

Handfeeding Pionus Parrots

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Native to South America, the Pionus Parrots have become increasingly more popular as they receive more focus. The Pionus Parrot (genus Pionus) consists of eight species.

1. Blue-headed Pionus *Pionus menstruus* also known as the Red-vented Parrot – Range/Habitat: Mexico, Costa Rica and Tropical South America.

Its most outstanding blue head, breast and throat are complimented by the brilliant green of the body. The bill is dark gray with red markings at the base of both mandibles. The undertail coverts are brilliant red tipped with green.

2. Bronze-winged Pionus *Pionus chalcopterus* – Range/Habitat: The Andes of Columbia, Ecuador and North-western Peru.

The colors on the Bronze-wing, aside from its subtleness are quite striking. The crown, back of head and upper neck are a dark bluish green. The wings are bronze, the tail and upper parts of the breast are extremely dark blue. The fusion of color in the throat area varies from a pinkish white to a deeper coral-white. The tail is dark blue with the under coverts deep scarlet. The most brilliant coloring appears on the underside of the wings. This is a brilliant iridescent aqua. The eye ring is pink deepening to a dark coral during the breeding season. Three pair of my bronze-wings have obtained full coral eye ring color at two years old and have maintained it.

3. Coral-billed Pionus *Pionus sordidus* – Range/Habitat: Northern Venezuela and Western Columbia to Ecuador, Eastern Peru and Northern Bolivia. The coral bill is the most outstanding feature of this species. The body is green with blue bordering and white eye ring.

4. Dusky Pionus *Pionus fuscus* – Range/Habitat: Venezuela, Lower Amazon areas and the Guianas.

The Dusky is an extremely striking bird. The head bears a resemblance to the Peregrine Falcon and is distinctively marked with buff. The skin surrounding the eye is gray in adults. The head is slate blue. The cere is marked with red feathers on either side, and the feathers of the breast area are brownish-pink becoming a rich wine as the bird matures. The undertail coverts are purplish red and the tail itself is a bright violet. The variation on the chest at maturity varies.

Some maintain more a grayish pink to a deep wine. The males tend to obtain a deeper color. The underside of the flights is an iridescent silver blue. My most colorful male (imported but in captivity for six years) has phenomenal wine color. His first year offspring have extraordinary color, the male and female siblings are almost identical.

5. The Maximillian Pionus *Pionus maxmillani* – Habitat/Range: Brazil through Bolivia and Paraguay to Northern Argentina. The Maximillian is the largest of the Pionus species. The plumage is less colorful. The scaly head with the white eye ring is the most outstanding feature. The overall color is bronze olive. The chin is a purplish blue which extends to the throat area.

6. Massena's Pionus or White-headed Pionus *Pionus tumultuosus seniloides* – Range/Habitat: Western Venezuela, Western Columbia, Ecuador, north-western Peru in the Andes.

This is the most rare of the Pionus species which has yet to be bred in captivity. The head is a dullish green with a white base which gives a speckled appearance. The upper parts are a dark green which extends to the tail. The breast is dark mauvish blue.

7. Plum-crowned Pionus *Pionus tumultuosus tumultuosus* – Range/Habitat: Peru, the mountains of Central and Southern Regions. Unique head coloring, plum on the crown and forehead.

The Plum-crowned is very similar in head contour and body shape to the Massena's or White-headed.

8. White-capped Pionus *Pionus senilis* – Range/Habitat: Mexico south-east region through Central America, Western Panama. It has a white feathered crown which starts from the beak and extends to a V shape. The eye ring is white until maturity, at which time it becomes coral. The rest of the head appears dark blue. The upper breast is dark green and the lower breast is bluish green.

In 1933, I took five pair of White-capped Pionus to England. Some of these were my first hatch from 1989.

All Pionus Parrots should be DNA sexed as young to eliminate any questions related to their pairing.

I have been handfeeding Pionus Parrots since 1986. Since some of the species are endangered already, I feel committed to monitor the results of my breeding. The offspring are sold as pets or young breeder pairs.

The Pionus are excellent parents, their clutches number from three to six and they sit until the babies are pulled, approximately 10 days to two and one half weeks, depending on the size of the clutch.

My handfeeding diet is Kaytee Exact. In 1986, I was introduced to Dr. Randall Brue and Kaytee by Miami Veterinarian Dr. Thomas Goldsmith.

They came to my aviary and introduced the formula. I had many questions as my Cockatiels and Pionus were already set up for breeding.

I was somewhat apprehensive as Cockatiels and Pionus are known for the tendency towards candidia. This concern was soon alleviated as I realized a tremendous support system through Kaytee.

My formula is stored in dated freezer bags after the original five pound bag is

opened. It maintains its freshness and is quite easily mixed. The temperature of the formula when fed is between 100° F and 105° F. This formula is added to extremely hot tap water, which is tested with a thermometer. The protein content is 22% maximum which is ideal for young Pionus. The consistency varies for different age babies. The young are between two and two and one half weeks when they are pulled. This is done in the early A.M. when the crops are ideally empty.

Before the first feeding, they are given approximately 10cc of warm Pedialyte. This offsets any form of dehydration and allows a smooth transition from parent to handfeeding.

The ratio of Exact to water is one part Exact to one and one third - two parts water. This formula must never be reused.

At two weeks, I feed three times a day, the youngest in a clutch of six pulled at two and one half weeks would only be eight days old and would require more feedings the first week and one half. I have had only three clutches of six in 1993-1994.

All babies are fed only when crops are empty and one syringe is used for each clutch. They are sterilized after each use. The babies are kept in individual tubs using Care Fresh and paper toweling.

The syringes are all acrylic with no rubber O rings. The babies are fed on thin pieces of foam rubber covered with paper toweling. This promotes cleanliness and eliminates unnecessary washing of towels. The babies take 30-40cc at one time depending on the age.

All babies should be monitored for weight gain. I use a digital scale, and in one clutch one week from pulling the oldest baby had gained 65 grams. Two weeks later, the same chick had gained an additional 29 grams. Three weeks later, the chick that had been 123 grams when pulled weighed 234 grams. This was the eldest in a clutch of three White-capped. My nursery is a Thief of Hearts and I use Sporadicin as a disinfectant.

One very important subject in the handfeeding of Blue-headed is their tendency to simulate a wheezing sound. This usually appears after the birds are fully feathered, approximately in their second to third month. This is not a true respiratory problem but if you are raising your first Pionus, you should have it monitored by an avian veterinarian.

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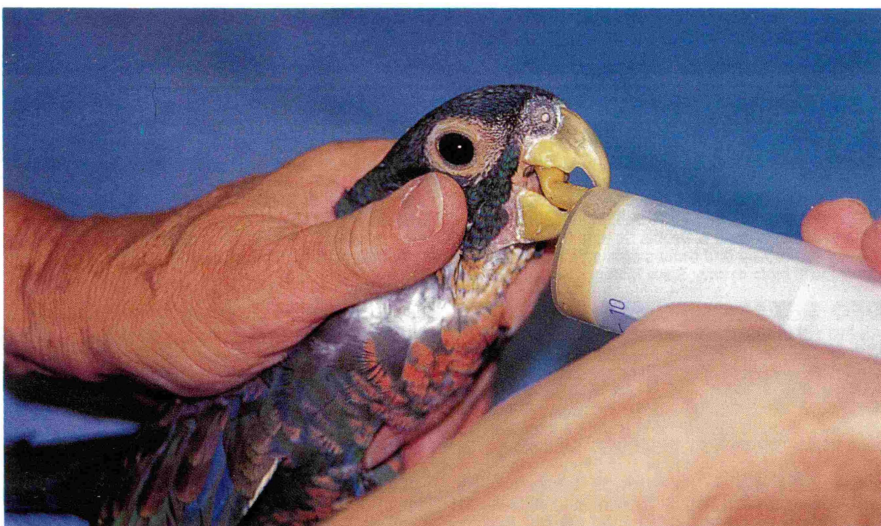
All Proceeds Donated to Avian Research.

1994 Recipients are: Dr. Keven Flammer,
Dr. Jack Gaskin and Dr. Branson Ritchie



All babies are fed when their crops are empty. All syringes are sterilized after each use. This is a young Blue-headed Pionus.



Care is taken during the handfeeding process to eliminate the risk of aspiration. This young Bronze-winged Pionus is well feathered.



Well fed Pionus youngsters.

This year, I have pulled my Blue-headed somewhat later and put them in a cage 1/2 x 1 in. wire (when feathered) giving them toys while introducing them on Kaytee Rainbow. This seemed to eliminate any stress which I felt had activated their wheezing.

The Pionus Parrots are unlike any other bird in that they maintain a sweet disposition even in a breeding situation, particularly the females. The males tend to talk. Their persona as young handfed birds going to new homes is unmatched as they maintain this quite gentle nature through maturity.

I recently took my 1988 hatch Bronze-wing pet from a breeding set-up (non-breeding season) to a show. She was as docile as ever and in impeccable feather condition. She won ninth best out of 80 parrots. I then returned her to the aviary.

I spent years researching for a bird similar in temperament to the Cockatiels. I initially chose Pionus and have never regretted my choice. The Pionus Parrot is a wonderful avicultural experience and has provided me overwhelming advantages of breeding a particularly species.

The Pionus are an ideal bird as they are not noisy, they do not chew, they are small and are very captivating. 🦜



The author uses Kaytee Exact for handfeeding Pionus parrots. The temperature of the handfeeding formula is always tested.

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