

The Red-vented Cockatoo Alive and Well in Buda, Texas

Editorial and Photographs by Rick Jordan



Across the United States there are many smaller, private breeders: these breeders may not appear at conferences very often, and many don't advertise their existence in the local newspaper. One such breeder is Bobbi Ryder, of Buda, Texas.

If you get to visit Bobbi's collection, you won't see hundreds of cages full of the many species of parrots commonly kept in aviculture; you'll only see Red-vented Cockatoos (*Cacatua haematuropygia*), and plenty of them. Bobbi is a specialty breeder who took an interest in this little cockatoo in 1990. She has been collecting her breeding stock and rearranging pairs for many years in hopes that she could bolster the dwindling population of this species in captivity.

The Red-vented Cockatoo is now very rare in captivity and is disappearing fast in the wilds of the Philippine islands. The species is listed on Appendix I of CITES, the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, and international commercial trade in Red-vented Cockatoos is prohibited with very few exceptions.

Success with Red-vented Cockatoos does not come easy and many find them frustrating to say the least. These small cockatoos can be very aggressive; mate annihilation is common and is probably the number one impediment to successful breeding in captivity. Some believe that hand-fed males are the only guilty ones, but the truth is that wild-caught males and even parent-fledged males can, and often do, kill their mates. Bobbi



has learned that just because a pair has produced young together does not necessarily mean that they are compatible. Close observation of pairs is a never-ending job for the specialist in this species, even established breeding pairs may need to be broken up and re-paired to keep the peace.

After many years of sporadic success, Bobbi had her best year ever in 2005. Seven baby Red-vented Cockatoos were raised. In 2006, she raised six more. What was the factor that bolstered their productivity? Well, that would be a difficult question to answer. Eventually, two pairs laid fertile eggs and unrelated chicks were reared. By using surrogate incubation and artificial incubation, the past two years may be the beginning of a very good upward trend in this species' existence in captivity.

Set Up: The standard set-up of "California" or "Nogel" style cages was used. Pairs were placed in cages about eight feet in length and given the standard grandfather style nestbox measuring about thirty inches deep. Summer temperatures in central Texas can reach over 100 degrees while winters often include several hard freezes. In order to protect her pairs in these extremes, Bobbi has housed her birds in an enclosed aviary in an area that is shaded in the summer and receives sunshine

in the winter. The facility is wrapped in plastic from November 15th to February 28th, and misting sprayers, controlled by timers aid in cooling in the summer. The birds love the water and cling to the sides of the cage in direct contact with the water source, bathing and preening. Pairs are allowed to see each other and to vocalize to each other during the off breeding season but visual dividers are hung between the cages just before the breeding season begins. Aggression is dealt with by temporary "time-outs" where the male is removed from the cage for a few days, and then placed back again after receiving a pedicure and having his wings clipped. He is not returned until he has had time to calm down. One of the unique practices that Bobbi has experimented with is allowing her most productive females their choice of mates in the off breeding season. Some have re-committed to their former mates and the most productive female has opted for 3 different mates in years past, each resulting in offspring. This occurs in a 28 x 14 foot flight where extra males and juvenile potential pairs are housed and allowed to socialize.

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Diet: The base of the diet fed was ZuPreem® Fruit Blend breeder pellets and dry seed, switching to sprouted seeds in March through June. In addition to these, fruit and vegetables are offered daily. Pellets and seeds are fed on separate days in hoppers since the birds will throw the pellets on the ground in preference to the seeds when fed in a mixture. Fruit and vegetables are fed in large chunks, also through the hopper.

Incubation: Past experience of allowing the parent birds to incubate has resulted in low productivity, so in 2005 the management of the eggs was changed.

Once the clutch was complete and the hen had incubated for a few weeks, all eggs were pulled to be incubated and hatched artificially. This resulted in a near 99% hatch rate of fertile eggs laid. Incubation is approximately 24 days.

Hand-rearing: Baby Red-vented Cockatoos responded well to ZuPreem Embrace hand feeding formula fed from day one. Gradually the mixture was thickened until at about one week of age they were receiving full thickness formula, six times a day. As the chicks grew, larger quantities were fed less often. Growth seemed to be the same as most cockatoos.

Special Observations: There were some subtle differences in the rearing of these chicks, as opposed to most other white cockatoos. It seemed that these hatchlings were a bit more aggressive to their siblings when kept in the same brooder tub. This meant that they would often be pumping each other and injuring each other, sometimes rather seriously. All chicks were separated into their own brooder tubs and were fed separately from each other. During feathering and initial weaning, the separation continued.

Difficulties during Weaning: Many cockatoo species can be difficult to “wean”. Some take longer; some will begin to eat as soon as food is presented. This is exactly the situation observed with the seven chicks from 2005. Four of them weaned almost immediately after being placed in a cage with pellets and food. Three of them refused to wean and cried endlessly to be fed when anyone approached the cages. Experimentation consisting of placing a weaned bird with an unweaned bird did have some advantages. The weaned bird taught the other how to eat in two cases. But, as always, there was an exception. The last bird did not seem to want to wean no matter how it was managed. Then, just as suddenly as if a timer went off in her head, she began to eat, choosing Lafaerber’s® Nutri-berries as her first food. All of the ’05 hatch were kept in the house through the winter, in order to protect them from the winter storms, but are now housed in the aviary with adult pairs.

Bobbi’s beginnings with birds started with her teenaged son’s love for snakes and regular tours of area pet stores. Since Bobbi has never taken an affection to the snakes, like her son Brad, she always headed for the bird room and eventually

fell in love with a Blue and Gold Macaw which in those days was priced at \$1700, slightly out of Bobbi's price range. She says that she never thought of owning a bird, although she visited "Blue" regularly on her lunch hour, until the day she found a sale sign on his cage. At that point she was offered a Red-vented Cockatoo male, Toby, who had been a re-homed bird, and that was the beginning of her affection for this species. Toby was paired with "Princess" in April of 1992 and the pair began breeding within the first month together. Eventually Bobbi traded Toby and Princess to a friend for a pair of Vosmarae Eclectus and the Red-vented were moved to Florida. Princess never bred again and died of old age in 1998. Bobbi bought Toby back in 2001 and he was paired with another re-homed bird out of Pennsylvania (many thanks to those who helped with that transaction) and they laid their first egg in 2004, with three successfully hatched in 2005. Her population of Red-vented Cockatoos has grown larger each year as she slowly added breeding stock to her aviary. Today there is little extra room at the Inn, except for all the chicks that hatch each spring and summer.

Anyone interested in working together and sharing knowledge of this rare species can contact Bobbi Ryder through her webpage at: <http://bobbiryder.com>, or by emailing her directly at: bobbi.ryder@gmail.com.





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