



Hawk-headed Parrots

Rick Jordan

Sometimes referred to as the “Red-fanned parrot”, *Deroptyus accipitrinus* or the Hawk-headed parrot is found in the wild in tropical areas of Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Surinam, Venezuela, Peru, and Guyana. There are two recognized subspecies, the nominate form *Deroptyus accipitrinus accipitrinus* is found throughout the range with the exception of Brazil, where it is replaced by a second form, *Deroptyus accipitrinus fuscifrons*. Brazilian Hawk-heads lack the buff color of the fore crown, and have a darker head, larger size, and generally deeper colors throughout the body. Males and females are the same although some claim they can differentiate the sexes by the amount of blue on the tips of the chest and abdominal feathers.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the Hawk-headed parrot as “Least Concern” and CITES lists it on appendix II; the species is not threatened or endangered throughout its natural range. Neither subspecies is considered “common” in aviculture probably due to limited importation during the days of unregulated trapping. Brazil has not allowed commercial trapping and export of wild parrots

since the 1960s and therefore the Brazilian form is actually rather rare in the caged bird trade worldwide, and is rarely bred in captivity outside of Brazil. Most of the representatives held in captivity in U.S. aviculture originated from Guyana or Surinam where a moderate amount of trapping took place in the 1980s to supply the pet and breeder trade.



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The most unique attribute of the Hawk-headed parrot is its ability to raise its crest and neck feathers in a full circular "hood" around the head. At rest and when not excited or acting out, the feathers of this hood lay flat off the head and down the neck, creating the namesake hawk-like appearance. But when this species is excited or emotional, the hooded crest feathers are raised in a spectacular ring of turquoise blue tipped maroon feathers that frame the speckled brown head and face.

Aviculture with this species can be a challenge. Probably the most notable issue with breeding pairs is their propensity to be aggressive toward each other. Strangely, aggression can be expected from either the male or the female, and each pair is different. Aggression issues are well noted and even the occasional mate annihilation occurs. Usually this militant behavior is a function of displaced aggression, often displayed when humans approach the cage or nesting area. Any interruptions into the nesting process should be accomplished with caution as breeding pairs can be extremely hostile to each other, to humans and especially to their eggs or chicks.

As a note of interest, a very successful breeder of Hawk-headed parrots in Texas claims that her wild-caught birds are much more aggressive toward each other than her own domestically raised stock. She has now bred this species to three generations and prefers captive-bred, hand-reared birds for breeding. She

claims that breeding domestics will still be aggressive toward the human keepers, but are far less likely to kill or injure their mates than her wild-caught imported birds. If a pair protects the nest vehemently, there is a good chance they will injure or kill their chicks trying to defend them.

As hand-fed companion birds, most Hawk-headed parrots are considered sweet and loveable. But like many pet parrots, if bonded to another bird or human in the house, Hawk-heads may revert to their expected aggressive posturing and may bite or injure their handler. Pet Hawk-heads display their head crest for a variety of reasons and it is not always a sign of aggression or hostility. As a companion bird, the crest is often erected when the bird is feeling emotional or excited either at play, in fear, or for protective reasons.



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The diet for this species is basically the same as for most medium to large captive New World parrots. A variety of vegetables, seeds, commercial pellets, fruits and nuts is usually accepted. Some Hawk-headed parrots prefer a higher quantity of fruit in the diet.

The future of aviculture in the United States is at risk. It is important for all bird enthusiasts to think about captive breeding and its growing importance. Pet birds that are relinquished might do better in a breeding situation and can

contribute to another generation of their kind. Hawk-headed parrots and others will be difficult to find in the United States in the future if we don't concentrate on fixing the cycle of relinquished birds, breeding, rescue, and rehabilitation. It is up to all of us to make sure our birds do not end up in a dead-end situation where they are no longer a viable part of the genetic lines now kept in captivity. Support aviculture, companion bird keeping, responsible rescue, and keep birds in the lives of future generations in this country.

Hawk-headed parrot nest box. First egg of the season. Clutches usually consist of two to three eggs. Photo: Mark Moore



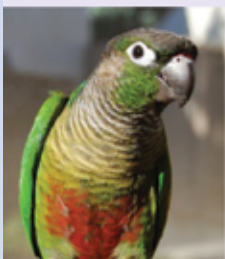
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