Species permit as well. (All starlings with the exception of the Indian Hill Mynah are illegal in CA. Don't ask why!) This state permit has not been easy to obtain. It seems to be at the whim of whomever happens to be in charge at the time of application.

Our Balis are housed in planted aviaries along with various other species of birds, primarily softbills, but we do keep some small lorikeets in one of the flights as well. Starlings have a reputation for being quite aggressive around other, especially smaller birds. Our "best" pair is housed in a 14' x 20' x 10' high aviary. Sharing this flight with three species of barbets, leafbirds, touracos, lorikeets, Pekin Robins and plovers as well as the odd sibia, bulbul, etc. we have had very little problem with aggressiveness. The male mynah tends to be most aggressive when chicks have just hatched or have just fledged. Even then he seems to chase just one or two birds, usually the Fire-tufted Barbets. Our other pair is in a 6' x 16' x 8' high, heavily planted flight along with a pair of Jambo Fruit Doves, a pair of Yellow-vented Bulbuls, and a lone male Green-naped Pheasant Pigeon. This pair is different. They will raise a few young each year,

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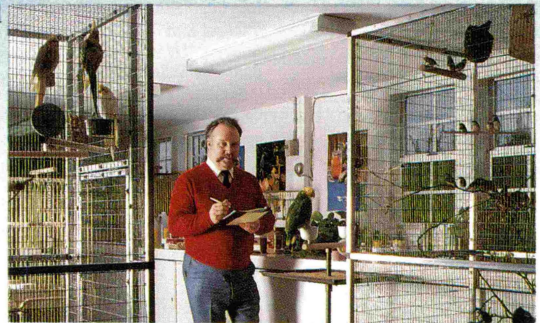
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though I tend to find them dead near the food dish at about a week old. When the chicks do fledge, this pair becomes deadly! They have killed a pair of barbets, several plovers and a leafbird! The male also beats up on the hen early in the breeding season, which runs from about March through October.

Both pairs use cockatiel nest boxes. They construct their own nests of twigs, leaves and feathers. Three, rarely four eggs are laid. Our "best" pair will usually fledge two of the three chicks, sometimes all three. We are quite happy to see two fledglings from the other pair. The eggs are blue, much like the European Starling, *Sturnis vulgaris*. Incubation lasts 14 days. We can tell how many chicks have hatched by counting the shells on the aviary floor. They usually remove them to the farthest end of the flight. Both pairs will tolerate checking of the nest. Usually I just open the top and use a mirror to check on the hatchlings. I have gone so far as to take a nest box down and out of the aviary to photograph the young without any problem. Within a week of fledging, the adult male will tend to chase any male youngsters. If all the chicks are female this is never a problem. We find the sexes to be about equally distributed. We will sometimes have a clutch of all one sex, but the next clutch might be all the opposite sex. This is true of both pairs. We have the young surgically sexed to be certain of gender. All chicks are banded with numbered bands in order to keep related birds separate. We use colored plastic pigeon bands.

Feeding in a mixed flight such as ours is pretty much a matter of offering something for everyone. This works out pretty well, as when a particular bird's favorite food item is gone it will choose something else, and before you know it nearly everyone eats everything. The adult mynahs follow this pattern as well, except when feeding chicks. They tend to feed only live food to their young. We offer both mealworms and crickets. The worms are fed live, while the crickets are frozen and thawed. This prevents populating Los Angeles with expensive bird food. With all of the other "live food" eaters in the aviaries, we use far more worms and crickets than would be necessary if the mynahs were housed alone. We have kept them in individual flights but saw no

increase in the number of young produced. Besides the live food, the balance of the diet offered consists of various diced fruits, apple, papaya, grapes, banana, melon, and mixed vegies. We also offer Exact low iron mynah pellets soaked in water, as well as Science Diet cat chow fed dry. Lory Life Nectar or Avico Sunbird Nectar is also offered daily. In the largest flight we offer the mixed diets in three separate feed stations, plus a nectar bowl. The smaller flight has two feed stations.

A note on keeping and breeding in a mixed species environment. All of the cavity nesters have been successful: the barbets, the lorikeets, and the mynahs. The cup nesters or those who build open nests have fared much less well. Most of the touraco eggs have been eaten by the barbets and bulbuls; the leafbirds and Pekin Robins have hatched young, only to lose them to something. I did witness a male Hartwick's Chloropsis eat his own hatchling. The plovers (spur-winged) have not had any problem rearing young, maybe because the parents are very protective, or because they nest on the ground, but they usually raise all they hatch. At hatching they look like long-legged button quail.

In conclusion, this is definitely a species where captive breeding is its only hope! The number of birds in the studbook drops little by little every year. They used to show up often on the AAZPA surplus list, now never! For an extremely rare bird they aren't even very expensive in the private sector, a pair costing little more than a pair of very common, overly imported Indian Hill Mynahs. The studbook has little use for "brand X" birds, those whose pedigree is unknown. These are usually the ones that the private breeder is working with. If you want to work with a beautiful, highly endangered bird, and don't mind the paperwork involved with permits and studbooks, maybe the Bali Mynah is the bird for you. They need all the help they can get!

References

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