



First Breeding: Yellow-breasted Hunting Cissa

OCCURRED MARCH 20, 1997

By Roland & Ilana Cristo of Cristo Aviaries

We received the pair on breeder loan from Gene Fetter. They were together at his aviaries but had never been able to breed them. He believed that it was because he wasn't able to provide them with what they needed in aviary size. They were inside for about 3 months and were moved to a sheltered cage that was outside to get them acclimated to the climate. We live at 1,200' elevation and it can get to below freezing at night (15 degrees in 1999).

They were fed "soft food" daily along with 4 pieces of canned dog food and 2 pieces of beef heart. The soft food consisted of Science Diet, Canine Maintenance (small bites); Kaytee Mynah pellets; green Purina Nutra-blend Pigeon pellets, and Mazuri Small Bird Breeder pellets softened with water. This was mixed with defrosted frozen mixed vegetables every other day. Dry food was kept in their cage constantly. The dry mix consisted of Science Diet, Canine Maintenance (small bites); Kaytee Mynah pellets; green Purina Nutra-blend Pigeon pellets and Calf Manna. The female laid an egg on the floor of the cage.

They were moved to an outside aviary, dimensions 3' x 16', planted with podocarpus. A basket nest was placed high in the sheltered area above the door. The basket nest was a decorative plant pot cover lined with rush¹ inside. More rush was placed in the aviary, which she added herself to complete the nest. In our experience, the hen seems to build a nest that is sturdy and neat as compared to other jays and magpies.

The female began to make her nest immediately after being placed in the aviary. The same food mixture was fed. We also fed weanling to half grown mice once a day.

After a few days she started to lay. The first clutch of 3 eggs was infertile. They were removed at 15 days. To our surprise, she immediately layed again. Our other pairs have never layed so soon after an unsuccessful nest. Mealworms were also added to their diet. They seemed to eat both the mealworms and mice with relish. At the onset of the first egg of the second clutch, mice²

were added on a daily basis. The mice were live and placed in a porcelain mixing bowl partially sunk in the ground. The sides of the bowl are smooth so the mice couldn't jump or climb out.

In four (4) days time she laid 4 eggs. The male kept vigil guard. She set tight unless someone went into the aviary to drop mice in their feeding bowl. The male sounded an alarm or became aggressive and she left the nest temporarily always going to the ground. (The Long-tailed Cissa always went to a high perch). About two (2) days prior to the eggs hatching, the male became even bolder and more aggressive hitting me on the head as I fed mice in the mornings.

In about 18 days the first egg hatched showing a completely naked, sightless and helpless chick. The next day, 2 chicks hatched, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon. The fourth chick



hatched the next day. The parents fed the chicks mealworms and mice for the first 3-4 days after hatching. After 3-4 days the parents stopped feeding mealworms. After 5-6 days, the numbers of mice given the parents were increased to 3-4 per feeding and served 2-3 times per day. It appeared that all parts of the mice were either fed or eaten by the parents. Remnants of the mice could not be found.

The babies had pinfeathers at approximately 11 days. Their eyes opened at 12 days. At approximately 12-14 days old, the parents were given 15-20 mice per day and served 4 times per day. The parents stopped eating soft food, dog food and beef heart for a

¹Rush—Juncos, "rushes somewhat resemble grasses; leaflike stems are round" Sunset Western Garden book. They grow in bogs or wet areas and due to the cylindrical blades seem to make a very neat nest material.

²The mice seemed to keep the male busy throughout the day. He would kill the mice and store them in a larder like manner for later consumption or feeding. Historically, one of the problems with raising these kinds of birds in captivity has been that the males would eat the eggs or young. We have used this method with the Cissas and Red-billed Magpies and we believe it works to keep the male busy. We have never had a problem with predation of the nest by the males.



while. It was quite hazardous serving the pair. The female would leave the nest calling and complaining and the male would scold and dive at the person entering the aviary. The offering of food meant nothing to him. He even drew blood from my ear.

The babies grew quickly and the food offered increased also. At 20 days one of the babies started to perch on the edge of the nest. The rest perched shortly after, about 2–3 days. One baby left the nest at this time also.

At about 25 days the chicks were standing on the perches away from the nest. They would be found on the ground and were able to hop and scramble up the perches to the highest perching “branch” and nest. During this entire time they were always fed soft food, canned dog food and beef heart. At about 24 days old the soft food mix, canned dog food and beef heart started to disappear. I never actually saw the chicks eat the food but the amount was increased and it always seemed as though less was left. They also started to eat the dry mix as more of that disappeared also.

The amount of mice served was decreased and the amount of canned dog food, beef heart and soft food was increased. At 29 days the chicks were increasing their activity and would fly to the “outside” perches and hop along the branches and perches. They started to call and scold like the parents and fully display their crest feathers. At 31 days their landings were much more accurate. Soft food consumption increased along with canned dog food and beef heart. What I didn't mention before was that occasionally powdered calcium was sprinkled on their soft food and beef heart.

They are still not the same color as the parents but they haven't gone through their first adult molt yet. They appear to be a blue-gray color instead of the lime and light olive green of the parents. Their beaks are also grayish in color and their feet are a fleshy pink color instead of the adult orange color.

Corvids (crows, magpies, jays) comprise a family of more than 100 species. They are distributed world wide except in the Polar Region.

My fascination with corvids began when at the age of 12. I helped my brother hand raise 20+ native magpies and some crows.

I have found this family of birds to be extremely intelligent. “Of all birds, Corvids have the largest cerebral hemispheres, relative to their body size. Under operant conditioning methods, crows have been found to be superior in intelligence to all other avian species tested.” (Plasse, Angell)

Through the years, I have found that the corvid family is far more intelligent than any of the birds I have worked with, including any psittacine I've worked with.

Ilana's fascination with corvids began in 1964 when she hand raised an Eastern Blue Jay. It proved to be an intelligent, mischievous clown. It kept itself busy and amused by causing chaos and teasing all the other birds in the house. It was very bold and always stole objects from pockets and various places in the house to hide them somewhere else. This is a natural behavior but none the less frustrating and comical.

References and Additional Information

Plasse, Chelle; 1992 AFA Proceedings, Corvids.
 Angell, T.; 1978 Ravens, Crows, Magpies, and Jays. University of Washington Press.
 Delacour, J.; 1936 Aviculture Volume 1, Stephen Austin and Sons, LTD., Hertford.
 Woolham, Frank; The Handbook of Aviculture, Blandford Press.
 Madge, Steve and Burn, Hilary; Crows and Jay, 1994, Hou

**PARROT FESTIVAL
COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR**

You Just Missed it!



- ◆ Great Speakers
- ◆ Super Vendors
- ◆ Texas Sized Raffles

- ◆ Live Auctions
- ◆ Silent Auctions
- ◆ Much Much More

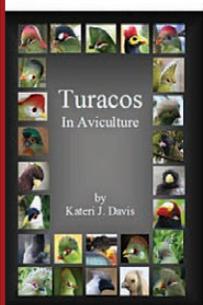
Don't Miss another one!

Join us in Houston, Texas January 29-31, 2016
 713-557-BIRD (2473) Festivalinfo@ParrotFestival.com
 www.ParrotFestival.org

"Turacos in Aviculture"

by Kateri J. Davis

**Full Color, 246 pg Book
Only \$29.95
& Ebook \$15.99**



Birdhouse Publications
sites.google.com/site/birdhousepub
birdhousebooks@aol.com

