

OPINIONS

Mynah Missive

Dear Mynah Messenger,

The resurgence of interest in mynah birds is wonderful. Since all the mynah books currently available leave a lot to be desired, it is particularly important to have a column with accurate, updated mynah information. We breed both the Greater Indian Hill Mynah and the Javan Hill Mynah. We'd like to discuss some points made in previous articles and to let everyone know that there is hope for the Javan Hill Mynah.

First, we strongly disagree with the idea of changing the common name of *Gracula religiosa intermedia* from Greater Indian Hill Mynah to Hill Mynah. We have six bird identification books where the term "Hill Mynah" is used to encompass all races of the species *Gracula religiosa*. This is useful when distinguishing the Hill Mynah from all other species of mynahs such as the Bali Mynah, Celebes Mynah, Crested Mynah, and Coleta Mynah. Although it is difficult to find books which describe the various races of Hill Mynahs, there are references to the Sumatran Hill Mynah, the Greater Malaysian Hill Mynah, and the Nias Hill Mynah, in addition to Greater Indian Hill Mynah, the Lesser Indian Hill Mynah, and the Javan Hill Mynah. These names are meaningful as they describe where the birds come from and distinguish one race from another.

In their books on pet mynahs, Martin Weil, Rosemary Low, and Otto Von Frisch all refer to *Gracula religiosa intermedia* as the Greater Indian Hill Mynah. We have noticed little, if any, confusion over the terms "Greater" and "Lesser." Fortunately, there are scientific names for the subspecies and we don't have to rely on or agree with the use of common names.

We've found, as have others, that *Gracula religiosa religiosa* — Javan Hill Mynahs — are very hard to come by. As stated in numerous articles, it is important that people learn to distinguish between the subspecies and that the Javan Hill Mynah be put into breeding situations since there are so few in this country. The Javan Hill Mynah was never imported in great numbers. Most of them came into this country mixed

in with shipments of Greater Indian Hill Mynahs. Few people seemed to notice the difference or care.

With the passage of the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992 (WBCA), all importations of birds listed on Appendices I, II, or III came to a halt. At that time, Hill Mynahs were on Appendix III. Mynah prices began to jump up as mynah lovers discovered the birds were no longer readily available. Breeders, like us, began to set up pairs of Greater Indian Hill Mynahs and Javan Hill Mynahs. It soon became painfully clear that there were too few individuals of these subspecies to develop self-sustaining populations.

We looked into a provision in the WBCA that allows for approved cooperative breeding programs to obtain import permits. After considerable effort and time, we are happy to report that we recently received approval of a cooperative breeding program for *Gracula religiosa* and plan to import Javan Hill Mynahs from Indonesia within a year.

Contrary to what was previously reported, Indonesia and other countries are still exporting mynahs — and not just to the U.S. The Nias Hill Mynah is the only mynah in Indonesia which is barred from export. Since the CITES Conference in 1997, Hill Mynahs have been moved to Appendix II which means their trade is slightly more restricted. Hopefully, there will be aviculturists in other countries who will set up breeding programs and with whom we can exchange blood lines in the future.

We know of bird parks in South Africa, Singapore, and Spain which have Hill Mynahs. A breeder in the Philippines had a number of pairs of Sumatran Hill Mynahs but has since given them up to "pet lovers."

If anyone is having trouble finding mates for other bird species, we encourage them to look into importing additional birds under an approved cooperative breeding program. It is not easy, but not impossible either.

Sincerely

Susan Boyer, Julian, CA

JoAnne Wyman, Rancho Santa Fe, CA

Letter to Editor

I was very happy to see the color photographs showing the various African Cape Parrot subspecies in the September/October 1997 *Watchbird*. The accompanying article explaining identification will be an aid to many.

I have to admit, though, I became somewhat depressed after reading the piece. I took the photographs out to my aviaries to compare them with the Cape Parrots I keep and to confirm that all the birds passed on to me as *Poicephalus suabelicus* were, in fact, pure *suabelicus*. One of my males shows the brown cheek specks listed as diagnostic of *P. fuscicollis*, while another has the darker patches on shoulder as it should be according to the article. Comparing the photos with my birds, it almost appears as if some of my birds have characteristics of both of these two subspecies. It wasn't noted if the amount of red orange on the shoulder epaulet has any bearing upon subspecies identification. Both my birds and those pictured in the *Watchbird* showed marked differences.

It is entirely possible, since all but one of my breeders are domestically raised, that some subspecies mixing has gone on in their parents' generation.

Hence my disappointment. The keeping of pure subspecies of psittacines is becoming very difficult here in the U.S. This is even more so when one (like me) never had the opportunity to see in person the parents of the offspring I obtained. Some years ago, I purchased at a rather high price a proven pair of Grand Eclectus, *E. roratus roratus*, and was offering their progeny as pure *roratus*. On their third clutch they threw a female chick with the blue eye ring feathers notable to *E. roratus polychloros*. After discussing this with several Eclectus experts, I concluded that a subspecies impurity existed in the parents and was forced to place subsequent offspring into the pet trade.

The great question in all this confusion is what happens when all these Eclectus babies grow up and begin moving into the U.S. breeder scene?

Thoughtfully,

EB Cravens, Waiohinu, HI ➤