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fruit pigeons and doves

by Lynn Hall
Camarillo, California

In the fall of 1984 I went to Jakarta to try to find pheasant pigeons, of which I found nine, and made arrangements to import them. As long as I was going to the trouble of getting permits and quarantine space, it seemed wise to bring in other doves and pigeons with them. There were twelve or so superb (Ptilinopus superbis) and a small number of black napes (Ptilinopus melanospila), along with other seed eating doves and pigeons. In years past I had a pair of green imperial pigeons which were very easy to keep and breed. The availability of fruit doves was poor, but with this import I really got involved with them.

In 1985 I received more superb and black napes and a small number of black backs (Ptilinopus cineta) with a promise of more. I foolishly let go of pairs and was left with five males. Of course, I never received any more black backs. Then, in 1986, I received some pink necked doves (Ptilinopus porphyres) from Singapore.

In 1987 I received a few pairs of pink necked green pigeons (Treron vernens) and thick-billed green pigeons (Treron curvirostra), also from Singapore. The same year I purchased a pair of Jambu fruit doves (Ptilinopus jambu) from an importer in southern California. These were new imports. All birds I have had were new, wild-trapped birds which, I feel, are the easiest to work with.

In 1986 the black napes went to work. It wasn't long until I found out that black napes pick their own nest spot whether there is a nest or not . . . off the perches, in the feed bowl, or any place they happen to be. One pair insisted on a feed bowl. So, after losing three or four eggs, I picked the egg out of the fruit bowl, cleaned out the bowl, built a small nest, replaced

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WYOMING

the egg, and they went right back and hatched and raised their young.

Black napes do not seem to build a nest — two or three sticks and that's it. Another pair kept trying to balance their egg on a small branch that was really a perch. I tired of this and wired a basket to the branch, which seemed to make them happy as they have been using it ever since.

In black napes, both sexes incubate. The egg hatches in twelve to fourteen days and the young grow more rapidly than any bird with which I have had experience. They leave the nest in seven to nine days and are very small, about one fourth the size of their parents. They have fully developed wings but little more. The parents are very attentive and one or the other is always close by with the youngster under their wing. The young are dependent on their parents until about five or six weeks old. With the first head feathers they can be sexed. Black napes are easy to keep and should be common in all large, softbill displays as they seem very peaceful.

In 1987, the superb went to nest and seemed to be more selective in their nesting habits. One pair used a nest basket nailed to the back wall of the aviary. They raised two young that year but lost others because they were disturbed by a pair of white-faced black cuckoo doves that were housed with them. I moved the superb to another aviary and they went right back to nest, but this time on a shelf. Although they raised two young in 1988 they also lost four eggs when they knocked them off the shelf. The second pair selected a basket in a bush about six feet off the ground and have used it ever since. The young do not leave the nest as soon as black napes, though they are quite small when they do leave.

Continued on page 8

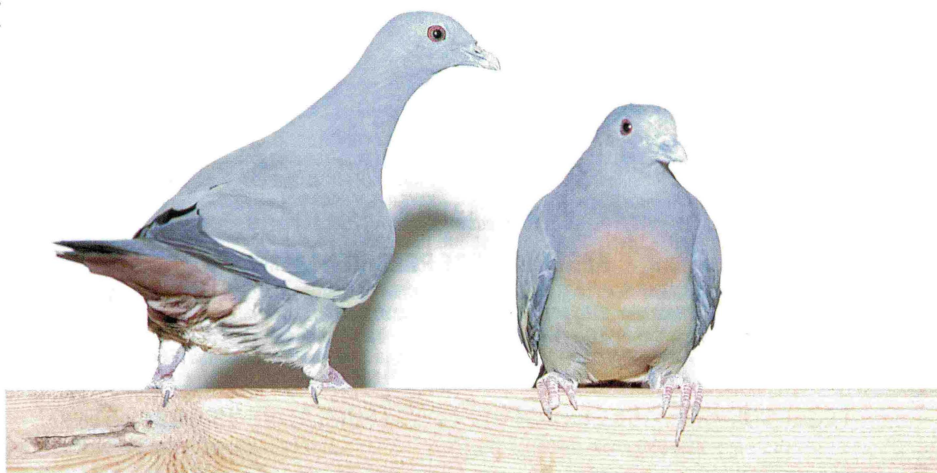
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Pink necked green pigeons.



Superb fruit pigeon.



Black backed fruit dove.

I did have a problem in a walk-through aviary with the black napes. My extra black backs wanted to set on the black napes' egg and drive off the napes. I finally solved this by removing the black backs. Black backs are being raised in California by at least two breeders now.

The thick billed green pigeons, of which I have two pair, looked like it was going to be a snap, but not so. In 1988, both pair started off well — two eggs to the nest, tight setters and good feeders for the first six to ten days, then off. I would find two well-fed babies chilled and dead in the nest. In a year's time I had at least 14 young. I raised two and lost one of them. This year I will hand raise them after the first week. They seem to build no more of a nest than the *Ptil-*

Pair of pink necked fruit doves.

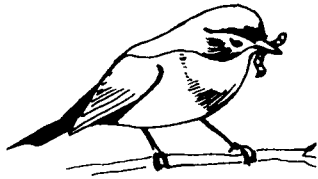
Parents are quite attentive and care for them for about five or six weeks. Superbs use little or no nesting materials. All *Ptilinopus* lay only one egg.

In 1988, the pink necked *Ptilinopus* and Jambu fruit doves both nested using the same type of nest — no real nesting material. The pink necks were very attentive parents except I never saw them on the nest. I swore they left the nest when I entered the aviary 85 feet away, though they did stay close to the young. On the other hand, the Jambu are so tame you can pick them up to check the egg or the young. The only real problem with raising *Ptilinopus* is if something disturbs the parents at night the young sometimes get separated from them and they chill easily.



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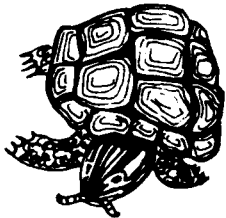
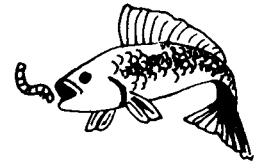
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inopus.

The pink necked green pigeons are the odd ones in feeding, nesting and a very strange, un-pigeon like call. They are the only fruit pigeons or doves I keep that eat grain as well as fruit. I find them feeding on small seeds right next to a fruit bowl, yet I don't find any undigested seed in their droppings as would be found in other fruit pigeons and doves that pick up seed. They use a large amount of nest material, nest back in a darker part of the enclosure, up high, lay two eggs and the young stay in the nest until they are quite large. They seem to be slow nesters and only nested once for me in 1988. But, in January 1989, one pair was already on eggs.

All of my fruit doves and pigeons are kept in landscaped aviaries that vary from 6' x 12' x 8' high to 12' x 12' x 8' high. One pair of fruit doves and one pair of seed eating doves are housed in each pen with the exception of a large, walk-through aviary that is 75' x 25' in which there are two pairs of nesting black napes along with other seed eaters, two black back males who bug everyone, and two nutmeg males who seem to be the favorite target of the black backs.

The climate is mild with the highs 85° to 90° and the lows generally above 45°, though this year was the exception. We had lows in the 30s with no really harmful effects. Our birds are fed in the late afternoon, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. The reason for this is that I find the birds will feed late in the day and the fruit will not spoil by morning as our climate is dry. The aviaries are well protected from the wind and all are covered in the back with a four foot covered area. All varieties I keep seem to be hardy, but I would like it warmer in the winter.

As to feeding, I feel before you start with any birds, mammals or fish, a little common sense should be used. Ask yourself where did the bird come from? Where is it likely to feed, ground or aerial? Does it pick up or peck? Are its feet strong or weak? Is its bill straight or curved? Look, read and know something about its home. *Ptilinopus* have very weak feet and legs so they must spend most if not all of their time in the upper canopy. Therefore, they must feed mainly on fruit. Also, they have small, weak bills so they do not tear up large fruit. As they spend most of their time in trees and not on the ground, insects cannot

be a substantial part of their diet. *Trerons* have stronger bills, some even being hooked. They have strong legs and feet and seem to go to the ground more frequently. Therefore, it seems to me they are more capable of opening larger fruit, finding more insects and, in some cases, feeding on more small seeds.

With these factors in mind, my diet does not consist of too much extra protein. I know many keepers who feed soaked dog food and monkey chow. I do not. Adult birds seem to enjoy and do well on them but I see little breeding success. They nest, lay eggs, but lose the young. Please remember this is my personal observation and is not backed up by any research. I do use a small amount of dog food as I will explain in my diet.

I dice the following fruit in about 1/4" cubes:

3 lbs. apples (preferably red)

2 lbs. bananas

2 lbs. yams, sweet potatoes or any fruit in season (no citrus)

To this I add 2 lbs. cooked brown rice and 1 lb. raisins, soaked, then drained. I mix this with a fine powder (enough to dry the mixture) made up of:

1 cup pigeon pellets

1/2 cup Hi-protein dog food

2 tablespoons Zoovite vitamins

1/4 teaspoon calcium

Enough powder is made to last one week and is stored in a dry container. The amount used each day depends on the moisture content of the fruit.

Ten pounds of mixed fruit feeds about forty fruit pigeons and doves and is greatly appreciated by the cuckoo doves, luzons and other seed eating pigeons and doves. The bowls are changed daily as one of the problems encountered with fruit eating birds is salmonella. This may not be the best feeding program but I did raise sixteen birds this year and hope to raise more next year.

In general, the fruit pigeons and doves should be as easy as any fruit eating bird to keep and far easier to breed. There are many advantages to keeping them. In large, walk-through, planted aviaries, a large number of highly colorful birds can be kept together without damage to the foliage. The only problem might possibly be that too many would try to nest at the same time and I feel they would be territorial, though there would be no problem with any other species. In smaller pens, one pair would get along with about anything that would not eat them. ●