

Maximilian's Pionus

Pionus maximiliani South America

Also known as Scaly-headed parrot.

Maximilian's Pionus are medium, stocky dark brownish-green parrots with short square tails. They have a blue throat patch and the typical bright red patch on the under tail coverts. Primary and secondary flight feathers are green and contrast with darker body. The tail is green. The beak is dark grey and rather mottled in color. They have distinctive red eye-rings which are light colored but appear to have a stripe of dark grey which appears to extend from the brow to the bottom of the lower lid as if bisecting the eye. This eye ring stripe is distinctive and present even in young birds.

Maximilian's Pionus have a very large range in Central-eastern South America from South-eastern Brazil to Northern Argentina. They inhabit dry tropical lowland forests such as caatinga and cerrado forests. They are usually found in lowlands but range up to approximately 6000 feet elevation in some areas.

They are tolerant of human disturbance and often found near cultivated areas. Generally found in pairs or small groups but may be found in larger gatherings especially when roosting. They nest in tree cavities and feed in the tree canopies.

Length is 10.5-11 inches. Weight is 180-210 grams.

Most juveniles have relatively little color compared to adults. The eyes of both juveniles and adults are dark brown.

Maximilian's Pionus can probably live up to 35-40 years or more. Little is known about their life span in captivity. Breeding age is approximately 3-5 years.

Personality - Maximilian's Pionus make good pets but are not often available and are not popular due to their relatively drab coloration. They typically don't speak well. They are intelligent, inquisitive birds but are sometimes shy. Mature birds, especially males may become bonded to one person and aggressively protect that person from other people including other family members. They are relatively common in captivity but captive bred birds are not frequently available. They are active by nature and may become overweight if closely confined.

Activities – Maximilian's Pionus should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew. In order to ensure safety companion Pionus parrots should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young Pionus parrots should be socialized to many people and exposed to a variety of situations such as new cages, toys, visits to the veterinarian, handling by friends, wing and nail clips, etc. to avoid fear of novel situations. They need to have some space for exercise.

Dietary needs - Pionus parrots should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee Exact is an excellent staple diet for Pionus parrots. They should be fed approximately 2 heaping tablespoons to ¼ cup of pellets. They will tend to waste less food if fed small sized pellets. The diet should be supplemented with the same volume of fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Monitor food intake. Overfeeding leads to pickiness, selective feeding and wasteful throwing of food. Pionus parrots should be fed little to no sunflower or safflower seeds or seeds should only be given as treats. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

Birds, which are fed only seeds, will need vitamin and mineral supplementation to prevent deficiency diseases. Preferably vitamins should be added to soft food rather than putting in the water as this dilutes the vitamins, water soluble vitamins break down rapidly and water with sweetened and vitamins is a good growth medium for bacteria. Vitamin added to the outside of seeds is usually lost when the bird shells the seeds.

Grooming - Routine bathing or showering is vital to maintaining good plumage and skin condition. Birds can be misted and allowed to dry in a

warm room or in the sun, or gently dried with a blow drier. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as Pionus parrots often fall and injure themselves. Clip only the primary flight feathers and only enough so the bird will glide to the floor. Maximilian's Pionus are heavy bodied and care must be taken not to cut too many feathers. Excessive wing clipping can result in injuries from falling.

Identification - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and assist in maintenance of medical and genealogical records. Many breeders apply closed legs bands when chicks are young. While they present a slight risk of entrapment closed bands are preferable to no identification, especially for breeding birds. Microchips, which can be implanted into the muscle or under the skin, are a reliable means of identification but require electronic readers to verify identification. Tattoos may be used but often fade or become illegible with time. Footprints may have some application in identification.

Sexing Maximilian's Pionus are monomorphic (sexes are not visually distinct). Surgical sexing or DNA sexing must be used to confirm sex of breeders. Males are generally larger have larger heads and beaks.

Housing - Maximilian's Pionus are very active and should be provided the largest cage that space and budget allows. Ideally the cage should provide room for flight. Durable cage construction is not as critical as it is for macaws and cockatoos. Locks or escape proof latches may be necessary on cages. Ideally the bird will have an outdoor cage as well to allow playtime in the fresh-air and sunlight.

Breeding – Maximilian's Pionus are moderately difficult to breed in captivity. In North America Maximilian's Pionus breed predominantly in the spring and have a limited breeding season typically from February or March to June or July. Clutch size is typically 3 to 4 eggs. One inch by one inch by 14 gauge welded wire, or 1" X ½ " welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 6 to 8 feet long suspended 4 feet above the ground or floor.

Nest Box - Grandfather style wooden boxes can be used. Size should be approximately 10" x 10" x 18-24".

Incubation period is approximately 24-26 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 8 to 10 weeks of age. Maximilian's Pionus are difficult to hand-rear from the egg. For best results they should be initially fed by the parents or fed very often in the first week. Kaytee Macaw hand rearing formula is a good choice.

Aggression

Male Blue-heads are occasionally aggressive toward their mates. Clipping the wings of the male prior to the breeding season may be necessary in aggressive individuals to help the female to escape in case the male becomes aggressive. Males in breeding condition can be very aggressive to keepers. They will often approach the keeper and flare the tail in an aggressive posture.

Blue-heads are moderately noisy when in breeding season. When breeding Pionus parrots, noise and proximity to neighbors must be considered.

Common diseases and disorders

- Pox virus infection (Primary disease of imported birds)
- Proventricular dilation disease
- Feather-picking
- Aspergillosis
- Vitamin A deficiency
- Psittacosis
- Poor eating habits
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Toe necrosis

Conservation Status –Common, stable- Maximilian's Pionus are listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Wild populations are generally large and locally common. Maximilian's Pionus were not imported in large numbers into the United States and are not commonly breed.

