Handrearing of a 
Blue-naped Mousebird
(Urocolius macrourus macrourus)

By Maarten de Ruiter
Gettorf, Germany

Although mousebirds are very attractive and interesting softbills, they have not become extremely popular in aviculture. The six species of this family (Coliidae) are so different from all other birds that they are placed in their own order (Coliiformes). In nature, they are only found in Africa. In captivity, they are rarely displayed in zoological collections. This is a shame as their behavior is very interesting.*

Of the six known species, I have had the privilege of caring for one species, the Blue-naped Mousebird (Urocolius macrourus macrourus**). Over a period of several months, I kept a small group of 10 individuals. I donated them to a friend after he expressed and showed great interest in these birds.

Later I was lucky to care for the Blue-naped Mousebird while at the Birdpark of Walsrode (Germany). Here a group of 20 birds were housed in the enormous Tropical Free-flight Hall. This Hall is well planted with numerous tropical plants and trees. Two small water pools were placed between the tropical foliage. Many other species of birds besides the mousebirds are also housed within this Hall. These include pigeons and doves, starlings, waxbills, orioles, pittas and many more. The large Great Blue Plantain-eater was also kept in this exhibit. I observed no interactions between the mousebirds and the other birds.

Mousebirds are fruit eaters and they received a mixture of many types including apple, banana, grapes, tomato, etc. They were also fed cooked rice, soaked raisins and salad. The mousebirds consumed large amounts of salad and other green foods when they were rearing young.

Breeding the Blue-naped Mousebird proved to be quite easy as the Hall was very spacious with plenty of plants and trees and a warm temperature. Throughout the year we observed the typical cup-nests built by the mousebirds distributed throughout the Hall. We had proof that the nests were successful as the total number of Blue-naped Mousebirds increased in number.

In the summer of 1988, I found a fallen nest which contained two baby Blue-naped Mousebirds. Only one was alive. From the condition of the baby that had died, I assumed that another bird, possibly a pitta, had attacked it.
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AFA BOARD MEETING
16, 17, 18 February 1995
New Orleans, Louisiana
Clarion Hotel

CONVENTION
August 10, 11, 12, 1995
Clarion Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana
Exec. Board — all day, Tuesday, 8th
House of Delegates — all day, Wednesday, 9th

Because I have had a lot of experience in handraising birds (ibis, herons, storks, birds of prey, owls, todies, parrots and passerine birds), I removed the little mousebird in hopes of handrearing it. From its size, I estimated it to be about seven days of age. Its eyes were open but its pin feathers were still within their sheaths. It was housed in a brooder that was kept at a temperature of 34° Celsius (90°F). The baby was very lively and my wife Antje decided to name it “Mausie” (little mouse).

The baby accepted food immediately at its first feeding. Its food consisted of small balls of mashed fruit and salad. It was fed every two hours until very late at night. Because I had to work the following morning, Antje took over the job of feeding the little mousebird. She did an excellent job.

When I returned home from work that same day, I wanted to feed Mausie again but it would not accept food from me. Surprisingly, only a few minutes later it accepted three food balls from Antje. From that moment on my wife took over the handrearing of this young mousebird completely.

Ten days after it was removed for handfeeding, the young Blue-naped Mousebird was completely feathered and was just beginning to try to eat food on its own. It also made its first attempts at flying at this time. For the next six weeks, Mausie was flying free within the house. However, when it sav Antje it flew directly to her.

At this time we thought it would be best to allow our mousebird to become acquainted with its own species. We released it in the Tropical Free-flight Hall where it began to feed. Within one hour I observed it in the company of two other Blue-naped Mousebirds.

This handreared mousebird has acclimatized very well with the other birds, but whenever Antje walks through the Hall and calls to Mausie, it takes only seconds before he (or she) is sitting on her shoulder!

I consider mousebirds to be very lovely birds and they deserve much more attention than they have received. I wish to thank my wife, Antje, for successfully raising Mausie.

* Mousebirds have been kept and bred in American aviculture. (Editor)