

# Unusual Hybrids

by Tony Silva  
North Riverside, Illinois

The four of us were sitting in New Orleans' famous Arnaud's Restaurant. Across from me was Theo Pagel, Jr.; to my left his father, Theo Pagel, the famous German lorikeet expert; and to my right, Paul Roth, a Swiss ornithologist who now lives in northern Brazil and whose specialty is parrots. Our discussion centered on parrots, then suddenly it turned to hybrids. With hesitation I explained having seen a very unusual, indeed almost incredulous, cross in Australia — the offspring of a male rainbow lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus*) and a female king parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*). I expected Pagel to react the same way I did when first hearing of the bird — my eyebrows raised, facial expression clearly showing that I did not believe the cross was possible, and then asking the person telling me the story if they had been drinking — but he did not; in his soft-spoken words, he related another peculiar happening: the rearing of hybrids between a macaw (*Ara* spp.) and *Pionites* or caique. These two birds are as separate from each other as the

lorikeet and king.

It was in 1983 that I first visited Australia. Towards the end of my visit, Don Ripper told me of a male rainbow lorikeet kept in a cage with a pair of kings. When the *Alisterus* male died, the opportunistic and apparently sex-starved lorikeet took up the opportunity. A week after the king's death, the female laid four eggs; two were fertile. On 14 February 1980 a singleton hatched.

The chick, assumed to be a pure king, was reared by its mother and the lorikeet. After it colored up it became apparent that it was a hybrid. The unusual circumstances occurred in the aviaries of Victorian Stuart Anderson.

Don is an aviculturist of great standing, but this story was far too incredible for even me to accept. However, my curiosity was such that I could not allow the opportunity to see this bird escape. Several days later I stood, with lower jaw dropped, in disbelief: the bird existed!

Its size, some actions and other characteristics, left not a modicum of doubt as to its parentage. A description is not

Photo supplied by Tony Silva, U.S.A.



A very beautiful bird is the hybrid resulting from a mating of the greater sulphur-crested cockatoo with a rose-breasted cockatoo. Note the short crest and gray wing coloring of the rose-breasted cockatoo.

necessary; you can see for yourselves the appearance of the bird, in the accompanying photograph, generously supplied by Don Ripper. An apology to Don was in order, and this he accepted.

During a recent visit to Australia, I enquired about the bird. It has been transferred to another collection and paired to a rainbow lorikeet but thus far shows no interest in breeding.

The zoo in Duisburg, West Germany, accidentally reared young from a male black-headed caique (*Pionites melanocephala*) and a female severe macaw (*Ara severa*), the progeny taking ten weeks to leave the nest and developing like severe macaws. Slides sent to me by Theo Pagel depict the hybrids as extremely attractive. Body is green, breast orangish hinted, this color intensifying at the top of the breast forming a band, the face is naked (at least this is how it appears in the slides), and the bill is

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On the left is a male rainbow lorikeet alongside its hybrid offspring. The mother bird was an Australian king parrot. The hybrid shows the king parrot's influence in its size and shape while its color more closely resembles the rainbow lorikeet.

Photo by Don Ripper, Australia



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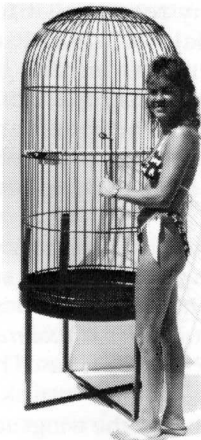
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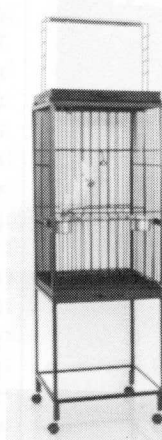
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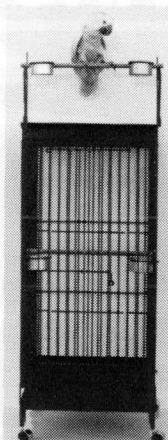
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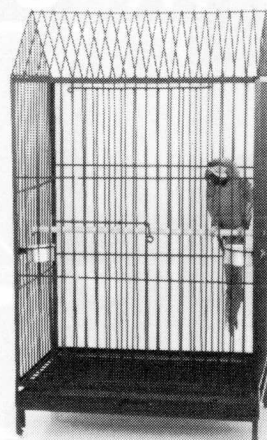
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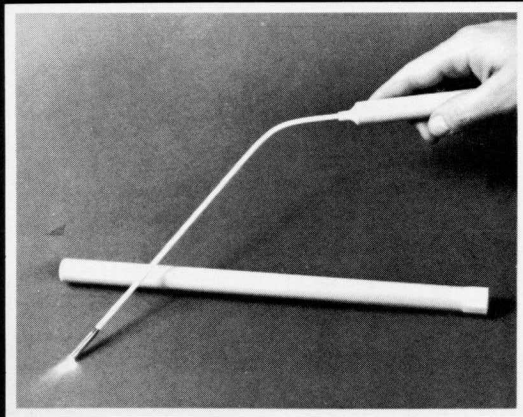
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dark, lighter towards the tip.

Another unusual cross is that of the hyacinthine and blue and gold macaw, (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* and *Ara ararauna*), respectively. It was first produced at the Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City, Utah, but others have since managed to duplicate the birds; hybrids between the military *Ara militaris* and *hyacinthinus* have also been produced in the U.S.

The hyacinthine / blue and gold hybrids appear like a *hyacinthine* from the back, but from the front, the yellow breast clearly identifies its parentage. Interestingly, Rothschild in his 1907 book, *Extinct Birds*, depicts a similar bird, though with a reddish tail. This individual is given the name of *Ara erythrura*, while one with even greater affinity to the hybrid (save for the deeper breast color) is also depicted; this one is named *Ara martinica*. If these West Indian macaws were ever seen, they could well have been hybrids, either naturally occurring or the progeny of birds kept by Indians. That indigenous people reared parrots for many centuries has been described in the annals of early explorers to Brazil.

One interesting hybrid was seen in the collection of Peter Chapman, near Sydney. The progeny of a ringneck parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and a plumheaded parakeet (*P. cyanocephala*), it resembles an intermediate parakeet (*P. intermedia*). The bird is undoubtedly a male.

The last two crosses were both seen during my recent visit to Australia. Featherdale Wildlife Park has two sulphur-crested *Cacatua g. gallerita* x Galah *Eolophus roseicapillus* hybrids on display. The breast and crest are orangish, and the back greyish. In size they are intermediate between both parents.

Jack Stunnell, an extolled breeder of finches, had two equally striking birds in one of his parrot aviaries — Princess parrot *Polytelis alexandrae* x rock pebbler *P. anthoepplus*. They resemble the latter, but with pinkish throats, deeper green in the wings and yellowish-green breasts. Both were reared last season.

Before closing, I must point out that these hybrids are recorded as a matter of interest — not because such profligate activity is condoned. While this is passable if done for a reason or with a plan in mind, far too many people hybridize their birds haphazardly. The resulting offspring are often used for breeding, the result being mongrels which only impurify true species. ●