



ASA
Avicultural Bulletin

ASA

A JOURNAL FOR BIRD BREEDING, CONSERVATION,
RESTORATION AND EDUCATION

March/April 2019



NEXT ISSUE

HAND REARING KNOBBED HORNBILLS

The purposes of the Society are the study of foreign and native birds to promote their conservation and protection; the dissemination of information on the care, breeding, and feeding of birds in captivity; the education of Society members and the public through publications, meetings, and available media; and the promotion and support of programs and institutions devoted to conservation. Front Cover: ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) photo John York . Inside Cover: Knobbed hornbill (*Rhyticeros cassidix*) Photo by Wisbroek © 2012-2019 Avicultural Society of America. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced without express written permission by ASA.

Volume 87, Number 2

March/April 2019

CONTENTS

FEATURED.....

4 SEXY GENES AND PSYCHEDELIC SEDUCTION
John York



32 Virulent Newcastle Disease

FAVORITES.....

24 Steve's Photo Pick
38 Who's Your Daddy?
42 Who's Your Daddy? Answer
43 Events



WHO WE ARE.....

3 Officers & Staff
44 ASA Affiliations
44 New Members
45 HONOR ROLL
45 SUSTAINING Members



March/April 2019

President's Message

Greetings, fellow Aviculturists:

Southern California has had an ongoing outbreak of Virulent Newcastle Disease (formerly Exotic Newcastle Disease) that has caused a quarantine of birds within the perimeter (see map on page 32, followed by more information.)

It is believed this disease has been distributed in the area through local cock fighting, which is illegal. Read the articles in this issue for more information.

On a happier note, I'm very pleased John York agreed to write an article based on his well-received presentation at the 2018 ASA conference in Sacramento. Here, it's named "Sexy Genes and Psychedelic Seduction." This article answers many questions about why birds look the way they do and how it benefits survival of the species. I'm sure you will enjoy it.

We're always in search of articles from the avian community. If you have a story you would like to tell, send it to us at info@asabirds.org and we will try to use it.

Yours truly,

Carol Stanley
President, YOUR Avicultural Society of America

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Carol Stanley 925-698-0191

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 Sheri Hanna turacoldy@aol.com
 805-208-1759
 Rick Rosenthal rickatbnb@aol.com
 Dick Schroeder 760 743.3156
 dick.schroeder.911@gmail.com

Aviculture Apprentice Program

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Carol Stanley 925-698-0191

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Web Master

Steve Duncan 909-599-7577

www.asabirds.org

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Laurella Desborough 904-291-9043

Membership Committee

Sarah Brabbs
 Steve Duncan 909-599-7577

Conference Coordinators

Steve Duncan 909-599-7577
 Carol Stanley 925-698-0191

Editorial Panel

Susie Christian winged1s@aol.com
 805-772-2038

Steve Duncan 909-599-7577

Sheri Hanna 805-208-1759

Carol Stanley, Art Director 925-698-0191

Lisa Woodworthtempleaviaries@gmail.com

AFA Delegates

Steve Duncan 909-599-7577
 Carol Stanley 925-698-0191

Lifetime Honorary Members

Frank Miser Dick Schroeder Steve Duncan

Conference Raffle Coordinators

Richard Dickinson 623-544-6973
 408-313-4986
 rgdickinson@yahoo.com
 maryd4_8@msn.com

Mary Rose

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Sexy Genes and Psychedelic Seduction

John York

OCELLATED TURKEY (MELEAGRIS OCELLATA) DISPLAYING PHOTO JOHN YORK



Last year, two events inspired a presentation at the ASA symposium which in turn inspired a lot of discussion after the fact. I have expanded some of the ideas in the talk, provided research sources, answered some of the questions that arose, and whittled away some of the visual bird-walks in the original presentation. So come with me on a little journey based on scientific discovery, evolutionary theory and a bit of imagination.

The first event was watching Ocellated Turkeys in Guatemala. Most of us have seen groups of turkeys, males tails fanned out and the hens acting like the males were a bunch of trees. The turkeys in Guatemala and other areas of Central America act pretty much the same except the birds are blue with orange spots, making their north American cousins look like the backwards backwoods cousins they are.

While in Tikal, I watched a courting display and mating of the Ocellated Turkey. The male shakes his tail and wing feathers, struts around trying to drum up some interest in the indifferent hens, kicking up a lot of dust in the process. Finally, one of the females goes to the ground, the male stands on top of her, balancing for many seconds and the mating occurs so quickly, it is easy to miss.





OCELLATED TURKEY (MELEAGRIS OCELLATA) DISPLAYING PHOTO JOHN YORK

And my question was, “Why all that fuss for a second of actual transmission?”

These behaviors developed over time and somehow they help that species to survive. How do we know this? First, this species is surviving today. It has not yet died out like millions of other species. Second, these birds do this behavior instinctually; it is not learned from watching other birds or their parents or reading a book. In other words, they are genetically programmed for this behavior and it helps the species survive. But the cost for this display is substantial. There is energy expended to grow the feathers, with that brilliant coloration, which makes the male, and only the male, an easy target for predators, plus the energy to maintain those feathers, and all the energy to do all that strutting. There must be an easier way.

The second inciting incident was listening to one of Richard Dawkins audio books. Dawkins and his colleagues have a take on natural selection that has shaken up the way we look at how animals evolve. Most people understand evolution as the process that enables organisms to adapt to their environments and continue to survive as a species. The more efficiently they adapt to their environment, the more likely they are to carry on in that, possibly changing, environment. This is natural selection. Characteristics and behaviors evolve that allow an

organism and its offspring to out-compete current rival organisms including members of its own species, possibly producing a new species in the process.

The oldest living types of birds we have are ratites – ostriches and rheas, emus and cassowaries. By oldest, I mean evolved earlier than others. The latest arrivals are the New World blackbirds. Apparently these have adapted pretty well to their environment given their numbers. This does not mean that blackbirds developed from ostriches. It means they had a common ancestor, probably some sort of feathered dinosaur. One branch of the evolutionary tree has culminated in ostriches, while another has culminated in Red-winged Blackbirds, at this point in time.

But according to Dawkins, this version of natural selection is actually the visible by-product of an evolutionary process on a much tinier scale. In his book, *The Selfish Gene*, he contends that it is not the individual or the species that is out-competing and adapting – but it is actually individual genes that are doing the competing and adapting. Individual genes make their way to reproduce themselves, the sole reason they exist. According to this theory, the gene or genes that make this Northern Potoo have feathers that mimic the colors and texture of the branches it sits on during the day



SOUTHERN CASSOWARY (*CASUARIUS CASUARIUS*), PHOTO CAROL STANLEY



OSTRICH (*STRUTHIO CAMELUS*) PHOTO CAROL STANLEY

ELMER THE EMU (DROMAIUS NOVAEHOLLANDIAE)
PHOTO STEVE DUNCAN



evolved to perpetuate themselves. Those genes are surviving because the effects of those genes makes the Potoo better adapt to its environment because those traits camouflage the bird. The bird survives and reproduces, thus reproducing those genes. Dawkins emphasizes these “selfish genes” are also “cooperative genes” because obviously all the bird’s genes need to survive to reproduction for an individual set to survive. Genes that do not contribute to the birds’ ability to survive will tend to die off or be replaced by genes that do. But the competition is on the genetic level, not the organism or the species.

So how does a gene for blue feathers and orange warts make a turkey living in the forest of Guatemala more competitive than a drabber, more camouflaged bird? What makes garish colors – and by extension, garish displays – make an animal, a bird, more competitive evolutionarily, more competitive in a specific environment that will then guarantee those genes are the ones that are reproduced?

Meet Dawkins’ “manipulative gene,” a sort of avian Spanish fly. We know these colors and displays allow the male (usually) bird to be more successful in mating. The better his display, the brighter his colors, the more likely he is to be successful getting a mate. According to brain studies of female birds, a female’s reaction to a male’s display, essentially, her synaptic responses to the stimuli from the

male are similar to a reaction to a drug. The male’s display actually manipulates the brain of the female as if she were on drugs and she is ready to mate. In order for genes to be passed to the next generation, successful mating must occur. Therefore genes that encourage reproduction are going to be dominant as long as they are not too detrimental to the survival of the individual.

Most female pheasants are cryptic in their environments. This is necessary as a hen must sit on eggs for about three weeks and raise chicks to the point where they can fend for themselves. If she had all the trappings of the male, this might be difficult.



INDIA BLUE PEACOCK DISPLAYING PHOTO JOHN YORK

Consider the peacock. Obviously, the cryptic strategy has given way to a different strategy that entails long tail feathers and dancing around a lot. But that male has only to survive to fertilize a female or two for his genes to be passed on. So his genes that make him so flamboyant might shorten his life, but the payoff for those genes are they will be passed on to the next generation. The hen still has to do all that work.

So the extravagant display works to manipulate the brain of the female to get her in the mood for mating, the genes get passed on and all is well. It seems like there would be less costly ways to impress a female, such as sharing the chores of nesting and feeding young, and this happens in some species. But, the colors and display work for many birds because of the way birds see the world, literally.

Most birds are primarily visual animals, meaning they experience and understand their world through their eyes. Birds see better than we do, and better than most mammals. Humans have three types of cones in their eyes. Cones are color receptors. Those three cones allow us to see the visible spectrum – the colors in the rainbow. Dogs only have two cones making their vision nearly monochromatic. This is why your dog will respond to movement more than color, and will respond to smell and audible stimulus primarily.

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still has to do all that
work.*

Most birds have four types of color cones, some have five, allowing them to see into the ultra-violet range and partially into the infra-red. A female turkey might see that display at the top of this article with another range of hues on top of all the color we see. Now you know why her mind gets blown. Consequently, her genes responding to the manipulation of the male, “see” this male as a good conduit to pass themselves on with the help of this vital male.

I manipulated some photographs of feathers to give an idea of what another bird might be seeing. I make no claims for the accuracy of this since we cannot actually see into the ultra-violet range, but let’s use our imaginations.

Why does a gene that requires all this energy expenditure and danger to the male become dominant over what I call the “rapy gene”. Why go through all this trouble when a male can just jump a female, have his way with her and move on. There are ducks where gang rape seems to be a fairly common occurrence, Plumed Ducks and Mallard Ducks. The problem is that the males hold the hen under water when they mate in this fashion. Repeated matings often drown the female. Those genes are not going to be passed on. Obviously, the “rapy gene” is still in the population, but it is losing out to something more civilized because far more ducklings are coming from bonded pairs.



BURMESE GREEN PEAFAWOL OCELLI NORMAL PH

BLUE-BREASTED KINGFISHER PHOTO JOHN YORK



I manipulated some photographs of feathers to give an idea of what another bird might be seeing. I make no claims for the accuracy of this since we cannot actually see into the ultra-violet range, but let's use our imaginations.

BURMESE GREEN PEAFOWL OCELLI ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK

OTO JOHN YORK

K



ORANGE-WINGED AMAZON FEATHER NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



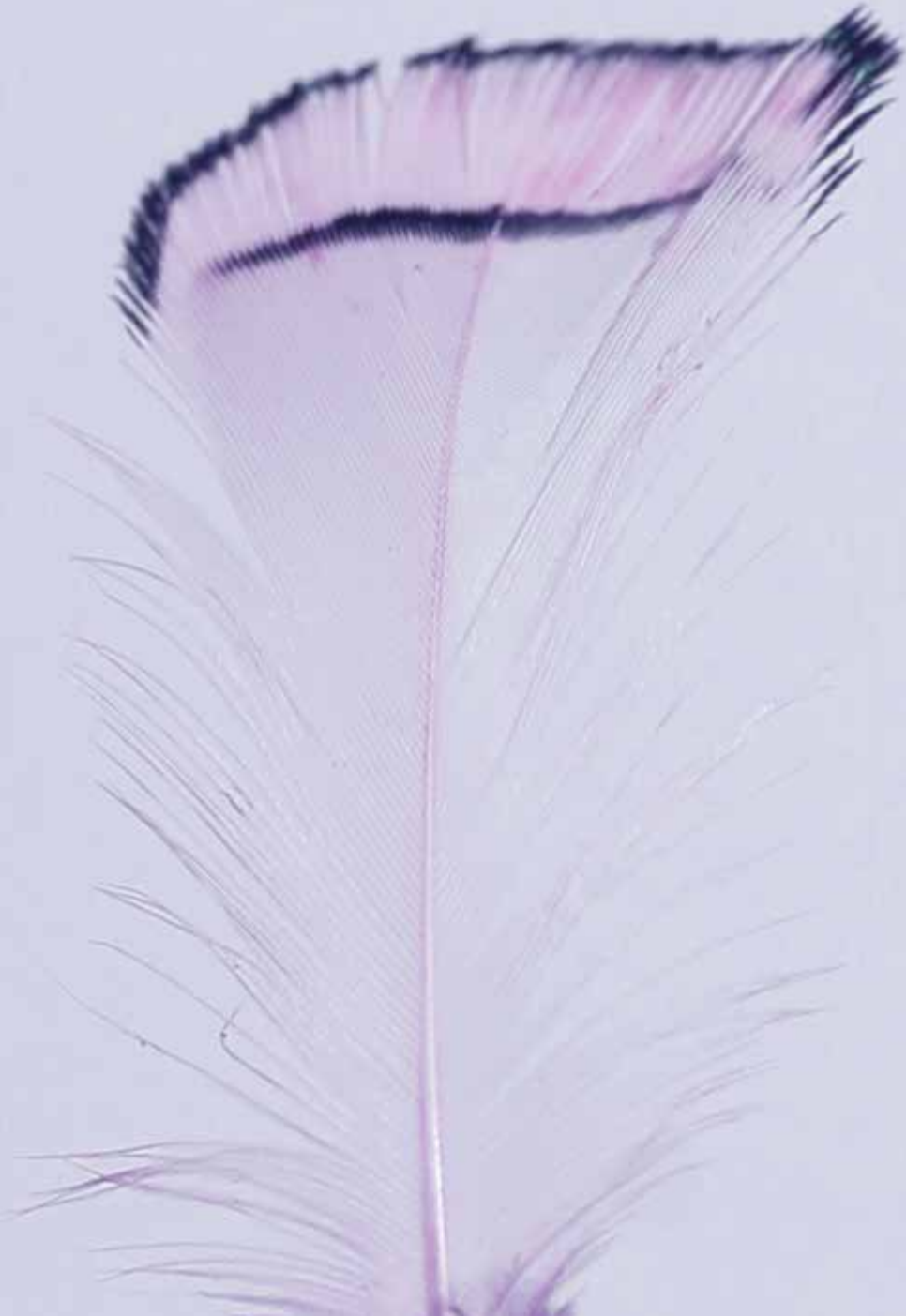
ORANGE-WINGED AMAZON FEATHER ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK



LADY AMHERST PHEASANT CAPE FEATHER NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



LADY AMHERST PHEASANT CAPE FEATHER ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK





EDWARD'S PHEASANT BODY FEATHER NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



EDWARD'S PHEASANT BODY FEATHER ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK

PICAZURRO PIGEON WING FEATHER NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



PICAZURRO PIGEON WING FEATHER ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK





Steve's Photo Pick

Patagonian conure or, burrowing parrot
(*Cyanoliseus patagonus*)



SILVER PHEASANT NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



SILVER PHEASANT ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK



MALAY CRESTED FIREBACK WING COVERT NORMAL PHOTO JOHN YORK



MALAY CRESTED FIREBACK WING COVERT ENHANCED PHOTO JOHN YORK





NORTHERN POTOO ROOSTING PHOTO JOHN YORK

Genes also control key behaviors in birds, such as nest building, a feature Dawkins calls the extended phenotype. Genes select not only the coloration of the Potoo, but also the habit of sitting on branches with their eyes closed to a slit.

Horneros do not learn how to build their oven shaped nests from watching their parents or from growing up in one. The parameters for building this nest are genetically controlled. They do it “instinctually.” Thus the nest shape, size and structure become an essential part

of the organism, an extension of the phenotype. The genes that make this bird build these nests in this way are continually passed from generation to generation because this behavior benefits this bird – makes it more adaptable to its environment. The safety the nests provide as the perfect brooder for the chicks offsets the energy expended to get the shape, the width of the walls, the size of the hole all correct.

What does this mean for us as we raise birds and observe their

behavior? If we know that certain features mark a competitive male, such as long feathers on a peacock's tail, we can select stock based on those characteristics. We can see the functionality of that huge train of feathers, not just the beauty we as humans see in it. Understanding what works to drug the brain of the female allows us to create conditions for that drugging to occur. Anyone working with a mutation has to deal with the possible deleterious effects of that mutation. This gives us an alternative way of looking at our birds and how they behave, of partially understanding them on a genetic level.

This explanation of selfish genes may take some of the mystery

out of unusual bird behaviors and extraordinary colors. But, rather than diminish the overall wonder of these creatures, I think this competition on a level so tiny we cannot see it only enhances the enjoyment of birds.

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RUFOUS HORNERO NESTS PHOTO JOHN YORK



Virulent Newcastle Disease



Virulent Newcastle Disease Update: Quarantine Boundaries Modified in Southern California

SACRAMENTO, February 27, 2019

– California State Veterinarian Dr. Annette Jones today modified Southern California’s quarantine area to further restrict bird movement as work continues to eradicate virulent Newcastle disease (VND). The quarantine mandates the reporting of sick birds and prohibits poultry owners from moving birds in all of Los Angeles County, and in large areas of San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

The modified quarantine extends from the northern and southern borders of western Riverside County to the Salton Sea—including the Coachella Valley—and as far east as Yucca Valley in San Bernardino County, with a northern boundary of State Route 58 at the Kern County line. The quarantine language and a map may be found at CDFA’s VND Web site.

The quarantine requires bird owners to allow diagnostic testing, to isolate poultry from other species, to cease exhibitions, to stop the shipping and receiving of birds, and to enhance biosecurity.

“By modifying the quarantine area in Southern California, we are building upon an ongoing effort to eradicate virulent Newcastle disease,” said Dr. Jones. “The primary way that VND spreads is by people moving sick birds. Extending the prohibition of bird movement across a larger area is the next logical step in being able to stop the spread of the virus and to eradicate the disease.”

VND is a nearly-always fatal respiratory infection in

poultry. Birds may seem healthy but will die within days of being infected. There is no cure. The virus is also transmitted by people who have VND on their clothes or shoes, and by equipment or vehicles that can transport the disease from place to place.

There are no human health concerns provided that any meat or eggs are cooked properly. People who come in direct contact with the virus may develop conjunctivitis-like symptoms or run a mild fever.

The only way to stop the virus and eradicate the disease is to euthanize birds. This includes all infected birds as well as birds within heavily-infected areas.

Since May 2018, staff from the California Department of Agriculture (CDFA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been working in joint incident command to eradicate VND in Southern California. The highly contagious virus has resulted, or will soon result, in the euthanasia of more than one million birds in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties.

Birds from four poultry industry producers in Riverside County and two poultry industry producer in San Bernardino County have also been infected with VND and all birds in those facilities have been or will be euthanized.

For more information about movement restrictions, biosecurity, and testing requirements, please call the Sick Bird Hotline (866) 922-2473 or email SFSPermits@cdfa.ca.gov

Virulent Newcastle Disease (VND)

Virulent Newcastle disease (VND), formerly known as Exotic Newcastle Disease, is a serious, highly contagious viral disease that can affect poultry and other birds. In rare cases, humans that have exposure to infected birds may get eye inflammation or mild fever-like symptoms. These signs generally resolve without treatment, however, medical care should be sought if symptoms persist. Infection is easily prevented by using standard personal protective equipment. Virulent Newcastle disease is not a food safety concern. No human cases of Newcastle disease have ever occurred from eating poultry products. Properly cooked poultry products are safe to eat.

The virus is found in respiratory discharges and feces and may cause high rates of sickness and death in susceptible birds. For poultry, chickens are most susceptible and ducks and geese are the least susceptible. Mortality rates for Psittacine birds (parrots) can range from zero up to 75%. Certain parrots, especially Amazon parrots, can shed VND virus intermittently in excess of one year. Other birds may be infected, but may not show any symptoms and may still be able to spread the disease. Once VND is introduced into domestic avian populations, subsequent spread is normally caused by domestic bird-to-bird contact or through contact with contaminated people, feed or equipment. Other types

of Newcastle disease known as lentogenic and mesogenic are less virulent and may cause mild symptoms or none at all.

There is no effective cure for virulent Newcastle Disease. It is important that all commercial and non-commercial poultry owners maintain effective barriers to mitigate the risk of VND. Biosecurity tips for commercial poultry owners can be found [here](#). For Backyard and non-commercial poultry owners, biosecurity tips can be found [here](#).

How to Stop a Bird-Murdering Cat

Domesticated felines are one of the biggest threats to birds worldwide. Two pet owners think they've found a solution.



Opium Addicted Parrots

Click on photo to see article





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• Thursday

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• Friday

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• Saturday

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Who's Your Daddy?



PHOTO SARAH BRABBS

Stumped? See answer on page 42



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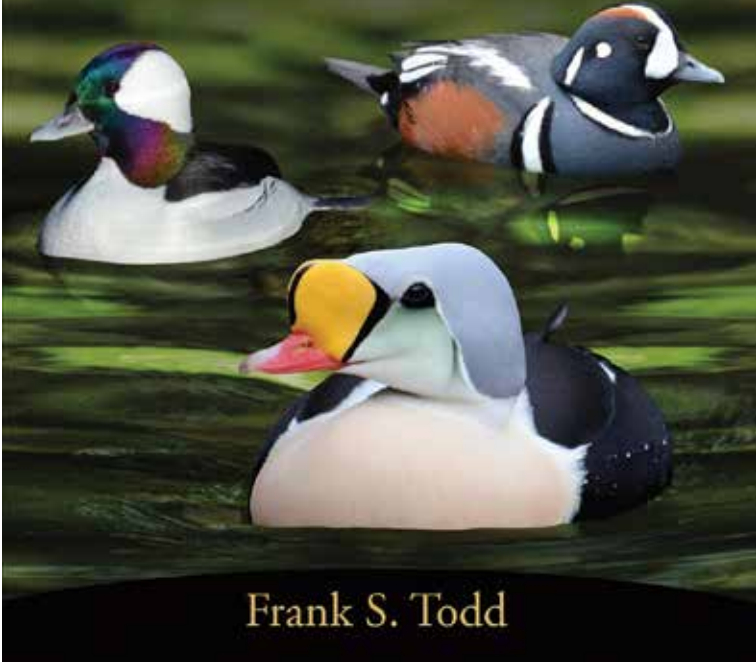
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NORTH AMERICAN DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE



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CONGO AFRICAN GREY (PSITTACUS ERITHACUS) PHOTO CAROL STANLEY

Who's Your Daddy?

From page 41, Answer:

Congo African grey (*Psittacus erithacus*)

Congo african grey (*Psittacus erithacus*)

The grey parrot is a medium-sized, predominantly grey, black-billed parrot. Their average weight is 400 grams (0.88 lb), with an average length of 33 centimetres (13 in)[2] and an average wingspan of 46–52 centimetres (18–20 in).[3] It has darker grey over the head and both wings, while the head and body feathers have a slight white edge to them. The tail feathers are red. Due to selection by parrot breeders, some grey parrots are partly or completely red.[4] Both sexes appear similar.[2] The colouration of juveniles is similar

to that of adults, but the eye is typically dark grey to black, in comparison to the yellow irises around dark eyes of the adult birds.[5] The undertail coverts are also tinged with grey.[2] The adults weigh 418–526 grams (0.922–1.160 lb). [6]

Grey parrots may live for 40–60 years in captivity, although their mean lifespan in the wild appears to be shorter at about 23 years.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

EVENTS

2019 EVENTS



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF AVICULTURE - AFA's 45th Annual Educational Conference and Avian Expo will be held **August 8th – August 10th B Resort and Spa | 1905 Hotel Plaza Blvd. | Orlando, FL 32830** More info on www.afabirds.org



AVICULTURAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA - ASA's 14th Annual Education Conference October 30- November 2, 2019. Hosted by Zoo Miami. Conference activities: Marriot Hotel Miami. Guest room are at the Courtyard by Marriot in Miami. Watch for more details online at www.asabirds.org

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Acadiana Bird Club
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acadianabirdinc@hotmail.com

Fort Worth Bird Club
P.O. Box 1712 Keller, TX 76244
fwbc@fortworthbirdclub.com

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