

AGAPORNIS...THE LOVEBIRD FAMILY

Continued from the October edition

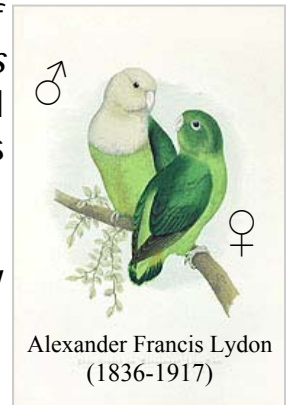
#6 MADAGASCAR LOVEBIRD



MADAGASCAR LOVEBIRD
Photo: "Toumoto"

The Madagascar Lovebird (*Agapornis cana*), sometimes known as the Grey-headed Lovebird, only occurs on the island of Madagascar and is the only lovebird species not endemic to the African continent. This species is rarely seen in aviculture in Australia, and has proved difficult to breed in captivity.

The Madagascar Lovebird is one of the smallest species of the *Agapornis* genus, being 13cm (5 inches) long and weighing 30-35gm. The species is sexually dimorphic: the adult female is entirely green, with a dark green back and wings, a bright green rump, and a paler green chest; the adult male are similarly coloured, but the head and upper chest are a pale grey. The beak and feet are pale grey in both sexes.



Madagascar Lovebirds are strong fliers, and their open wings seem larger in relation to their bodies than those of the Peach-faced Lovebird. They gain speed quite quickly and effortlessly, and turn smoothly, but they are not as agile in the air as the Peach-faced. They tend to be nervous and easily frightened in an aviary.

The species was first imported into Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. When imports were permitted and they were available to aviculture in large numbers, but little effort was put into breeding. They prefer to breed in the autumn, and have poor tolerance to cold. In Australia they initially bred well, but after a while the hens became very susceptible to egg-binding, and the species almost disappeared from Australian aviaries.

In the late 1970s the late Ross Hogben, of Port Pirie, managed to find several of the species. He placed them in cabinet-type cages in his shed, gave them nesting facilities and achieved good results. However, he eventually placed both the original birds and their young in conventional

open aviaries, but, alas, he bred no more. When he passed away the birds had a chequered existence; they initially came to a well known Adelaide lovebird breeder, but he too had no luck. They were then placed on consignment with a bird dealer, who took them to Melbourne, where they stayed for some time, but failed to sell. Unfortunately, when they were returned to Adelaide most were badly feather-plucked. What eventually happened to them I don't know.

Given Hogben's initial success with them indoors, and given the fact that they are a forest species and not birds of open woodlands, it would seem that darker, more confined housing suits them best.

The last I heard of the species was in the mid 1990s when I was contacted by a breeder on the Atherton Tablelands who had several pair, but was having no luck in breeding them. I advised them to try the cabinet style cages, as used by Hogben. They said they would do this, but I lost touch with them and I don't know what luck they may have had.

The Madagascar Lovebird builds a concave pad nest of palm leaves similar to that of the Peach-faced Lovebird. The nesting material is carried to the nest tucked into the hen's feathers, again like the Peach-faced. However, they not only tuck the material into the rump feathers but often into those of other parts of the body as well. The average clutch is four to six white eggs, and once the hen has commenced incubating she is fed on the nest by the male. Incubation commences with the second egg, and the first young will fledge approximately forty-two days later. Weaning takes twenty-five to thirty days. When the young leave the nest all parental duties are assumed by the male. The hen takes no further part in their raising. Initially the young return to the parental nest at night, but the parents soon discourage this, so it is necessary to have a spare box for the young to sleep in once they have been ejected from the parental nest. This Lovebird usually resents nest inspection.

One interesting fact about this Lovebird is their preference for finch and canary seed rather than the sunflower/safflower mixes usually given to the other lovebirds species. This probably due to them having the smallest beak size of all the *Agapornis* family.

- Reference:
1. Wikipedia.
 2. Lovebirds and Related Parrots
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 3. Guide to Lovebirds and Parrotlets
E.N.T. Vane
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