

The Nicobar Pigeon

By Solomon Turner
Contributor

According to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo and the World Wildlife Fund of India, these resplendent birds are native to the tropical region that includes the Islands of Nicobar, Indonesia and New Guinea along with other islands in the region.

These eye-catching birds are classified as Near Threatened according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List. They are medium sized birds that are around 16 inches in length and one pound in weight.

The male and female sex both have a grey chest and head along with short, pure white tail feathers. Their wings, back and neck feathers are a vivid metallic coloration.

Around their neck, their feathers are long and hair-like and form a distinctive mane. They have hooked beaks and the males have a small black knob at the base of their beak.

Their behavior is nomadic as a result of their island habitat. Generally, they are most active at dawn and dusk when they commute between forested islands devoid of human activity in flocks of up to 85 birds. When they vocalize, they “coo” like the pigeons we are accustomed to in the States, but when they display aggression, they grunt like pigs.

The males will court females for several days, searching for their lifelong mates. The male will bring a female nesting material and the female will construct a simple primitive nest.

Both parents are involved with the incubation process and care for the altricial young, lasting around two months. One month for incubation and another before the chick can care for itself.

The mated pair will rear two clutches per year, each clutch consisting of a single white egg. Their lifespan in the wild is around 15 years

while in captivity they live for around eight to 12 years.

Their diet consists of hard seeds and nuts, fruit, insects and corn in the wild, and vegetables, fruits, greens and pheasant grains when in captivity.

Conservation efforts are needed to ensure their survival as their numbers are steadily declining. This decline is due to the pet trade, logging and other human activity on their native islands and trapping for food and jewelry.

In addition to their normal characteristics these birds have a special muscular gizzard that allows them to eat nuts with very hard shells. They drink, like all other pigeons, by sticking their beaks into the water but do not tip their head back to drink like most birds. These birds are also closely related to the extinct Dodo bird.

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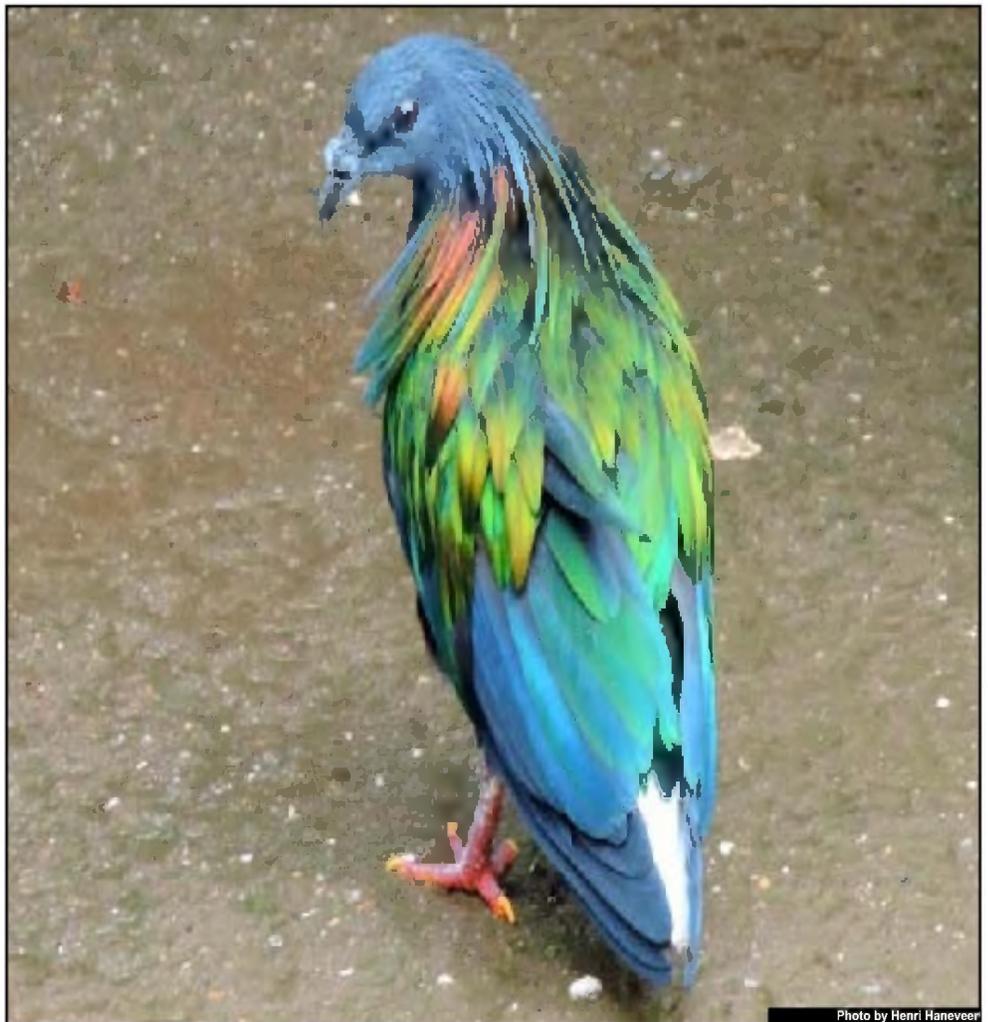


Photo by Henri Haneveer

A Nicobar pigeon