

Black Headed Caique

Pionites melanocephalus

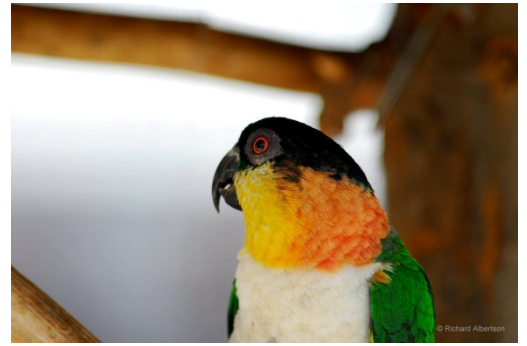
Class: Aves **Order:** Psittaciformes (parrots) **Suborder:** n/a

Family: Psittacidae (parrots, cockatoos and relatives)

Other names: Black headed parrot; black-capped parrot; or pallid parrot (for *P. m. pallidus*)

Other subspecies: There are 2 subspecies of *Pionites melanocephalus*. *P. m. melanocephalus* (Eastern part of its range. Orange thighs and crissum, nape deep orange, and belly white) and *P. m. pallidus* (Western part of its range. Yellow thighs and crissum, nape relatively pale, and belly tinged yellowish (often barely visible; belly normally appears "dirty white" in the wild))

Other Relatives: One other species in the genus *Pionites*, *Pionites leucogaster*- white-bellied parrot



Zoo Caiques 2.0

'Curly' 0.1 - female DOH: 04/07/1996 AQ: 04/07/1996

About Curly

Curly was hatched at Brandywine Zoo.

'Moe' 1.0 – male DOH: 06/27/1995 AQ: 06/27/1995

About Moe

Moe was hatched at Brandywine Zoo

Status

Least Concern [1] CITES II.

This species has an extremely large range, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the range size criterion, however it is believed their population trend is decreasing (>30% decline over ten years or three generations) [1]

Geographic Region

Found in forest (especially, but not exclusively, humid) and nearby wooded habitats in the Amazon north of the Amazon River and west of the Ucayali River in Brazil, northern Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela [2]

Habitat

Humid, lowland rainforests of the Amazon

Characteristics

Size: *Height:* 23cm (9in) [3]

Wingspan: 36cm (14in) [3] *Weight:*

about 160g [3]

Longevity: *Wild:* *Captivity:* 22 years [2] to 28 years [3]

Physical Description

- The black headed caique has a mostly black head. The feathers on the cheeks, throat, flanks, and thighs are an orange-yellow and there is an orange band across the back of the neck with a border of bluish feathers.
- The feathers on the wings, back, rump, and upper tail are green. The belly and breast feathers are creamy-white and the tail feathers on the tip are yellow.
- Younger black-headed caiques have more yellow on their underside feathers and their yellow and orange parts are paler.
- The white breast feathers of wild caiques are often stained a chestnut brown (or 'isobel') color. This may be tannin staining, as result of their particular affinity for bathing by rubbing their bodies against wet leaves and other plant matter [2].
- The caiques have a very strong, hooked bill and flexible tongue to open nuts as well as preen. The bill acts as a third foot to help the bird climb.
- Their feet are **zygodactyl**, they have two back toes and two front toes to use for perching and for holding and manipulating food.

Dimorphism

As with many parrot species, there is no dimorphism between males and females. The only ways to determine gender of an individual black-headed parrot are surgical sexing or DNA (blood) sexing.

Male:

Female:

Diet: Herbivore

Diet in the Wild: seeds, flowers, pulp, berries and fruits, and possibly insects [2].

Diet in the Zoo: exotic parrot pellets, fruits & mixed veggies

Behavior

- *Diurnal*, day-active
- Caiques are very energetic, playful, affectionate and intelligent. Also, they are very affectionate and social birds.

Social Structure & Communication

- They live flocks of up to 10 individuals, but sometimes up to 30 [2].
- May form a **parapatric** species-group with *P. leucogaster* [2]
- Caiques are very vocal birds that are known for their loud shrieks and alarm calls. Their vocalizations include trills, songlike sounds, as well as toots. The courtship behavior includes *kleek* calls. [4]

Defense Mechanisms

- When predators are nearby, the flock falls silent and then all at once takes off with a loud and confusing array of color and noise; this often will startle a predator and save the parrots from danger.

Reproduction

- During the breeding season, the female will lay up to four eggs which incubate for about 25 days.
- The male will feed the female while she is brooding, and will join her in the nest at various times during the day and at night.
- The hatchlings will leave the nest at about 14 weeks.

Conservation

- **Use & Trade:** Black-headed parrots are popular in **aviculture**. They've been collected for the pet trade, but this does not appear to have significantly affected their populations.
- **Threats:** Habitat loss, as deforestation in the Amazon basin is a continual threat.
- **Predators:** typical arboreal carnivores found in the Amazon, such as snakes, birds of prey, and some primates

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The name caique is pronounced *kye-eeks*

Glossary

Aviculture - practice of keeping and breeding birds and the culture that forms around it

Parapatric - the relationship between organisms whose ranges do not significantly overlap but are immediately adjacent to each other; they only occur together in a narrow contact zone.

Zygodactyl - having two toes pointing forward and two backward.

References

[1] IUCN Red List, "Pionites melanocephalus," IUCN Red List, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22686079/0>. [Accessed February 2015].

[2] Encyclopedia of Life, "Pionites melanocephalus," Encyclopedia of Life, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://eol.org/pages/1041125/details>. [Accessed February 2015].

[3] Northern Parrots, "Black headed caique fact sheet," Northern Parrots, 20 September 2013. [Online]. Available: <http://www.northernparrots.com/black-headed-caique-fact-sheet-blog145/>. [Accessed February 2015].

[4] Beauty of Birds, "Black headed caiques," Beauty of Birds, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://beautyofbirds.com/blackheadedcaiques.html>. [Accessed February 2015].