

Caiques (Pionites) Species Profile: Black-headed and White-bellied Caiques

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Pionites

There are several subspecies of the Black-headed and White-bellied Caique:

Black-headed Caique - *Pionites melanocephala*

Pionites melanocephala melanocephala - nominate subspecies

Pionites melanocephala pallida

White-bellied Caique - *Pionites leucogaster*

Pionites leucogaster leucogaster - nominate subspecies

Pionites leucogaster xanthurus

Pionites leucogaster xanthomeria

A forest canopy dweller, both species of Caiques (pronounced like "dike" with a k) are found primarily in tropical zones, especially near water sources. They tend to congregate in pairs, family groups, or small flocks of 30 birds or less. Very noisy, they vocalize often, whether resting in a canopy or traveling from one part of the forest to another.

Considered by many to be the class clown of the parrot world, Caiques are playful and always on the go. They love exploring new objects, which can include a newly purchased curio box or the hair of a new guest they have not met before. They can also react with unexpected fear or anger to new situations, objects, or even habitual practices such as being put down or back into their cage.

Likened to the scarlet macaw, Caiques are extremely intelligent, posing a challenge for their owners to keep them entertained and stimulated mentally. They do best when handled frequently by many different people and taken on a variety of regular "outings." Caiques may display territorial behavior, even toward people. Do not be intimidated. Removing the Caique prior to cleaning the cage will result in fewer confrontations.

Colorful, playful, and entertaining, Caiques can be noisy, so this may not be the best choice for apartment dwellers. Otherwise, these medium-sized charmers make captivating and loyal pets, generally selling for between \$400-\$500.

Quick Stats: Caiques

Family: Psittacidae

Origin: South America

Black-headed Caique

Pionites melanocephala

melanocephala - Brazil, Venezuela,

Roraima, and Columbia

Pionites melanocephala pallida -

Columbia, Peru, and Ecuador

White-bellied Caique

Pionites leucogaster leucogaster -

Brazil, between the Amazon and

Madeira River basins

Pionites leucogaster xanthurus -

restricted to Amazonas regions of

Brazil

Pionites leucogaster xanthomeria -

Amazonas region of Brazil and

Ecuador

Size: 9 - 11"

Coloration: Black-headed Caique:
forehead crown and nape of neck

Cage Size: Minimum of 3.5' H x 4' L
x 3' W

Grooming: Trim beak, nails, and
flight feathers as needed. If flighted,
may still prefer hopping or jumping;
however, this species enjoys outings,
so trimming the flight feathers is
encouraged.

Compatibility/Disposition: Can be
territorial and exhibit unpredictable
behaviors with territory as the main
issue. A fun, loving, and intelligent pet
when handled frequently by several
different people. May do well with
limited number of other parrots of
similar size and disposition.

Vocalization: Both varieties exhibit a
variety of screeches, shrieks, and
squawks. Peculiar to the Black-headed
Caique is a sort of "toot," believed to
be used as a way to contact other

black; green streak under eyes; cheeks and throat orange-yellow; back wings, rump, and upper tail green; breast and abdomen cream; thighs orange-yellow; legs and bill grey; orange iris.

Subspecies: *Pionites melanocephala pallida* similar, but with duller colorations.

White-bellied Caique: forehead, crown, and nape of neck orange; throat and sides of head yellow; back wings, rump, and upper tail green; breast and abdomen cream-colored white; thighs green; legs pink; bill pale beige; red iris.

Subspecies: *Pionites leucogaster xanthurus* similar, but paler colorations.

Subspecies: *Pionites leucogaster xanthomeria* similar with the exception of having yellow thighs.

Diet: High quality pelleted diet supplemented with equal amounts of vegetables with some fruits. Include legumes, greens, berries, greens, and occasional nuts and seeds. Also enjoy an occasional cricket. In the wild, fruits, berries, seeds, and flowers. See [Basic Nutrition for Psittacines \(Parrot Family\)](#) for more information.

Caiques. In captivity, known for rather limited speech (similar to conures and pionus) and a relatively quiet voice (but a loud screech). Will mimic environmental sounds better than human speech.

Playfulness: Friendly, clever, and acrobatic.

Life Span: 20+ years

Age at Maturity: 2-3 years

Nesting Sites in the Wild: Tree hollows

Breeding Season: Little is known for certain regarding either species; however, breeding behavior has been observed from October to April, depending on location.

Sexing: Reliable only via DNA or endoscopy.

Special: Considered chronic chewers and need to be provided with plenty of replaceable wooden toys or they may destroy their perches, and may do so in any case. Caiques seem to prefer jumping and hopping about often in lieu of flying, having well-developed, strong legs and feet. Enjoy towels and close quarters so beware of possibilities of suffocation (especially in bedding). Love bathing so change water several times a day.