

breeding the Bleeding Heart Dove

(*Gallicolumba l. luzonica*)

by D. Grenville Roles
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Photo by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge

Luzon Bleeding Heart Dove

"Hey, Mister! You've got a bird badly hurt over here, you'd better come and take care of it!" I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard that! If it's not a bird appearing to have suffered a stroke (Crowned Pigeon sunbathing) or experiencing a seizure (pheasant dustbathing) then it has to be every visitor's cries of concern (those who don't read the label that is), the Bleeding Heart Dove (*Gallicolumba l. luzonica*).

What subtle influences of evolution conspired in the development of this brazen stigmata can hardly be guessed at. This savagely marked bird displays an apparently fresh wound in the middle of its white breast. However, it is also beautifully glossed iridescent purple and green on the neck and mantle of its dark grey upper parts. The wings are barred chestnut and grey, the cap light grey; while its underparts below the white throat and breast are buffy peach, legs are dark red, bill black, and eyes brown. Males, in my experience, tend to be larger than hens. Chunky in appearance, and about two thirds the size of a common

pigeon, Bleeding Heart Doves are mostly terrestrial in their foraging behavior, arboreal, in fact, only while resting, roosting and nesting.

I am able to work with two pairs of these handsome little birds at present. The first pair professionally at Tracy Aviary, which have frustrated me for eight years, and the second pair I have at home which have driven me nuts for only two years.

There are, of course, those paragons of avicultural virtuosity such as Garrie Landry in Louisiana, who are able to breed these birds at will, but for me, it's been a struggle.

The Tracy Aviary pair, consisting of a 10-plus year old male and a two year old female (obtained from Garrie) were initially housed together in a mixed species aviary where some intermittent egg production (no incubation, mind you) took place.

I was experiencing similar problems at home with my year old pair (hen from Paddy Lambert, male from Garrie Landry).

Over the same weekend last fall, I moved both pairs to new accommo-

dations. The Aviary pair to a triangular shaped cage 8' x 8' x 8' with a solid wall at the rear, upon which was hung a bushel basket stuffed with hay. This cage is totally indoors, with a sand floor, a couple of perches, and otherwise bare with no other occupants.

My home pair is in my basement in a cage three feet square by 12' long, containing some Lantana and Boston Ferns, Gouldians and Diamond Doves, and a drawer 6" deep by 10" x 8" and half filled with bark chips provided for nesting, hung on the rear wall.

Within two weeks both pairs laid and incubated! My home pair, which had previously shared a flight with numerous Diamond Doves, Society and Zebra Finches, became very territorial and killed the female Diamond Dove sharing their flight and beat up the male (they would have killed him, too, if I had not come home in time).

Both pairs incubated solidly, the aviary pair on a single egg, my own pair on a two egg clutch. The diet which is normally a grain mix with diced fruit and some hard boiled egg (at the Aviary) was supplemented by a small quantity of mealworms scattered on the floor of the cage three or four times a day. At home my feed is a pellet/grain mix with canned corn in the morning and soaked seed in the evening, and a few mealworms three or four times a week.

Thrilled by the birds' behavior and claiming all responsibility for the clearly proven, new found technique of "if they don't breed, move 'em", I greeted each day with some degree of trepidation expecting the eggs to be either broken, abandoned, or disappeared. Imagine my delight, therefore, not to mention my relief, upon finding the cleanly evacuated and ejected shells upon the cage floors.

Clothed in surprisingly long, white down, the pink-fleshed chicks continued to be closely brooded by either, sometimes both, parents.

Having laid three or four days before my own birds, the Aviary chick left the nest first. Such a peculiar little chick at almost two weeks old, almost all wings and legs - it reminded me rather of a butterfly (except of course when it ran along the ground like a clockwork toy).

Both pairs were very attentive to the chicks, brooding them wherever they happened to be, or sometimes just sitting upon the ground next to them.

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My home pair was a little more nervous - I think because I could approach them so much more closely. Initially all the chicks appeared somewhat uncoordinated and just kind of took off and landed at whatever spot they hit, the wall, plant, perch, whatever, but after three or four days they were much more purposeful and controlled.

I rarely saw the chicks beg for food. They would occasionally squeak just like a domestic pigeon chick and jab at a parent's bill while pursuing them for a few inches, but the parents were rarely relaxed enough in my presence to feed their chicks while I watched.

My presence did not inhibit courtship, however, and I often witnessed their fascinating rituals. Periodically, all the adults were seen to pause without any detectable stimulus, hold their folded wings out horizontally and quiver them rapidly. This always takes place on the ground and usually interrupts their vigorous pacing around the cage - often it is followed by feeding of one bird by the other - I'm not sure it is always the male who feeds the female.

Vigorous courtship consists of both birds striding around their enclosures, the male in measured pursuit of the female, pausing frequently to give a loud "whoop" while he rocks back on his heels to prominently display his inflated white chest and "flash his gash" so to speak. Sometimes courtship is successfully concluded when the hen stops, turns and grabs the male's bill and solicits feeding, then squats for mating. Sometimes the male is disappointed.

Both pairs renested within a matter of three weeks or so after the chicks left the nest but due (I think) to the chicks roosting with their parents, neither clutch was successful.

Though very rapid growers initially, it seemed to take forever (ten weeks) before they were big enough and I was comfortable with removing them from their parents.

Looking like drab versions of adults with a pinkish "heart" with one or two dark spots, the chicks were only a little smaller than their parents at the time of separation.

Both pairs immediately recycled after the chicks were removed but all eggs were either abandoned, broken, disappeared, etc, etc. Clearly, it's time to move them again! ●