

Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeet

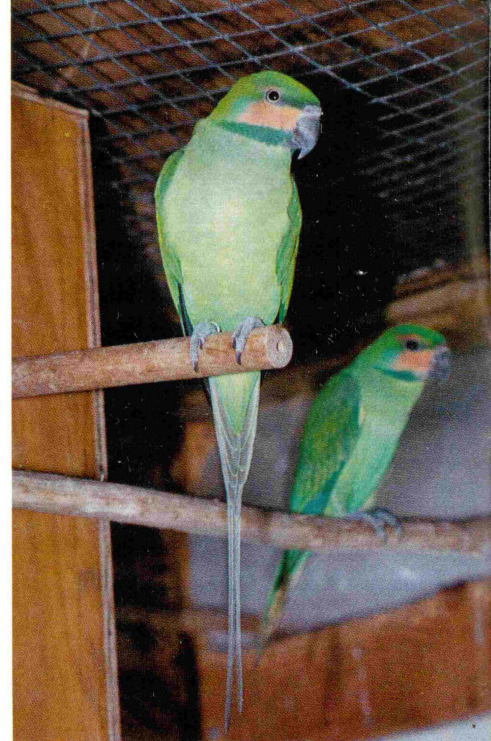
by Singkata Tongyai
Fort Meyers, Florida

Of the genera of psittacine birds found on the Asiatic mainland, the genus *Psittacula* is the most numerous (12 species) and contains the largest species in size. Many members of *Psittacula* have rather long tails which gives them a very graceful

appearance.

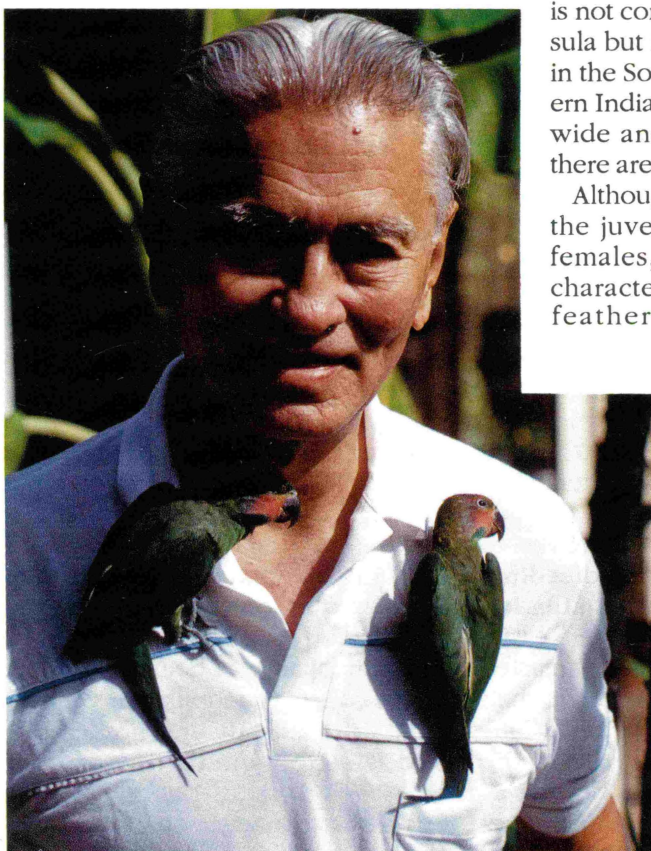
The Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeet (*Psittacula longicauda*) is, in my opinion, one of the most elegant and handsome species in the genus *Psittacula*. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most difficult to breed and raise from the time of hatching. This species is not confined to the Maylayan peninsula but is also found on many islands in the South China Sea and in the eastern Indian Ocean. Because its range is wide and many islands are isolated, there are five subspecies.

Although the literature indicates that the juvenile birds look like mature females, my male juvenile had the characteristic red-colored eye-brow feathers from the time he first



The adult female has a green moustache and bib compared to the male's black. A parent-reared young bird (male) can be seen on the rear perch.

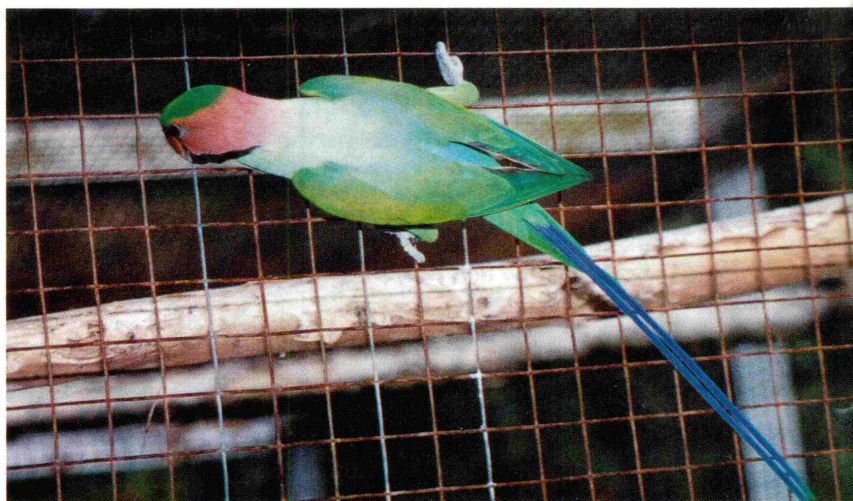
Photos by Jonathan Tongyai



The author with two six-month juvenile birds. They were hand-raised from day one.



These two juvenile Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeets show the beginning of a sexual difference at six months of age. The male on the left has a red eyebrow coloration which is lacking in the juvenile female.



Although most members of the *Psittacula* genus are noted for their hardiness, the Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeet is not because it comes from the warm climates of the Maylayan Peninsula, Borneo, Sumatra and many other smaller islands. The male Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeet is noted for its long blue, white-tipped tail and powder blue nape and back. The top of his head is emerald green.

feathered out.

The Long-tailed Parakeet prefers a lowland habitat which puts it in some jeopardy as much of the lowland area is being converted to agricultural use. The bird finds sufficient food in the palm plantations but doesn't fare as well in other agricultural zones.

The population of this species is declining not only through the destruction of its habitat but also from shooting, trapping, netting and the taking of babies from their nests. During my many visits to the Far East, I've noticed fewer and fewer numbers of the various members of the *Psittacula* genus. This holds for wild birds as well as captive birds in the various local bird markets.

In the bird markets there is no such thing as sanitation. Birds are jammed into filthy holding cages and must share water from a communal bowl which, I believe, has never been cleaned, let alone sterilized. Dead birds are removed and thrown away without a thought of determining the cause of death. Oh yes, a few "scientific minded" shop keepers throw various antibiotics into the drinking water but without knowing the disease, the dose or the duration of treatment. As a result, these birds often develop problems they wouldn't have had otherwise and many microbes become resistant to the antibiotics. These are the birds that are shipped overseas. Thanks to our quarantine system, not many sick birds get through to our market.

People in the Far East seem to enjoy having birds in their possession but very few have any intention of breeding them. These birds are, therefore, essentially dead as far as conservation is concerned. Unfortunately, most of these birds will not live very long after being exposed to diseases in the holding cages. Those that do live will suffer from malnutrition as very few of the people have any knowledge of bird husbandry.

In northern Thailand, I saw an amazing method of feeding baby parrots (Blossom-headed and Slaty-headed). These babies were brought down from the mountains by tribesmen after removing them from tree holes to be sold to traders. In this instance, the trader's five year old daughter had the duty of feeding the baby birds. The child chewed up cooked rice (every animal eats cooked

rice) with a kind of ripened banana called "Num Wa." The child then jammed the beak of the baby bird into her mouth. The starving babies thus ate the gluey food heartily until their crops were filled. I asked, "How many birds die?" She replied, "Very few." Does this mean the child transferred an antibody to the baby birds? I'd not suggest trying this.

The Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeets seem to have a poor resistance to various diseases and only a very few survive when they reach our market. Those that do survive may be carriers of some sort of disease not treated in quarantine. I had an unhappy experience when I lost two birds and almost lost my present male.

I put two pairs of Long-tailed Parakeets together so they'd be free to choose their own mate. Two males chose the same hen so they had a skirmish. Standing straight, heads held high, they faced off. Soon one realized that he was shorter than his opponent so he quit the fight. Shortly thereafter, the pair came down with an intestinal disease and both birds died within two days. The male who lost the fight also became sick but was given imme-

diat and intense veterinary care and was saved. I later learned that the remaining female (the one rejected by the males) which I had gotten separately, was the sole survivor of a big shipment. Perhaps she is a carrier of an unknown disease.

Eventually I put this hen with my surviving cock in hopes of breeding. The courtship display was quite interesting. On a perch, the male stands erect, facing the female. His head is held high. He jumps, making a 180 degree turn, walks toward her and jumps twice more — each time making the 180 degree turn. He then commences bowing or making a repeated gesture of feeding her. She will peck him if she is not ready. Indeed, the typical bossiness and nastiness characteristic of females in the genus *Psittacula* show up even in immature females of this species. Eventually, though, the female accepted the male's advances and they bred.

All the babies produced from this breeding died within three weeks of hatching. Despite veterinary care prior to, during and after breeding, we couldn't keep the babies alive.



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Necropsy results from Texas A&M showed no evidence of virus. This is good news. There was some gram negative bacteria. This gives us a good chance to do something about the problem.

For subsequent breeding, I decided to use two plans — one for artificial incubation (two eggs) and the other for the parents to incubate and hatch the eggs remaining in the clutch (usually three). The following methods were successful for me so I present them for your consideration.

Prior to the early breeding season (January or February), do the following:

1. Make a nest box. I used 1/2 inch plywood. The box measures 24" deep x 8" x 11" with an entrance hole 2" in diameter. Put a 1" x 1" wire ladder from the hole to the bottom. I disinfected the box by soaking it for 30 minutes in a 9:1 solution of water to household bleach. Rinse with clear water and dry. Put three or four inches of pine shavings in the bottom. Hang the box as high as possible in the aviary with the entrance facing south or east.

2. Take the pair to a good avian veterinarian for a thorough examination including lab work. Try to find a veterinarian who is familiar with aviculture rather than just pet birds and work with him or her throughout the breeding cycle.

3. Before the birds are returned to the aviary, disinfect it with the same solution used for the nestbox. Soak the walls, wire, perches, etc. for 30 minutes, then rinse with clear water.

4. During the breeding season, I provide more food that is high in calcium and also add vitamin E.

5. While breeding is underway, use all methods to promote sanitation. I use rubber gloves to handle eggs and before taking eggs to the incubator I cleanse them according to my vet's instructions.

6. The incubator should be fumigated and sterilized according to your vet's instructions, then set up in a room dedicated to incubation. The room should be easily cleaned and sterilized and should maintain a nearly constant temperature. I set my incubator at 98.5°F at least five days prior to hatch time.

I have been very successful in raising baby birds using my own formula as well as other commercial formulas

but I decided that I will use only human baby food and materials for the first seven days at least, as it is made under very strict sanitation rules.

I use Pedialyte (oral electrolyte maintenance), Gerber's "1st Food" and "2nd Food" (oatmeal with bananas) and bottled baby food such as Garden Mixed Vegetables, Applesauce, Papaya with Tapioca and Chiquita Bananas. Commercial live "Lactobacillus acidophilus" is a *must* for the incubator babies. I keep this in the freezer.

To contain the tiny babies, I use a small, clear box size 11-1/2" x 7-1/2" and 6-3/4" deep as a brooder box. The cover is plastic mesh with small holes for the thermometer. I found these boxes in a pet store. I made a 1/4" x 1/4" wire mesh platform to support the babies in the box by bending all four sides of the mesh down so the platform is 10-1/4" x 6-1/4" and 1/2" deep.

This box will be placed inside a larger, clear box (Rubbermaid) keeper-size 16" x 11" x 9" deep also with a wire platform in the bottom. The platform supports the small box and separates it from the bottom which contains wood chips and water for humidity. Between the sides of the small box and the large box I insert a heating pad. Be sure *not* to put the heating pad on the bottom of the small box or you will have a roasted baby bird. Set the thermostat to number one and put the brooder boxes in a nursery room that maintains a constant temperature.

When the first baby hatched in the incubator, I put it in the small brooder box near the wall with the heating pad. The temperature in the box was 95°F to 97°F.

Four hours after hatching, I used a small spoon with a narrowed tip to feed a small amount of Pedialyte plus a sprinkling of Aviguard. I filled the crop only half full. These feedings were repeated every two hours for seven feedings, then I increased the amount to fill the crop three-fourths full. On the eighth feeding, I mixed some Gerber's 1st Food with Pedialyte and heated it to 175°F at least (or almost to a boil) in the microwave oven. The food must be stirred thoroughly and cooled to 102° to 104°F before sprinkling on some Aviguard. I prefer to make a new batch of food for

each feeding.

This routine is followed for two days. If the crop is empty within two hours, I increase the amount of food and continue to watch how the crop empties. If all goes well, switch to Gerber's 2nd Food plus the Pedialyte and Aviguard. Increase the Gerber's as you go.

I prepare a mixture of egg yolk and honey (honey should be heated to 175°F, then cooled) mixed together and keep it in the freezer. By the fourth day, I add a bit of this gummy mixture to the baby food to be reheated.

On the fifth day I replace half of the Pedialyte with clean water. Aviguard is still added to each meal when it cools to 102°F. This is the time to increase both the Gerber's 2nd Food and the honey-egg yolk mixture.

By the seventh day, I've replaced all the Pedialyte with water and I add Chiquita Banana to the formula. Carefully monitor the crop. Should it fail to empty within five hours, go back to the Pedialyte and Aviguard formula for one meal. If the crop moves well, start again with the regular formula.

On the eighth day, combine Gerber's 2nd Food with a small amount of Mixed Garden Vegetables and, as always, add the Aviguard. Increase the Mixed Vegetables to equal the amount of Gerber's 2nd Food. At this point, I alternate the above formula with Gerber's 2nd Food and egg yolk-honey plus Papaya. By this time, the baby should have doubled its hatch weight.

I believe in giving a variety of foods and teaching the babies to eat everything that is given to them. You may use your own formula or any of the commercial foods from this point on but I believe it is wise to continue to use Aviguard. I also sprinkle Prime vitamins and minerals on the food.

Baby Maylayan Long-tailed Parakeets grow quickly and will feather out in less than two months and may be weaned by then also. I give safflower and sunflower seeds to them to play with and they soon learn to eat them. I always spoonfeed the weaned babies just before they go to sleep at night to be sure their crops are full. By two months, the babies can fly very well. They are always very sweet and want to be with me at all times. The baby that was raised by its parents is beautiful but very wild. ●

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