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INDIAN HILL MYNAH: *Gracula religiosa*

So far we have looked at various species of seed eating birds such as Parrots, finches, and doves. The Mynah bird's diet is quite different. They cannot digest hard seeds but must rely on a softer mix of insects, meat, fruits, vegetables and the like. Although it is true that parrots, finches and doves eat these softer foods as well the inability of Mynah birds to eat hard nuts and seeds has lead aviculturists (people who work with and raise exotic birds) to classify them as "soft billed" birds.

Upon seeing one for the first time one might think it is a crow, however, Mynahs belong to a wide ranging family of vividly colored tropical birds and not so vividly colored temperate birds known as Mynahs and starlings. Yes, the common everyday European import starling seen on lawns across North America is a close relative of the Mynah bird.

Mynahs are renowned mimics. Talking ability is the main, and perhaps only reason, why these birds were popular as pets. Years ago many babies were imported into this country from India and could readily be found in pet shops. It soon became evident they were far too active to ever thrive in any cage small enough to fit in the average room. Instead, these rather messy noisy birds are now found in spacious aviaries in places like California and Florida where the climate is mild year around. Keeping them outside keeps the "mess factor" to a minimum and the birds are happier as well.

The best place to see the wide variety of Mynahs and Starlings and to gain an appreciation of the almost unbelievable assemblage of iridescent color is to visit a Zoo, library, or Internet. Current prices for these birds are formidable as is the space and care they deserve.