



White-eared brown fruit dove with chick.

Raising the White Eared Brown Fruit Dove

(*Phapitreron leucotis*)

by Ann and Don Hurst
Orlando, Florida

When I graduated from high school, my fiance gave me a beautiful pair of white doves. That was the start of something *great* in more ways than one! In the last 30 years we have raised four children and lot of birds.

We have kept a little bit of everything, except the big, noisy birds, as we live in a residential neighborhood and have always tried to respect that. After raising parakeets, cockatiels, lovebirds and five different kinds of conures, we have found that our true loves are finches, softbills and doves — especially fruit doves.

Two years ago we acquired a pair of black naped fruit doves from our friend Richard Schmidt. We fell in love with these beauties right off, and were lucky enough to get them to go to nest and present us with a new baby every few months.

In the spring of '88, my husband came across four nondescript-looking fruit doves. Having just been released from quarantine, they appeared to be in sad shape, but to us they were irresistible. Since the weather was still cool and the birds looked less than robust, we kept them in a small cage in our quarantine area. At night we

provided them with a heat lamp.

We turned to Richard Schmidt again and with a little help from a book or two he identified our new little darl'ns as three white-eared brown fruit doves and one amethyst dove.

Being familiar with fruit doves, we knew the basics to offer as far as diet was concerned. We didn't know this particular species' likes and dislikes, so we gave them everything we could think of. (This is another advantage of using a smaller cage with birds you are quarantining, since you know the birds can find the food and you can readily tell what they prefer.)

At that time we were using the popular basic softbill diet: three cans bite-size (21% protein) dog food to one can of fruit cocktail. We do *not* use the fruit mixture anymore but, instead, canned or frozen mixed vegetables. The birds like it as well or better, it is more nutritious, and we have eliminated the sweetness. To this basic mixture of vegetables and dog food we add raisins, chopped beets, apple, banana and, when they are feeding babies, we add little broken pieces of soaked monkey biscuit on top, as well as a few strips of Moist

and Meaty dog food for a little extra protein. Our dry mix consists mostly of Purina Gamebird Starter, with some Purina Trout Chow, Nutra-Blend Green and Gold pigeon feed, and Wayne's Dog Meal. Recently Schmidt suggested we try adding some apple flavored horse pellets, but the white-ears don't go for them as well as some of the larger doves and pigeons. With warmer weather we put the four doves into a 4' x 6' x 6' high planted aviary. By then we realized that these birds, though not as eye catching as the black napes, are very lovely and make a delightful cooing noise. We also noticed the white-ears are much calmer and, therefore, less likely to spook than the black napes.

In April we had all four birds surgically sexed and found we had lucked out and had two pairs. The little amethyst was a hen, so we went ahead and paired her off with the extra male white-ear. Each pair was given a 4' x 4' x 6' high planted flight made of 1/2" x 1/2" hardware wire. These flights are fed from a safety hall and are 90% covered. We built a 6' x 12' plywood shelf, with a 1" x 2" rail around the edge, up in the back corner for a nesting site. The last few days of May we noticed both birds spending some time on the nesting shelf. On the morning of May 31 we found the female sitting on the nest and this time she looked serious. Later that day we checked closer and, sure enough, there was one egg. The following day we were surprised to find another egg, because we were used to the black napes, which lay only one egg. The male and female took turns setting their eggs and occasionally we would find them both setting and looking very pleased with themselves. On June 13th we saw egg shell on the ground and June 21st both babies fledged. It was several weeks before we were certain the babies were eating on their own and moved them to an adjoining flight. The parents went right back to nest and we now have two more babies.

We have thoroughly enjoyed these birds. They have a subdued beauty that is very appealing and their delightful coo is the first sound we hear welcoming us to a new day.

Editor's Note: The Avy Awards Committee requests any information on previous known breedings of the white-eared brown fruit dove. This species has been nominated for a U.S. First Breeding Award. ●

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