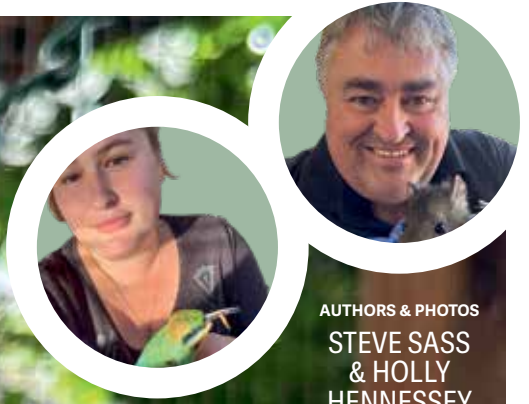


# Luzon Bleeding-heart

## Need Aviculture



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Luzon Bleeding-heart on its nest

**T**HE Luzon Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba luzonica* is a species of dove native to the Philippines, specifically the islands of Luzon, Marinduque, Catanduanes and Polillo. Like many species around the world, the Luzon Bleeding-heart faces ongoing threats to its survival, due to habitat loss, hunting and introduced predators.

Conservation efforts are often complex and require a multi-faceted approach that addresses not only immediate threats but also the underlying causes that contribute

to a species' decline. Captive breeding programs play a crucial role in conservation by establishing a self-sustaining captive population which can serve as an insurance policy against the potential extinction of the species in the wild.

In the case of the Luzon Bleeding-heart, there is no official captive breeding program, but this article draws on 40 years of experience in keeping the species, discussing housing, sexing, compatibility, diet, breeding, and transport.

## IN THE WILD

### Species

There is a total of seven Bleeding-hearts, which include one extinct species that survived until 1971. The Luzon Bleeding-heart Dove is now considered rare in the wild and is listed as a CITES 1 species. All other species of Bleeding-heart are either endangered or critically endangered in the wild.

Endemic to the island of Luzon, they are found in dense forests up to 1400m above sea level. They are known to the locals as 'Punalada', meaning 'stabbed pigeon' due to the prominent red marking on their chests. The forests they inhabit have a closed canopy and are dimly lit, with a dense mid-storey of vegetation.

## IN CAPTIVITY

### Status

It was assumed for many decades that the Luzon was the only Bleeding-heart species kept in Australian aviculture. However, Adelaide Zoo imported a pair of Bartlett Bleeding-hearts from the Keston Bird Farm, England on 17 May 1932. Zoo records confirm they bred a female in 1936 which died in 1947. What happened to the original pair is unknown, and the species is likely no longer held in captivity in Australia.

Luzon Bleeding-hearts have had varying levels of popularity in Australian aviculture over many decades, although recently they are a much rarer sight in Australian zoos and private aviaries. In the 1980s, Val Buller, of Rutherglen in north-east Victoria, was instrumental in developing captive husbandry

techniques and advocating for a captive breeding program within Australian zoos.

While exact numbers of birds are unknown in private aviculture, only 11 zoos hold the species, with a total of 43 individuals (ZAA Regional Census Plan). With a likely aging population and limited genetic diversity, the species could be lost to Australian aviculture without a concerted breeding effort.

### WHY KEEP BLEEDING-HEARTS?

We are often asked this question. Many aviculturists consider the species 'dirty' simply because they are doves. They believe Bleeding-hearts would be big, clumsy flyers, hence stirring up their finches and attacking newly fledged finches as they sit on the ground.

In reality, the species is not flighty when housed appropriately. These birds also do well in a mixed collection, and they are well suited to a small but appropriate aviary. They are no more 'diseased' than any other aviary species. Most importantly, this species needs aviculture.

### SEXING

Luzon Bleeding-hearts are not sexually dimorphic, with no clear differences between male and female. Males do not always have a larger or brighter 'wound', so this method of sexing used in the past has proven very unreliable.

Some aviculturists rely on eye colour or leg colour to differentiate the sexes, and males can feel larger in the hand. These variables are highly subjective and inaccurate, and should not be relied upon. DNA sexing is the only reliable way to identify sexes.



*One-day-old Luzon Bleeding-heart chicks*



*Nine-day-old chicks*



*Luzon Bleeding-heart nesting in aviary shrubbery*

### HOUSING

We have found an aviary representative of the Bleeding-heart's wild environment works best. Remembering these birds inhabit closed forests, a fully roofed aviary is ideal but a very well-planted aviary with a dense canopy is adequate. Both options provide an environment that keeps these birds calm. An open wire roof with few shrubs will result in stressed birds unlikely to reproduce to their full potential. It may also leave them susceptible to attack by raptors.

We also find that a small aviary fits the species' requirements well. An aviary measuring 4m x 3m x 2m is an excellent starting point. However, we have housed Luzon Bleeding-hearts in aviaries as small as 2.4m x 2.4m x 1.8m. All aviaries were well-planted with low shrubs, small palms, and vines to simulate the closed-in habitats of the wild. Bamboos, including tiger grass, should be avoided as these can cause entrapment of captive individuals.

Aviary floor substrates of gravel or sand provide a hygienic and easy-to-clean solution.



Three-day-old chicks



Five-day-old chicks



Seven-day-old chicks



Eleven-day-old chicks



Twelve-day-old chicks



Fourteen-day-old chicks



Luzon Bleeding-heart with chick

### COMPATIBILITY AND AGGRESSION

It is important to house only a single pair of Luzon Bleeding-hearts in an aviary. More can result in aggression towards individuals, and even bonded pairs can turn on each other, resulting in injury and even death. It is important to keep a watchful eye on your birds and separate any that show signs of aggression.

Once a pair has reproduced, they generally have a very strong pair bond. We strongly suggest that if breeding does not occur within 12 months, pairs should be split. Housing pairs of Luzon Bleeding-hearts in adjacent aviaries can increase breeding success. We have documented cases in which a pair in one aviary, showing no signs of breeding, had begun nest-building within a week or two of another pair being added to an adjacent aviary.

To avoid aggression between the breeding pair and offspring, it is also important to remove young Luzon Bleeding-hearts in a timely manner. This should occur around 4–5 weeks after leaving the nest.

**Luzon Bleeding-heart  
nesting in a metal  
hanging basket**



#### **DIET**

The diet of any species is fundamental to its captive success. In the wild, Luzon Bleeding-hearts feed primarily on fallen fruits and insects, so these items are essential in captivity.

We offer AviGrain Blue Finch Mix, a fruit and vegetable mix, madeira cake, live food, and a speciality softbill mix. Supplements include charcoal, shell grit, Passwell's Insectivore Mix, and Lori Dry.

#### **SOFTBILL MIX RECIPE**

- 500g kangaroo mince
- 3 boiled eggs (include shells)  
put through food processor  
until roughly mashed
- 300g chicken crumbles
- 1.5 cups Passwell's Insectivore Mix
- 70g protein boost  
(Naturally for Birds supplement)
- 10g micronutrients  
(Naturally for Birds supplement)
- 350g grated cheese

Mix all ingredients well in a bowl, ensure a consistent texture throughout. Pulse mix through food processor in batches to get a fine texture. Do not overdo and do not turn into a paste.

Live food is extremely important to breeding success. We find bonded pairs will successfully have 3–4 nests per year with live food available during the incubation and nestling period. Mealworms and maggots are offered when bringing birds into breeding condition and throughout the breeding season. This is maintained during incubation, chick-rearing, and even when offspring have fledged. Cessation of live food at any time during these periods can result in parents abandoning eggs, chicks, or fledglings.

#### **NESTING**

Luzon Bleeding-hearts can breed any time of the year in temperate Australia. Spring and autumn breeding avoids the coldest and hottest periods. Bleeding-hearts appear to show a preference for building in dense shrubbery. They show strong fidelity to their chosen nest site over time, so it is important not to change nesting sites, or refresh brush frequently.

In our experience they seem to be terrible nest-builders. We provide metal hanging baskets with a 30cm diameter, with replaceable coconut fibre liners. We place about 5cm of teff straw into the bottom of the basket and leave the birds to build the remainder of the nest. Pairs should be provided with an ample supply of fine sticks

of varying diameters and lengths since individuals can be fussy regarding nest construction.

The depth of the hanging basket provides three benefits:

**Privacy**—the eye height of nesting birds is usually below the edge of the basket top, so they cannot see people servicing the aviary and will remain sitting tightly on their nest.

**Security**—the eggs (or later chicks) cannot fall out of the nest, given the deep sides of the hanging basket.

**Success**—the basket avoids nest failure, resulting from the poor quality of nests built by this species.

Colanders and strainers are too shallow and not advised as nesting receptacles.

## EGGS AND CHICKS

Luzon Bleeding-hearts lay up to two white eggs that are incubated for 17–18 days. The female incubates the eggs at night and shares duties with the male during the day.

We generally avoid nest inspections, as the species is known to be nervous while incubating. Disturbances can lead to Bleeding-hearts abandoning eggs and chicks prematurely.

We leave our closed ring placement until as late as practical, as we have even had pairs abandon chicks after handling in the nest. We generally leave this until about Day 9–10. Like most doves and pigeons, Luzon Bleeding-hearts generally leave the nest at around 12–14 days of age. At this stage they are 'all wings' in appearance. Their deep russet-brown colour, with three light brown wing bars, means they blend in very well in their dimly lit and well-planted aviary for the next 7–10 days. They generally stay on the aviary floor at this time, even to roost. Parents will also generally roost with the squabs on the aviary floor at night.

## TRANSPORTATION

Transporting Luzon Bleeding-hearts can prove disastrous if the right container is not used. Head trauma and subsequent blood loss is a common occurrence in an unsuitable container. At best, serious injury is likely without the use of a padded foam ceiling on a transport box.

Padding on walls should also be considered, depending on duration of travel. Box size should allow for some horizontal movement, but opportunity for vertical movement should be avoided. The box should also be dark and enclosed. Sections of wire should be avoided, but the box should be well-ventilated with small holes.

Hydration is also important—a sponge filled with water inside a water receptacle is ideal. Provision of Madeira cake, and a cucumber split in half, also provide moisture.

## CONCLUSION

Luzon Bleeding-heart Doves need the help of aviculture. Given the loss of habitat and ongoing threats in the wild, this species will become extinct without aviculture.

It is important that you have a compatible pair. Smaller aviaries seem more successful than larger ones in allowing birds to be relaxed and confident. This type of environment simulates the closed-in forests of their native habitats.

The diet offered should be varied, and the importance of live food cannot be overstated. It is also important to remember that pairs will often continuously use the same nesting location. Be mindful of this and don't alter nesting sites too regularly. The use of hanging baskets as nesting receptacles has been a game-changer for us in avoiding nest construction failures and improving fledgling success.


Captive breeding programs play a crucial role in the conservation of endangered species such as the Luzon Bleeding-heart. Establishing a self-sustaining captive population can serve as an insurance policy against the potential extinction of the species in the wild. The need for captive birds to be maintained in optimum conditions, with the highest breeding potential, cannot be overstated.

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I also wish to mention my youngest daughter and co-author, Holly, who has managed our animal collection since 2016.

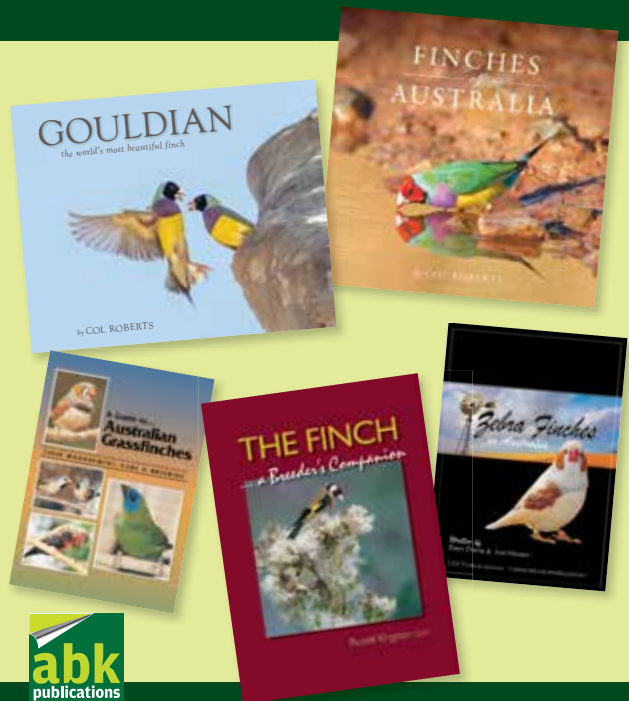
I also want to acknowledge the hard work and perseverance of the late Val Buller for her early work with Luzon Bleeding-hearts, without which these magnificent birds would not still be in Australian aviculture.


The authors would also like to thank both past and current bird keepers who have worked in our facility over the years, including Linda, Alex, Zoe, Josh, Emma, Ci-aan, Maddy, Kylie, Aimee, Lily and Jai. 

### Luzon Bleeding-heart with chick



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