

# Raising Hawk-headed Parrots:

## More Questions than Answers

by Sherry Rind  
Redmond, Washington

When Anna Colbeck purchased a young pair of Hawk-headed Parrots nearly ten years ago, she thought to herself, "This pair is going to breed." Not long out of quarantine, they were wild but not frightened of people, having been partially hand fed but not socialized as pets. Due to their mostly brown foreheads streaked with white, they are possibly of the subspecies *Deroptyus accipitrinus fuscifrons* (according to the description in Forshaw's *Parrots of the World*).

She named them Maggie and Jiggs and, not having a cage ready at the time, released them into an 80 by 30 foot greenhouse where they have remained ever since. Their "L" shaped nest box, about 18" by 24" deep, hangs from the ceiling. They make a game of dive-bombing any strangers who enter the greenhouse, coming close enough to touch the people with their wingtips, making them duck. When Anna comes in with the food buckets, they come down to investigate what's for dinner; otherwise they keep to themselves.

When Anna attempted to put another pair in a cage in the same building, Maggie and Jiggs flew at the cage, harrasing the new birds. The second pair, nervous birds that plucked each other, were moved from a flight cage to a smaller one measuring about 5 by 4 by 5 feet. "They liked that one," said Anna.



Hawk-headed Parrot babies do not show color in their feathers at three weeks of age.

### Weight Charts for Hawk-heads Hatched 1991

(given at intervals although birds were weighed daily)

#### First Hawkhead

| Date | Age in Days | Ounces |
|------|-------------|--------|
| 8/25 | 1           | .02    |
| 8/30 | 6           | .06    |
| 9/5  | 12          | 1.0    |
| 9/10 | 17          | 1.8    |
| 9/15 | 22          | 3.0    |
| 9/21 | 28          | 4.8    |
| 9/25 | 32          | 5.8    |
| 9/30 | 37          | 7.2    |
| 10/4 | 41          | 8.2    |
| 10/8 | 45          | 9.0    |

Died--calcium in kidneys

#### Second Clutch

| #225                         |     |        | #214 |     |        | #224 |     |        |
|------------------------------|-----|--------|------|-----|--------|------|-----|--------|
| Date                         | Age | Weight | Date | Age | Weight | Date | Age | Weight |
| Oct.                         |     |        | Oct. |     |        | Nov. |     |        |
| 29                           | 1   | 0.2    | 29   | 1   | 0.2    | 1    | 1   | 0.2    |
| Nov.                         |     |        | Nov. |     |        | Nov. |     |        |
| 4                            | 7   | 0.6    | 4    | 7   | 0.8    | 4    | 4   | 0.4    |
| 7                            | 10  | 0.8    | 7    | 10  | 1.0    | 7    | 7   | 0.8    |
| 12                           | 15  | 1.2    | 12   | 15  | 2.0    | 12   | 12  | 1.6    |
| 18                           | 21  | 2.6    | 18   | 21  | 4.0    | 18   | 18  | 3.2    |
| 24                           | 27  | 4.6    | 24   | 27  | 6.0    | 24   | 24  | 5.2    |
| 30                           | 33  | 6.4    | 30   | 33  | 7.6    | 30   | 30  | 6.6    |
| Dec.                         |     |        | Dec. |     |        | Dec. |     |        |
| 4                            | 37  | 7.4    | 4    | 37  | 8.4    | 4    | 34  | 7.4    |
| 7                            | 40  | 7.8    | 7    | 40  | 8.6    | 7    | 37  | 7.8    |
| WEIGHT NOW MEASURED IN GRAMS |     |        |      |     |        |      |     |        |
| 12                           | 45  | 235    | 12   | 45  | 230    | 12   | 42  | 245    |
| 17                           | 50  | 235    | 17   | 50  | 225    | 17   | 47  | 250    |
| 22                           | 55  | 240    | 22   | 55  | 230    | 22   | 52  | 250    |
| 27                           | 60  | 225    | 27   | 60  | 210    | 27   | 57  | 240    |
| Jan.                         |     |        | Jan. |     |        | Jan. |     |        |
| 1                            | 65  | 210    | 1    | 65  | 205    | 1    | 62  | 230    |
| 6                            | 70  | 205    | 6    | 70  | 195    | 6    | 67  | 230    |
| 11                           | 75  | 210    | 11   | 75  | 205    | 11   | 72  | 235    |
| 16                           | 80  | 210    | 16   | 80  | 205    | 16   | 77  | 230    |
| 26                           | 90  | 210    | 26   | 90  | 210    | 26   | 87  | 235    |



Handfed Hawk-headed Parrots can be quite tame, often showing their colorful crown. This youngster is three months of age.

"As soon as they went in, they threw their bonnets up and made happy noises." She has doubts, however, as to whether this pair will ever breed due to their extreme nervousness.

She fed her Hawkheads the same diet as she gives all her hookbills: a mix of several kinds of seeds and pellets and fresh fruits and vegetables daily. As with Amazons, their favorites are grapes, corn on the cob, and apples. They never chewed much on their nest box but, when coming into breeding condition, they begin to devour the succulent plants in the greenhouse, such as aloe and Christmas cactus. Anna has never seen them mate but the sound they make is unmistakable, a certain high-pitched squeal they make at no other time, totally different from the sounds her other birds make.

Maggie and Jiggs laid their first eggs at about age eight in 1989. The three eggs were unfertile but the birds double-clutched after she removed the eggs and, of this clutch, one was fertile. Since this was their first venture at being parents, she left the chick with them. They apparently decided the diet she offered was not good enough and got into a part of the greenhouse where a foam spa cover was kept. Feeding the baby bits of foam, they killed it.

The following year, 1990, they laid again in the dry summer months (July-August in the Pacific Northwest). This time, of two eggs, one was fertile. Taking no chances, Anna pulled the baby and fed it Lake's handfeeding formula, her formula of choice for her many varieties of hookbills. The frustration still sounds in Anna's voice as she said, "It didn't open its eyes until it was 30 days old. There were no pinfeathers until 40 days. I took it to the vet but the tests were too stressful. It died at 65 days of malnutrition." An aviculturist who handfeeds hundreds of babies, Anna is accustomed to the inevitable losses that occur; but this was the first loss to malnutrition.

What was it these Hawkheads needed that others did not? Anna read and re-read everything she could find about them but there was not — and still isn't — much material. It was not until Dr. Imelda J. Santos' article appeared in the Aug./Sept. 1991 *Watchbird* that Anna found the nutritional information she needed. While a high percentage of protein in a handfeeding formula will cause problems in other species, it is a necessity

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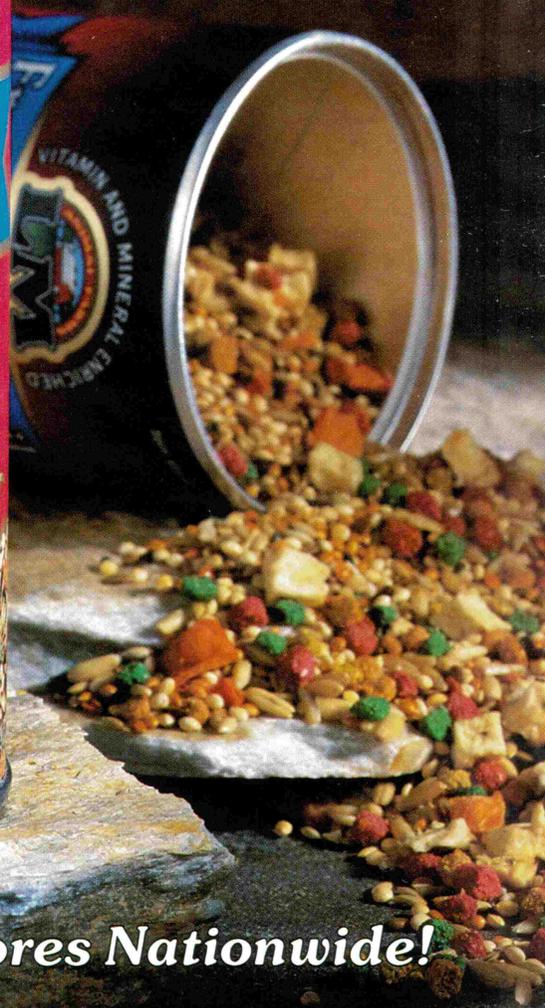
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for Hawkheads. Dr. Santos wrote from Jurong Bird Park in Singapore and the exact diet she fed the birds could not be duplicated here. Anna decided to mix equal proportions of Gerber's Hi-Protein cereal, Kaytee Exact handfeeding formula, IAM's dry cat food, and a bit of additional bone meal and vitamins, using Pedia-lite for the liquid.

The birds laid their usual three eggs in July, 1991. Anna pulled all three for incubation. One hatched on August 25. When it was 43 days old, it vomited its mid-day feeding. When it vomited a second time, Anna called her avian vet and took the baby in the following day for tests. It died that night; the necropsy showed calcified kidneys and liver failure. The parents laid again, with all three eggs hatching at the end of October, 1991. (See tables.)

Using the same diet without the bone meal and vitamins, Anna fed the chicks hourly around the clock for the first three days. Then she fed them every two hours, again around the clock. At 33 days she put them on a schedule of feedings at 6 a.m., 10 a.m., 2 p.m., 6 p.m., 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. until weaning. At about 46 days, a chick vomited. With nothing to go on but guesswork, Anna cut back the amount of protein in the feed, adding some Lake's formula plus commercial baby food fruits and vegetables. In a few days, the vomiting stopped. It would seem that Hawkheads need extra protein only until a certain point in their development but exactly how much protein and how to pinpoint the time at which to reduce it still needs to be determined.

Like her other birds, the chicks weaned onto fruits, vegetables, seeds, and cereals such as Cheerios. They were weaned at three and a half months of age but, at four months, they still get a token bit of formula when she feeds other babies in the nursery, in order to keep them friendly and accustomed to people.

Anna noted a few things about Hawkhead behavior that she has not heard about from anyone else. The youngsters are very aggressive to the other birds in the nursery. If let loose together, they will hit the other birds with their feet to bring them to the ground, just as hawks do with their prey. The only other birds they will semi-tolerate are a clutch of Blue-headed Pionus that they shared a brooder with for a time (due to lack of space).

Maggie and Jiggs laid a third, out of season, clutch in February, 1992, which is in the incubator at the time of this writing. Anna speculates that this clutch may be due to our having an unusually mild winter. Like the other clutches, this one consists of three eggs. The eggs laid by this pair are shaped differently from all her other hookbill eggs. They are more of a full oval than an egg shape, with one side that is almost flat. Anna calls them cashew shaped, but without the curve of a cashew. She is not sure if this is normal for Hawkheads. On the other hand, this odd shape could be the cause of the difficulty one bird in the summer clutch had. It was perhaps too large for the egg and hatched out with a crooked spine. It could not sit up but lay on its back. Because of its position, the crop developed on only one side (see #225 on chart).

When the chick was 17 days old, Anna put it in a small, straight-sided glass just bigger than the bird. It could no longer flop onto its back but was forced to sit straight, like a normal chick. First the crop began to normalize. Then the bird pulled its legs forward and let its head go forward. Three days later, at the age of 20 days, it was able to sit up normally on its own. Anna left it in the glass for a few more days just to be sure. There is now no difference between this one and the other two active, feisty Hawkheads.

Anna usually keeps track of her chicks' weight in ounces but, realizing more accuracy would be needed, she switched to grams part-way through the Hawkheads' development. Rather than do the conversions, and introduce more inaccuracies, I have recorded the charts as they are.

"I have all kinds of questions," Anna says. "Who else is breeding Hawkheads? What are their diets? What are their weights? Why are these eggs shaped so oddly?" She asks that anyone with experience breeding Hawkheads call her to share information. Her number is (206) 483-5257, Pacific Coast time. A responsible aviculturalist, she will not sell the three youngsters for pets but wants to trade them for unrelated breeding stock. "It was a long wait," she says with a smile, "over eight years." I have a hunch she would have persevered for another eight, if that's what it took to breed these birds. ●

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's state coordinator.

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August 2 - 6, 1992

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Saturday, August 1  
6 p.m. - 12 midnight  
Imperial Room IV

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