

# RED-LEGGED HONEYCREEPERS

...Breeding success with this beautiful South American species can be achieved!

© Editorial and photographs by Cyril Laubscher



*The yellow under the wings of a male Red-legged Honeycreeper in nuptial (breeding) plumage can normally only be seen when the bird is flying or displaying. Note the bright red legs which give rise to the alternative name of Red-legged Honeycreeper. (524a)*

I am sure many foreign softbill enthusiasts have dreamed of breeding Red-legged Honeycreepers (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*). I certainly did, as they were the first pair of softbills I owned way back in 1962!

The male has a nuptial (breeding) and an eclipse (non-breeding) plumage, where virtually all the turquoise cap, blue, and black plumage changes to resemble the female. In order to breed them, the male must be in full color, and they are more likely to achieve

breeding success in a planted aviary or flight, either indoors or outdoors during the summer months. They must also have access to a dry, heated indoor shelter during inclement winter months, especially in some European countries and states in the USA and Canada.

In 1934, Mrs. K. Drake achieved the first UK breeding of Red-legged Honeycreepers. A breeding account was published in the Avicultural Society magazine in that year. While breeding success is not often recorded, they have been bred in Europe as well as the USA and South Africa.



*The male and female are very protective of their newly fledged youngster sitting between them. Fledglings have shorter beaks and tail feathers, and resemble the female. (526)*



## REMARKABLE BREEDING SUCCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Fred Barnicoat, one of South Africa's most prominent aviculturists, has fulfilled that dream of breeding Red-legged Honeycreepers. Most of us would be happy with breeding them once, but Fred recorded a phenomenal success in rearing three nests of youngsters from the same pair.

How did he realise this remarkable achievement? He accomplished this feat through diligence and perseverance, combined with total dedication and devotion to his birds and their welfare.

Fred lives in Johannesburg, some 5600 feet (1800 metres) above sea-level. The winter nights can be freezing, but the dry sunny days quickly remove any frost - a completely different environment to that inhabited by Red-legged Honeycreepers in South America. While photographing and studying birds on a rainforest project in Colombia in 1991, I saw Red-legged Honeycreepers feeding in humid rainforest, at a height of only 330 feet (100 metres) above sea level.

Fred purchased his breeding pair in 1989. He spent a number of years moving them around from aviary to aviary, in the hopes that they would eventually settle down and breed. He tried various types of home-made nectars, supplied different fruits, persevered with live food, created planted aviaries, and experimented with nest sites - until finally, early in 1995, he accomplished the first breeding of his Red-legged Honeycreepers in a totally unexpected manner.

His breeding success was achieved in an unplanted aviary, 12 feet (3.6 metres) long x 10 feet (3 metres) wide x 6½ feet (2 metres) high. Half of the aviary was covered, well-lit, with a thermostatically controlled heated shelter, and a door that could be shut in the



*The nestling sitting on the edge of the nest is only 11 days old, and has a short beak that will continue to grow until it reaches the length of the adults. (527)*

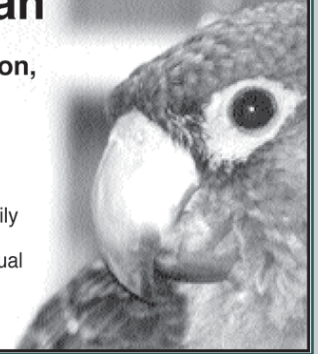
## Mattie Sue Athan

**Parrot Behavior Training  
In-Home Grooming, Adoption,  
& Rehabilitation** since 1978

### Award Winning Books

Guide to a Well-Behaved Parrot  
Guide to Companion Parrot Behavior  
Guide to the Quaker Parrot  
Guide to the Senegal Parrot & Its Family  
The African Grey Parrot Handbook  
Parrots, A Complete Pet Owner's Manual  
The Secondhand Parrot  
Parrots in the City

**918-812-1099**



**JOS**  
EXOTIC BIRDS, Ltd.

Hand-Fed Babies  
Cages • Toys • Avian Supplies

7534 Sheridan Rd.  
Kenosha, WI 53143

262 654 1609

[www.jos-exoticbirds.com](http://www.jos-exoticbirds.com)

Shop  
Online



## Judy's Stuff

Custom Embroidery and Sewing

*We create your heart's desire*

Specializing in custom made  
parrot and bird cage covers

Eureka, California 95501  
[www.JudysStuff.com](http://www.JudysStuff.com)

(707) 499-5233



## Give your Bird Something To Squawk About!

Zeigler Bird foods are the most nutritionally complete, all natural diets for your pet bird. Our diets contain all of the amino acids, vitamins and minerals to make your bird happy and healthy.

For more information visit  
[www.zeiglerfeed.com](http://www.zeiglerfeed.com)



Zeigler Bros., Inc.  
800-841-6800  
[www.zeiglerfeed.com](http://www.zeiglerfeed.com)  
[sales@zeiglerfeed.com](mailto:sales@zeiglerfeed.com)

severest winter. The Red-legged Honeycreepers shared the aviary with a pair of Golden-shouldered Parakeets (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*). There was never any interference from these two vastly different species. In fact, they got on extremely well.

A dry tree - with a convenient fork about 4-5 feet (1.2-1.5) metres up in which he placed a clump of bracken – was positioned just inside the shelter doorway, in the hope that this may induce breeding. Against all expectations, a half-hearted attempt was made at building a nest in the fork, using coarse dry grass only even though coconut fibre, cotton wool, unraveled sisal string and kapok (soft silk cotton from a tree) was available. A pale greenish blue egg, heavily marked with medium to dark brown blotches, was laid on 23 January, the second day later. The female appeared to be off the nest frequently, giving rise to the fear that she was not taking her task seriously in the hot mid-summer heat. However, she would quietly slip back on to the nest just as darkness set in. After incubating for 12 days, the first egg hatched on 4 February, followed by the second on the following day. The newly hatched dark-skinned babies had large heads with big gaping mouths and short beaks similar to a finch beak. They seemed to grow slowly until the 7th day when pinfeathers appeared and their beaks began to elongate. From then on, they grew rapidly and left the nest on the 13th day, resembling the female.



*A female is completely different to the brightly colored male, and displays an overall greenish sheen to the feathers on the back. The female lacks the red legs of a male and instead, has dark grey legs. (525)*

Having successfully reared the chicks to independence, the female attempted another nesting by relining the old nest. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful, because the nest collapsed and the two fertile eggs were found cold on the floor.

Prior to the next breeding season, a small wicker basket, with heavy felt sewn in, was placed in the fork of the old tree. By December '95, the female was building a nest in the basket, using dry grass again. A single egg hatched on 6 January 1996 and the young chick flew on the 13th day. The accompanying photographs show the chick in the nest and alongside its parents three days after leaving the nest.

A surprise further nesting took place while the single fledgling was still being weaned. Two eggs were laid in the same nest, which had been refurbished slightly with more grass. Two young were reared. The parents and their three young were progressing well for a few months when one youngster was unfortunately lost in a freak cloudburst as winter approached.

**Cynthia Kulp**  
AVIAN ART

original oil paintings  
giclee prints available on paper  
and stretched canvas

[www.cynthiakulp.com](http://www.cynthiakulp.com) • 305-394-0387

The basic diet for the sugarbirds prior to nesting was nectar prepared for sunbirds. Fred's homemade nectar was varied constantly, using various supplements and high-energy foods. He found that the sugarbirds were easy to feed on nectar supplemented with fruit in season. Mango and cactus (prickly) pear were favorites and the mainstay of the babies diet. Paw-paw or papaya, soft pear, banana, and black grapes were all avidly consumed.

The adults - who had largely ignored the various livefood offered prior to nesting – increased their intake of livefood when the young hatched. Abundant supplies of mealworms, termites and fruit fly were offered and consumed in quantity, and



this, combined with nectar, mango and cactus pear attributed greatly in accomplishing this outstanding achievement of rearing five Red-legged Honeycreepers from three separate nests!




**MYERS  
MENAGERIE of  
BIRDS**

Breeders Exotic Birds • Hand Fed Babies

SEEDS & SUPPLIES REASONABLY PRICED

Bob, Joyce & Rob  
M • W • F 10 am - 4 pm  
OR call for appointment


Ramona, CA 92065  
B: (760) 788-5848  
H: (760) 789-3815




**TOPPER BIRD RANCH**

**JASON CLINGER**  
Manager  
(800) 600-BIRD (336) 357-2473 FAX: (336) 357-2900

529 J.M. Penninger Rd.  
Lexington, NC 27292



*Embroidery  
By Ramona*



Tote Bags  
Shirts  
T Shirts  
Towels  
Checkbook  
Covers  
Pillows

Ramona K. Smith  
863-858-6739  
ramonaksmith@netzero.net

Macaws  
Cockatoo's  
Conures  
Cockatiels  
Caiques  
Many More

Quality Birds at Affordable Prices!

**Singing Wings Aviary**  
31 Old Wire Road East  
London, Arkansas 72847




Finches - Canaries - Parrots - Doves

**479-293-4994**  
Email: [mandy@singing-wings-aviary.com](mailto:mandy@singing-wings-aviary.com)  
Website: [www.singing-wings-aviary.com](http://www.singing-wings-aviary.com)

**PAUL HANCOCK  
MANDY TUCKER**


**THE IV INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON  
BREEDING BIRDS IN CAPTIVITY**

*— The International Gathering of the World's Finest Aviculturists —*

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA  
SEPTEMBER 12 - 16, 2007  
DOUBLE TREE INT. PLAZA  
[WWW.ISBBC.ORG](http://WWW.ISBBC.ORG)

SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING THIS SYMPOSIUM INCLUDE:

- + THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONVERSE AND ENGAGE WITH SOME OF THE WORLD LEADERS IN THE FIELDS OF AVICULTURE, ZOOLOGY, ORNITHOLOGY AND AVIAN CONSERVATION.
- + THE OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER THE SUCCESS AND FECUNDITY OF ESTABLISHED BREEDING PROGRAMS FOR BOTH IN AND EX-SITU INITIATIVES.
- + PARTAKE IN ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AND DIVERSE AVICULTURAL AND ORNITHOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUMS EVER CO-ORDINATED.
- + EXPERIENCE ONE OF THE MOST CULTURALLY DIVERSE CITIES AND COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD, MAKING IT THE PERFECT VENUE FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION.



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE  
VISIT US ONLINE AT  
[WWW.ISBBC.ORG](http://WWW.ISBBC.ORG)  
OR CALL  
+1 519. 538. 2171