

A Review: Caring Practices of Songbird, Red-Whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

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Received 15 June 2015
Accepted 26 October 2016
Online 21 December 2016

Keywords:

Caring practices; red-whiskered bulbul; song-bird

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Abstract

Pycnonotus jocosus is known as red-whiskered bulbul or known by local Malaysian as songbird or *burung candik*. *Burung candik* is one of the favourite pet birds'. Generally, it comes from Bangladesh, southern China, India, Nepal, north Peninsular Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam (Animal Pest Alert: Red-whiskered Bulbul). *Burung candik* is favoured because of their ability in singing in east-coast region of Malaysia specifically. In this research, the caring practices are observed. All the result were recorded and documented through interview and experiment research. The caring practices concerned are housing and cage, bathing and grooming, singing feature and diet and feeding. The results showed that one cage equipped with one bird for comfort and to avoid fighting. The birds were needed to be bathed once in a week at least according to the bird's willingness. General singing functions are to attract the mate and territorial defense. Feed given were insects, fruits and pellet.

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1. Introduction

Some birds that are trained for the oratory purpose which it is divided into two; imitate the vocal sound and produce the melody song. The voices produced by birds are often to be the key of their identification. Different songs of birds vary from species to species, and only the skilled birders can identify the species in a particular area by sound alone. Usually, the song sung by the male, announces that he has staked out a particular piece of turf for his own and warns other males away. The example of Malaysia's local bird that has the ability to make melody song is the bulbuls. The bulbuls are classified in Passeriformes order and a family of Pycnonotidae. One of the bulbul's families in east-coast region of Malaysia is the red-whiskered bulbul (*Pycnonotus Jocosus*). Birds use a variety of vocal signals in their communication. These signals can be classified into calls and songs. However, songs and calls are not always easily distinguished. Vocalizations uttered in a single articulation and generally made up of single elements (an element is a continuous sound, preceded and followed by a silent gap) are known as calls, while a typical song may include a continuous series of phrases. The east-coast region of Malaysia is famous with the song bird's competition. For an example, some area in Kelantan held the song bird's competition and offered variety kinds of presents as the rewards for the winning. Usually the competition will be

held every evening or particularly every Saturday and all the bird lovers will presence themselves to hear the melody song of the red-whiskered bulbuls (personal communication¹, Muhamad Azrol Bin Ismail, September 25, 2013). This song bird's competition which held at the fourth of Stadium Sultan Muhammed Kelantan also included in the Malaysia Book of Records. The caring practices should be considered in making the Red-whiskered Bulbul as a one of caged birds. Housing, feeding, feather care and more must be looked. At least one cage is required, of a size suitable. Adult birds should always be one bird to one cage. It is not encouraged to put the caged bird on the ground. It is less stressful for the bird to have the cage at eye level. While, food and water containers must be cleaned or replaced regularly. Birds need sunlight to produce vitamin D. When possible place the cage outside during the day in filtered sunlight and sheltered from draughts. It should also be in a position well away from predators and domestic pets (Jill Dark & Lynda Hyde, 2010). Red-whiskered Bulbuls was first described in 1758 by Carolus Linnaeus, Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist. It gets its name from the red whisker patch located below its eye. The word bulbul may have come from a Turkish or Persian word for nightingale. They are native to southern Asia, but were introduced into Sydney in 1880 and later to Melbourne around the mid-1990s.

2. Morphology

A red-whiskered bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) is one of the birds in Passeriformes order which is some called as songbirds group. The red-whiskered bulbul which mostly found in Burma, East Pakistan, Thailand, South China, and the lowlands of eastern India (Reilly, 1968).. The red-whiskered bulbul appeared with a pointed black crest, white cheeks with a red lobe under the eyes and brown back. Moreover, under tail coverts have reddish colour and a long white-tipped tail. The simple way to differentiate the sex of the red-whiskered bulbuls is by looking the colour of the elbow end of the wings. The reddish colour shows the birds are male while, the white in colour is female birds. The way to make the red-whiskered bulbuls have the smooth, beautiful feathers colour, the birds must be hang outside the house as the birds can get the vitamin from direct sunlight and able to adapt with hot weather because, the songbird competition usually held between 10 a.m. until 12 noon during the summer period which is from January to June (Personal communication², Ismail B. Abdullah, January 9, 2014).

3. Care and Management.

3.1 Housing and Cage

Some recommendations about the housing of an aviary are that housing must be stimulating appropriate wild conditions whenever possible. It includes the compatible conspecifics mainly for social species like the red-whiskered bulbuls as they are influenced by each other either in singing or taking bath. The housing must be allowing sufficient space for the birds to exercise; flapping flight should be made possible. The perches and refuges also must be provided in one red-whiskered bulbul housing. The housing should provide the bird to promote good health. High health standards do not necessitate sterile housing.

The red-whiskered bulbul only weight about 50 g. The cage for this captivity red-whiskered bulbul is about 295 mm/11.2 inches for the top length and 335 mm/12.7 inches for the length at the bottom base of the cage. Just before the bottom base, a length of middle stick is placed to enhance the strength of the cage is about 325 mm/12.3 inches. The wide for the cage from one end to one end are 295 mm/11.2 inches at the top and 335 mm/12.7 inches at the bottom are sufficient which showed the wide range from the top become bigger as it goes down to the bottom. Red-whiskered bulbul is not a strong flier in the aviary. Thus, the height of the cage which suit and to comfort the Red-whiskered Bulbul to move is only 375 mm/14.5 inches compared to the other bird species cage which is big. There is a perching stick which located in the cage for the bird to stand and sleep. The length for the perching stick is 330 mm/13 inches. In a short, the diameter of a red-whiskered bulbul cage is

1300 mm/49.2 inches. These measurements are the standard red-whiskered bulbul cage measurements as it to comfort one red-whiskered bulbul in it. Sometimes the bulbuls may show some aggressiveness towards to the other bulbuls and it is advisable to locate one bulbul per cage as they are very competitive, with the aid of their special feature, the ability in singing. A good standard of well-being and welfare requires appropriate housing, husbandry and care.

3.2 Bathing and Grooming

The caring practices for the red-whiskered bulbuls are very simple. There are two distinct aspects need to be observed as for the main factors in keeping the bulbuls in a good condition; feeding time and the clinical sign of diseases. Besides ensure the interval time of feeding is constant and clean water supply, the other use of water for red-whiskered bulbul is bathing. The red-whiskered bulbul loves to bath, usually twice a day (Personal communication¹, Muhamad Azrol Bin Ismail, September 25, 2013) and the bulbuls are taking bath in a group at a time as they are conspecifics. In a cage of a bulbul, it is needed to provide two different container of water; one for bathing and one for drinking. The bulbuls are quite intelligent as they can differentiate these two water containers together with their purposes. Thus, the water must be cleaned for both purposes as to keep bulbuls' health in an excellent condition. At least the red-whiskered bulbuls get bathe once a week.

The functional significance of specialized bills for feeding on particular food items is well documented (Zusi 1987; Benkman & Lindholm 1991) and food availability is known to exert direct selection on bill morphology (Boag & Grant 1981; Grant 1986). More, the bills also have role in preening themselves. Efficient preening is critical for the straightening and oiling of feathers and removal of dirt and debris from the body surface (Simmons 1985). Preening is also critical for defence against ectoparasites; birds with experimentally impaired preening are subject to rapid increases in ectoparasites load (Brown 1972, 1974; Clayton 1991), leading to reduced survival (Clayton 1989) and mating success (Clayton 1990).

The grooming and health of birds are more explained by Daryl Conner whereby, birds are the only animals to have feathers, or plumage. Feathers help protect birds from the environment, enable most types of birds to fly, and come in a rainbow of colours that help birds communicate with each other or provide camouflage. Much like hair on humans and dogs, feathers are made up of proteins called keratin. Some pet owners offer their birds shallow vessels to splash in; others mist their birds down or place them in a sink or shower to allow them to bathe under running water. They use cool to tepid water to prevent stripping out excessive amounts

of oil or burning delicate skin. Some types of birds, like chickens and other poultry, take care of their bathing needs by indulging in dust baths. Dust baths help remove excess oil and dander and may help discourage external parasites.

3.3. Singing Feature

The red-whiskered bulbuls are known for producing unique beautiful melody song and the red-whiskered bulbuls which possess the most beautiful melody song is the winner during the songbird competition. The songbird competition is evaluated according to level by level by a referee and the deposit for the competition entrance is RM10. The competition consists of five levels, at the first level the red-whiskered bulbuls are evaluated according to the melody sound produced three times in 30 seconds and followed by next level. The sign showed by the birds during producing melody song is by the movement of tails which can be observed in a far distance of the owner. Moreover, the price of red-whiskered bulbul can reach to thousands of ringgit Malaysia (Ismail B. Abdullah, personal communication 2, January 9, 2014).

Vocalization is the ability of one bird to imitate the vocalization of one another. It is rare trait found to date in five distantly related groups of mammals, seals and elephants and in three distantly related groups of birds, i.e., passerines, hummingbirds, and parrots. Furthermore, the red-whiskered bulbuls are known for their ability in singing. It is encouraged to place the bulbuls in a group or near to each other to let the bulbuls keep practicing their singing and increase their ability to compete with each other. Unlike the Great Bowerbird, *Ptilonorhynchus*, it gives a variety scolding calls, including raspe, cackles, hisses, whistles and churrings, and a harsh advertising song. More, they copied include dogs barking, machinery, squeaking gates, human voices, crumpling paper and cat meows. While the female of the Great Bowerbird, they use vocal mimicry to deter predators away from the young, including the alarm call of the Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*).

3.4. Diet and Feeding

The red-whiskered bulbuls are omnivorous typed. Since the red-whiskered bulbuls have the softbills, mostly they feed on the soft foods like fruits, flowers and insects in their natural diet. According to Mr. Azrol, usually the fruits are fed once in two days and the fruits must be fed at least 50% for the bulbul's diet and at least

two different types of fruit, the most important are mango, papaya and banana which should be fed along with the pellets. Here, the local owner fed the red-whiskered bulbuls with pellets, tomatoes, banana, cucumber, papaya, insects such as crickets and worms. While for the red-whiskered bulbul water consumption, the water must be clean and it is need to be changed twice per day to keep it hygiene. This is because there are a large numbers of bacteria either in drinking water container or the water container for bathing routines which can be fatal to the bird (Karen Allen, 1999).

4. Conclusion

The caring practices of red-whiskered bulbuls by local villagers were identified. This red-whiskered bulbul was a songbird which famous and well-known in South-east Asia like Thailand and especially east coast region of Malaysia; Kelantan. These melodious songbirds sometimes participated in a competition held by the local residents which determined the louder melodious songbird title in that area and it is listed as least concern avian by International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN) (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) and BirdLife International (Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, 2013).

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