

## BREEDING THE FIERY-SHOULDERED CONURE

By Rosemary Low (Gran Canaria)

In the 1970s a considerable number of species of lories, fig parrots and Amazons became available in aviculture for the first time. It was an exciting era, the like of which we will never see again. Indeed, the ethical aspects of importing wild-caught birds are now considered in a different light. Few would wish to return to the days of mass importation. Aviculturists must now be self-sufficient and never again rely on the importer as a source of stock. We must value the wild-caught birds in our care more highly for they are the founder stock whose offspring will be available to many generations of aviculturists.

So these days we do not expect new species to be introduced to aviculture. Yet in 1990 the Fiery-shouldered Conure *Pyrrhura egregia* appeared in Europe, almost certainly for the first time. It is a member of a family of small conures which have much to recommend them. They have attractive personalities, they nest readily and, unlike other conures, they are not noisy.

There are more brightly coloured species of *Pyrrhura* but the feature which gives *egregia* its name is very striking. The bend of the wing is fiery orange and the carpal edge is yellow-orange. Its real beauty is appreciated when it opens its wings; the greater under wing coverts are yellow and the lesser coverts are orange.

The crown is dark brown and there are a few flecks of dark red on the ear coverts. (I have not seen one like that depicted by William Cooper in *Parrots of the World* which has the ear coverts actually red.) Feathers of the lower neck and upper breast are scalloped with grey and white and those of the lower breast are grey margined with faint yellow. The abdomen is green indistinctly marked with maroon and there is a tinge of maroon around the vent. (The breast markings on Cooper's bird are not really true to life.) Primaries and secondaries are blue. The tail is dark reddish-brown above and blackish tinged with red-brown below.

It is the only *Pyrrhura* known in aviculture which has a light-coloured beak; the beak is ivory, the cere whitish, the iris brown and the feet grey. The skin surrounding the eye is white and quite extensive. Length is 25 cm (10 in). Weight is about 70 g. Of two adult pairs weighed, both the males weighed 73 g., one female weighted 69 g. and the other female 75 g. Most *Pyrrhuras* with



which I am familiar can be weight-sexed; males are slightly heavier with the exception of the Blue-throated Conure *P. cruentata* in which the female is heavier than the male. (She is also dominant!)

In appearance, the Fiery-shouldered is, in my opinion, closest to the sub-species *chapmani* of the Maroon-tailed Conure *Pyrrhura melanura*. However, the latter has red under wing coverts and carpal edge of wing.

The Fiery-shouldered Conure has a small range, being found in the region of the borders of Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil (extreme north-east Roraima). It occurs only in the isolated, flat-topped mountains, which are called tepuis, in forested areas. It lives in the tropical and sub-tropical zone, usually at altitudes between 700 m. and 1,800 m. The reason why this conure remained unknown in aviculture for so long is that this area is difficult to invade. According to Robert Ridgely, one of the most experienced ornithological field workers in the region, it is "seemingly quite common within its small range." Its population is believed to be stable.

The small captive population is probably increasing. I have been told of breeding successes in Switzerland and Germany. Certainly one of the two pairs in my care lost no time in the race to reproduce. They were still in quarantine when the first egg was laid! Each pair (previously surgically sexed) was housed in a small cage measuring 102 cm. (3ft. 4 in.) long, 51 cm. (20 in.) wide and 77 cm. (2 ft. 6 in.) high. The nest-boxes provided measured (internal dimensions) 30 cm. (12 in.) long, 17 cm. (7 in.) wide and 20 cm. (8 in.) high. Inside, a small wooden shelf was fitted under the entrance hole and 8 cm. (3 in.) above the floor; it was 10 cm. (4 in.) long. This prevents a bird entering the nest from dropping down on to the eggs, it gives a measure of privacy to females who prefer to incubate underneath and the young ones can sit on the board and look out before fledging. The nest can be inspected by means of the hinged flap at one end.

The birds had arrived on 1st April and one female laid her first egg on 28th April. There were two eggs by 1st May, three by 4th May, four by 6th May and the fifth was laid before 10th May. The date of the sixth egg was unknown because the female was incubating so tightly.

It was not possible to mark the eggs, thus I could not record the exact incubation period. What I believed was the third egg was opened by the parents and contained a chick which was full-term dead-in-shell. This was very disappointing but a short while later, on 1st June, there was a chick in the nest, followed the next day by



a second. If it was the fourth egg which hatched first, the incubation period would have been 26 days which would be a long period for a *Pyrrhura*. Probably it was the fifth egg, to give an incubation period of 23 days for the first egg, if the chick hatched the previous evening. In the climate of Gran Canaria, most *Pyrrhuras* hatch after 22 days with a day or two longer sometimes recorded for the first egg in the clutch.

The female was extremely protective of the small chicks, thus she was not disturbed for weights and descriptions to be recorded. Not until the eldest was 16 days old and had to be ringed (with a 5.5 mm. ring) were the chicks removed and photographed. At this age they are at their least attractive, with the second down starting to erupt in little white blobs on body and wings. Not much of the first down remains. Upper mandible and feet were pink.

Three days later the orange feathers at the bend of the wing and two or three of the orange wing coverts were starting to erupt. The development of the youngest chick was several days behind that of the other. When the eldest was 22 days its flight and tail feathers were just breaking through the sheaths.

At 28 days both looked beautiful. The crown was dull green, the cheeks brighter green and the bend of the wing was quite brilliant orange. Scapulars and secondary coverts were bright green. The tail of the eldest was about one third the full length, the dark brown feathers being tipped with blackish. Much dense whitish-grey down was apparent, denser than in other *Pyrrhuras* with which I am familiar. The beak was still pinkish with brown at the base of the upper mandible. The beak pads were white.

The young were fully feathered a week later, both with an extensive area of yellow and orange at the bend of the wing. In *Parrots of the World*, Forshaw states that in immature birds the colour in that area is "much reduced" but this did not apply to these two. At 54 days the eldest differed from the parents only in the dark base of the upper mandible and in the light feet.

The eldest youngster left the nest during the last week in July. For several days before, the second stayed at the back of the nest-box, behind its sibling. I do not handle chicks just before they are due to leave the nest because of the likelihood of them leaving the nest prematurely. On 29th July, when it was 57 days old, it was apparent that the youngest was weak. It was removed from the nest for hand-feeding and medication but sadly it died the next day. The cause of death could not be established. The eldest youngster is now nine months old and indistinguishable from the adults.



Mention should be made of the diet of this species. It eats most seeds, fruits and vegetables offered. When the young were being reared, extra fruit and sunflower seed were consumed, also cuttlefish bone. I would suggest that fruit and vegetables should form at least 40% of the maintenance diet.



*Pyrrhura egregia*

Rosemary Low

It may be that no more wild-caught Fiery-shouldered Conures will be available. The few aviculturists currently fortunate enough to keep *egregia* must pair them with care, avoiding in-breeding, if the species is to have any future in aviculture. A stud-book, or a European alliance of breeders would increase the chances of its long-term survival.

Let us hope that its numbers will grow to the degree that all lovers of *Pyrrhuras* will eventually have a chance to keep it.



# JEAN DELACOUR AND THE AVICULTURAL MAGAZINE

## PART II(ii): 1920 - 1944

Josef Lindholm III

(Keeper II Birds, Fort Worth Zoological Park)

'For nine years I had not been to see my friend Mr. G. H. Gurney's aviaries. I was delighted, when last August I arrived at Keswick to find that their number had more than doubled ... The aviaries are built in three groups: the oldest one is in a small garden surrounded by walls. There is a central path, on the right side of which is a long and large aviary inhabited by Black-necked Ibises, Cattle Egrets, Oystercatchers, Ruffs and Reeves ... Alpine Choughs, Crested Pigeons and Dominican Cardinals. On the left side one finds six smaller aviaries, all with heated shelters ... the first one is stocked with many small birds, mainly Finches and Weavers, one White-crowned Plover and a rare South American Whimbrel... the last one, very roomy, with three Tiger Bitterns.

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'... the second group of aviaries, also surrounded by walls, is newer and larger... These birds, in the day time, walk about the garden and paths between the aviaries: there are pairs of Dusky Trumpeters, Razor-billed Curassows, Pileated Guans, a Screamer, an American Wood Ibis and various Guinea Fowls...

'On the left a very nice aviary... has been erected inside a greenhouse: there are males of the lovely Elliot's Pitta, Bellbird, Fairy Bluebirds, several Tanagers and Bulbuls. In cages, a few small Parrots, one very old Golden-fronted Bulbul, a Black-colored Barbet, and a very fine Crimson-breasted Shrike that Mr. Gurney has had for four years. It is to be noted that both Elliot's Pitta and the Shrike have kept very bright their green and red hues.

'...there is a wide turfed path, on the left of which is a long flight inhabited by Manchurian Eared Pheasants, Budgerigars and a Cocoli Heron, which is quite harmless to small birds to my amazement!

'On the other side, a row of nine fine new aviaries... contain many birds, among which I noticed Common Francolins... Kagus, Sclater's Crown-Pigeons on the nest... The central compartment, very roomy, is inhabited by Scarlet and White Ibises, Lesser Egrets and Gray's Pond Herons. In spite of the habits of its occupants, the



shrubs and grass are perfectly clean and nice, and I think this is a wonderful achievement.

'At a short distance, in a field, stands the hawks aviary... There are seven cages, all 18 ft. deep, with different widths. One sees the following birds: one pair of American Bald Eagles, one Red-tailed Hawk and one Southern Chilean Sea-Eagle *Geranoaetus australis*, a *Busarellus nigricollis*, one pair of Montagu's Harriers, in fine condition, a pair of Kolb's Vulture and a Chimachima: one King Vulture: a Jackal Buzzard bred at Keswick seventeen years ago, and a Caracara...'

A visit to the Keswick Aviaries. October, 1930. (Series IV), Vol. IX, 259 - 261.

'Among birds recently arrived at G ry, I should mention Black-crested Yellow Bulbuls, Racket-tailed Drongos, Crimson-crowned Whydahs, White-rumped Bichenos's Finches, Tambourine and Bartlett's Doves, Crimson-backed Waxbills, Brush Bronze-winged pigeons and Grayson's Doves, Motmot, etc...'

M. A. Dexoux's Aviaries at G ry (HTE Vienne) October, 1931. (Series IV), Vol. IX, 286 - 288.

'During the last year or more I have been so busy with different matters, and especially with the writing of the four big volumes on *The Birds of Indo-China*, that I have not sent to the Magazine my usual notes on my birds at Cl res since 1929.

'And yet so many species new to aviculture have been imported during recent years and a few of these have come to me ...!'

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'My Pheasant collection is more or less complete. I have ... four species of *Polyplectron*: Palawan, Bronze-tailed, Germain's and Ghigi's Grey; a pair of the latter gave, this season, eight clutches of two eggs, rearing six young. We also reared to full size one Rheinart, for the first time in Europe... The hen, which had been kept out of doors the whole winter, started laying on 3rd May, again on 22nd May and 12th June... Incubation lasts twenty-five days. I had a pair of Bulwer's Pheasants, but the cock died suddenly and I do not like the look of the hen. I find that the Fireback group do not do well at Cl res and it is not worth while keeping them here, although I still possess pairs of the rare Bornean Crestless and of my own Fireback *Lophura delacouri*. But I now intend having them kept for me in the sunny south of France.

'Since 1928 I have kept a pair of the rare Lewis's Pheasant *Gennaesus lewisi*, a very dark species of the silver group, discovered that same year on the mountains of Cambodia. In 1930 the hen laid



four unfertile eggs. In 1931 she laid five, three of which hatched and two young were reared... An imported pair of Mikado Pheasants produced thirteen young ones in 1930, and the same number again in 1931. This fine species from Formosa does not seem to breed before two years old. I have just obtained another pair from Formosa which will enable me to renew the blood.

'I also own some wild-caught, and therefore pure-blooded, Amherst Pheasants which I brought in 1930 from Yunnan. The wonderful Blue Crossoptilons sent to me in 1929 by Mr. Hampe being all males, hybrids with the brown species were reared last year and look almost like pure blue ones. One of these 1930 hybrid hens bred, in 1931, two young ones with a pure blue cock; these are indistinguishable from their father. In 1930 we reared some Soemmerring's Pheasants, a few of which escaped from their coop and have become established in the woods, where they are occasionally seen, together with some Bel's Kalij... During these two breeding seasons we also reared a fair number of... Brown Crossoptilon, Elliot's, Edwards', Imperial, Black-crested Kalij, Horsfield, Versicolor... Madagascar Guinea-fowl... Some Doves and Pigeons were bred: Diamond, Australian Crested, Bronze-winged, Jobi and Marquesa *rubescens*, and, for the first time since I have kept birds, one Nicobar Pigeon. To my surprise the young one remained nearly six weeks in the nest, till quite fully grown.

'The collection of Waterfowl is better than it ever was, although I must admit I have no more Pink-headed Ducks, Pigmy Geese, African Black Ducks, White-backed Ducks or Hottentot Teal... In 1931 a pair of South African Shelldrakes produced six young ones, and we reared one curious hybrid Rajah x Ruddy Shelldrake in size and shape: dark reddish brown, with white head and neck. Also we had a few Madagascar White-eyes and Meller's Ducks.

'Sea Ducks are doing very well on our clear running water. There are fifteen Eider and two Barrow's Golden-eyes, which feed greedily on grain and mash, with dried meat. One pair of Common Scoters have now lived for over three years and keep perfect condition, but they seem to thrive on natural food only, while a male Velvet Scoter, wounded at sea in August, has quite recovered and looks perfect; it has become fairly tame and feeds freely on grain and mash...

'I am sorry to say that the old *Sarus* which had been free-flying for more than ten years met with its death last summer, as it struck a high-tension electric cable, some distance from the park'.

Bird notes from Clères. January, 1932. (Series IV), Vol. X, 5-8.





*Denis Avon*

Lilacine Amazon

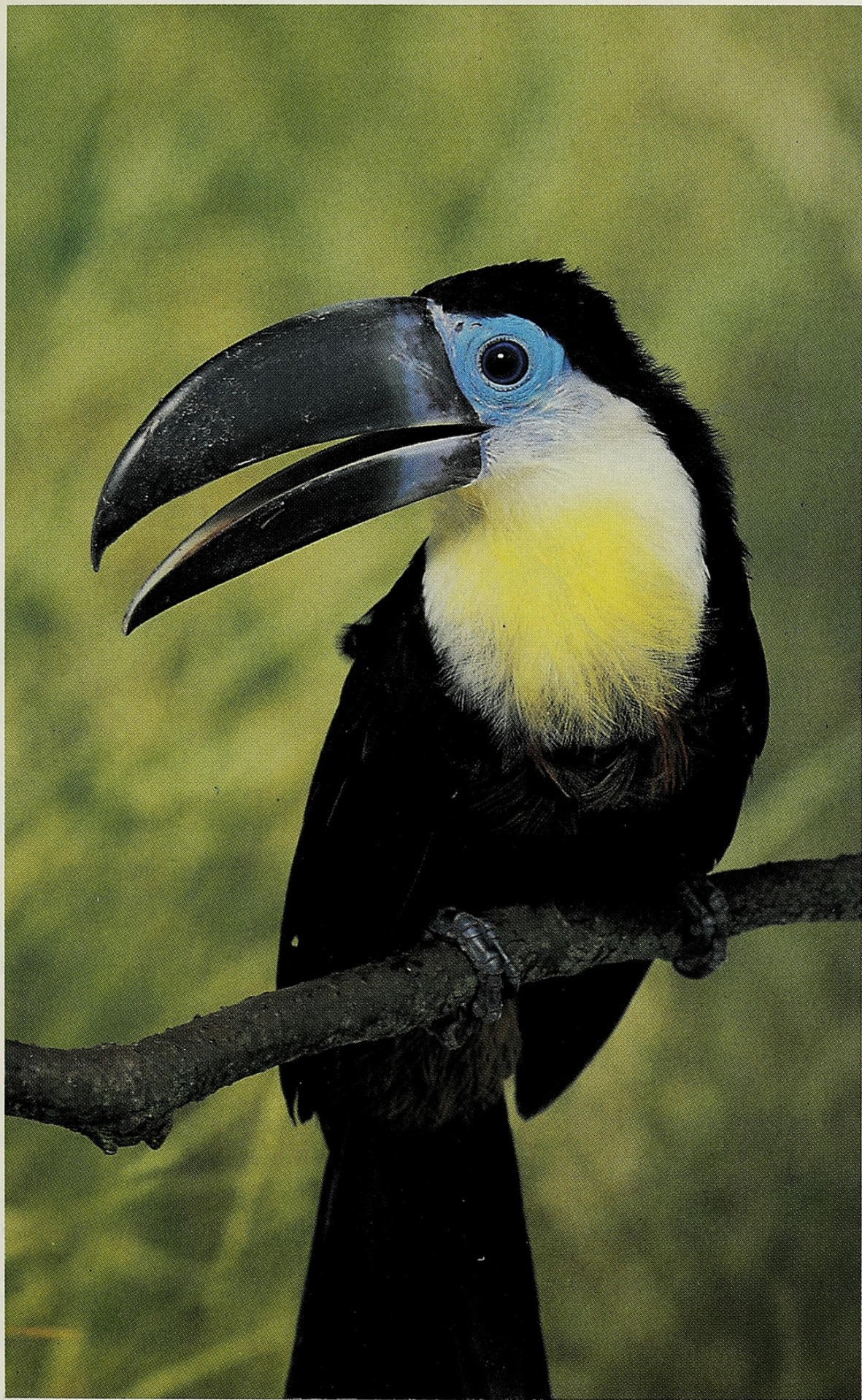




*Denis Avon*

Yellow-throated Laughing Thrush





*Denis Avon*

Channel-billed Toucan





*Denis Avon*

Blue-eyed Cockatoo



'...In a large aviary, all planted with pine trees and heather, often changed, there are some Capercaillies, Hazel Grouse, Black Game and Siberian Jays, all tame and kept in perfect condition during the last three years. The very complete collection of Ostrich-like birds contains such rarities as Beccari's Cassowary, Spatz's Ostriches, Darwin's and Great-billed Rheas, the latter the form *R. americana* [sic], much darker than the common Grey Rhea.

'In the Bird House one sees some very rare Weavers and Whydahs, three Egyptian Plovers *Pluvianus*, Birds of Paradise, a tame Woodcock, many Humming-birds, several in perfect condition, a large Cotinga *Pyroderus scutatus*, but the real treasurers are two pairs of very pretty little Lorikeets *Psitteuteles iris* and Parrot Finches *Chlorura microrhyncha*'.

On a recent visit to the Berlin Zoo. January, 1933. (Series IV), Vol. XI, 21 - 22.

'Another interesting event was the first breeding in captivity of the Bronze-tailed Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron chalcureum*. A pair of these quaint little birds, purchased two years ago as Mr. Frost brought them from Sumatra, started laying early in May. Unfortunately the first clutch was destroyed by the Rheinart's Argus living in the same aviary - which, by the way, is the largest compartment in my small birds' aviaries, 65 ft. by 22 ft., and where the crowds of Doves and small birds live beside the Rheinart's and Bronze-tails. However, instead of depositing her next two eggs on the ground, the little hen... chose for her nest one of the baskets hung under the roof for ... Pigeons and Doves ... The eggs were at once removed and placed under a Bantam. One was clear, but the other one hatched and the chick was reared to the adult stage...'

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'My old Black-necked Crane, the only one ever imported into Europe, dies last summer. A great loss.'

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'In the small birds' aviaries a certain number of more or less common species of Finches were bred, the most interesting being the Madagascar Weaver *Foudia*. I kept in the largest flight two pairs of birds that I brought over in 1929. One pair nested three times last summer in a privet, rearing four young ones. Of course, as it started breeding one of the males killed the other one...'

Bird notes from Clères for 1932. February, 1933. (Series IV), Vol. XI, 34 - 39.

'In the last two or three years, in fact since I have started keeping delicate small birds in a Tropical House, with heat and moisture



amongst a rich vegetation, a good many rare and little known species have come to me to be tried there, with good results as a rule.

'... in my first Tropical House ... Rainbow and Indian Crested Buntings are very satisfactory; also Chinese Painted Quails which look lovely as they walk among the plants, Bartlett's and Marquesas Doves. With them live the old Fork-tail, tame and beautiful, a Blue-tailed Pitta, a White-capped Redstart, a pair of Niltavas, a Clarino, a pair of Fairy Bluebirds, at present nesting, a Rubythroat, some beautiful Manakins and Yellow-winged Sugar Birds, and a Senegal Sunbird. Peace reigns in the community and not a leaf is damaged by the birds. The next compartment houses only a breeding pair of tame Shamas and a fine Red-breasted Sunbird *C. gutturalis*, which there retains his brilliant scarlet at the moult, but is so spiteful as to kill any weaker bird.

'The central part of the new house, which is connected with the old one by a glass-covered passage, contains a breeding pair of Purple Sugar-birds, a Vigor's Sunbird, finger-tame, a pair of Larger Minivets, one Lesser Minivet *P. cinnamomeus*, a pair of Tickel's, one White-browed and one Blue-throated Blue Flycatchers, a pair of Red-headed Tits *Aegithaliscus concinnus iredalei*, a Blue-headed Robin *Adelura coeruleucocephala* a Plumbeous Redstart, and a true pair of Hooded Pittas ... To them have been added a pair of Black and White Manakins *Manacus manacus* and some Humming-birds, such as *Eupetomena glaucis*, *Pygmornis*, *Thalurania*, *Lampornis* and *Hylocharis*.

'In the side aviaries, which do not contain any vegetation but are surrounded by creepers and other tall plants, there are a Rifle Bird of Paradise and a very pretty Yellow-legged Ouzel *Turdus flavipipes* from Brazil, rare Barbets *Megalaema lagrandieri*, which I caught in Laos, and a Brazilian species *Capito aurovirens*; although of very different sizes they agree well, but will attack wickedly all other birds.

'... another flight is given up to a large and varied population, Black-throated Cardinals *P. gularis* a very rare small species, Abyssinian Red-headed Barbets, Amethyst and Royal Starlings, a Cayenne Troupial, an Annamese Mesia *M. cunhaci* and some larger Tanagers; in others are a pair of Malacca Parrakeets, Red-headed *P. rubricapilla* and Beautiful Manakins *C. pareola*, and many sorts of smaller Tanagers. The special Humming-birds' compartment contains about fifteen Humming Birds of the following genera: *Phoelornis*, *Aryrtria*, *Hylocharis*, *Chlorostilbon*, *Melanotrochilus*,



*Eulampis and Polytmus*'.

Notes on the small birds in the Tropical House at Clères. July, 1933. (Series IV), Vol. XI, 179 - 181.

'Although many species of Pittas have been introduced into Europe during the last twenty years... none had so far bred or even nested in captivity'.

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'... it is almost impossible to keep two together, even in a large aviary and cock and hen of the same species, and this has been the principle obstacle to their breeding in confinement'.

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'In the early spring of 1933, however, I succeeded in keeping together two Hooded Pittas *Pitta cucullata*. A species which is often imported from India ...'

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'Both parents fed the chicks mostly on cut-up Bullock's heart, with meal-worms, a few earth-worms and insectile mixture... On 24th May one young one disappeared and was never found.

'...the growth of the youngsters was very quick. They came out more and more on the platform now, so much so that on the 31st one was out of the nest flying well enough. The weaker one also came out, but ... was drowned on 5th June, after having been flying well for several days. Both parents fed the remaining young bird devotedly, and did not abandon and bully it as I had feared, as the mother had started laying again in the old nest on the 31st, while the cock began another nest, further away ... the hen laid every day, as many as ten eggs, by 12th June. She insisted on laying in the old nest, and all but one egg dropped on the ground ... The cock had by then completed the new nest and would not go to the old one again. The birds were not sitting. On 13th June I removed the old nest and put eight eggs into the new one (I thought ten were too many). Very docile, the hen went to the new nest and incubation started immediately. Two eggs, probably addled, were rejected after a few days. At the same time, both parents continued feeding their first young, now quite strong, and eating also by himself since 12th June. However, on the 21st, I took him by hand (he is very tame) and removed him into another compartment, where he now lives happily.'

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'On 23rd June the head of a chick was observed, and four the following day. At once a platform was built in front of the nest.

'On 11th July, on my return from the Ornithological Congress at





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