

AN INTERESTING AND UNUSUAL HYBRID

by Fred Barnicoat

In 2008, a strange young bird unexpectedly appeared in Peter Brummage's garden aviary in Benoni here in South Africa. It proved to be the offspring of an odd male Jacarini Finch or Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina* and a single female Cuban Finch or Cuban Grassquit *Tiaris canora*. It clearly shows features of both its parents, being a small finch predominately of varying shades of black, with an olive-green back. The face is jet black, surrounded by the typical crescentic neck-frill of the Cuban Finch, which is dark grey instead of yellow. Its black chest fades into grey on the lower belly. A few yellow spots on the side of the head somewhat detract from the harmony of its appearance. The tail is noticeably longer and broader than that of its Cuban Finch mother and its dull black beak is midway between the short conical beak of the Cuban Finch and more elongated beak of the Jacarini Finch. This hybrid is almost certainly a male and has an exceptionally loud and penetrating call, more so than either of its parents. Like its paternal parent it keeps low down and hidden among the aviary vegetation. I am not aware of any previous record of a hybrid of the Jacarini Finch and the Cuban Finch only with the congeneric Black-faced Grassquit *T. bicolor*. This hybrid underlines the affinity of the genus *Volatinia* and the genus *Tiaris*.

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FORESTS OF HOPE

BirdLife International is urgently appealing for funds to support its work in the forests of Western Siem Pang, Cambodia, one of the last remnants of the ecosystem that once covered large areas of central Indochina. The forests are extensive and BirdLife International has identified a key site covering over 150,000 hectares (approx. 375,000 acres), with 90% of the habitat still intact and five Critically Endangered species of bird, the White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni*, Giant Ibis *Thaumatibis gigantea*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* and Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*. This Important Bird Area (IBA) was threatened by plans to log the forest and convert it into a biofuel plantation, but BirdLife International has succeeded in having the logging license revoked and hopes to conserve the forest and manage it under a new agreement with the government of Cambodia.

BOOK REVIEWS

PARROTS OF THE WORLD

A field guide dedicated to a group of birds is an unusual concept. Field guides tend to cover a specific area whereas parrots, of course, are found throughout the tropics and beyond. *Parrots of the World* in the excellent Helm Field Guide series will be welcomed by birdwatchers and bird keepers alike.

This is the third book with this title by Joseph Forshaw, the renowned authority, and the second illustrated by Frank Knight. The previous collaboration, published in 2006, was sub-titled *An Identification Guide* and was much too large to handle in the field. The layout of the two books is similar (with a colour plate on the right and the brief text and map on the left) but, in this recent publication, the text is limited to the facing page with the addition of 15 introductory pages.

So how else does this book differ from the 2006 volume apart from being a paperback and having a different publisher? The colour plates are virtually identical, but there is the addition of common names and a slight rearrangement of some images to allow for the smaller page size. There are also a few alterations to species' order - e.g., hanging parrots now come before pygmy parrots.

For those who do not have the earlier volume, this will be an extremely useful and informative book and its smaller size and lighter weight makes it easier to handle. Frank Knight's plates have an amazing clarity but here the illustrations are reproduced a fraction darker than the originals. New subspecies have been added, such as the *tucumana* race of the Mitred Conure, with the former subspecies *alticola* elevated to full species and the very closely related Hocking's Conure described for the first time. In other words, this book reflects all the latest taxonomic changes.

Parrots of the World by Joseph Forshaw ISBN 978-1-4081-3034-6, Helm Field Guides, 336 pages, numerous illustrations, is published by Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd. Price £24.99.

Rosemary Low

LIVING WITH PARROTS

I had only reached page 10 of *Living with Parrots of Different Sizes* when I found myself congratulating the authors out loud! When they decided to buy two Amazons as pets, they weighed up the pros and cons of parent-reared and hand-reared young. They decided on parent-reared. The Red-lored Amazons were six months of age and straight out of their parents' aviary,

yet after six and ten days they were taking seed from the authors' fingers and after 16 days the male was sitting on the hand. They proved to be easy to train and to handle.

The Swedish authors, Birgitta Magnusson and Peter Tössberg, had for some years kept Budgerigars and Cockatiels before deciding to keep larger parrots. The book describes in a most appealing way their experiences with their birds. It is also full of practical information. Advice is given on important decisions that many parrot owners must make. They debated whether to take on a captive-bred, 11 years old Blue-fronted Amazon named Morty whose owner was on the point of having him euthanised due to his aggressive behaviour. They decided to give him a chance although several previous attempts to rehome him had failed. Morty proved to be unpredictable and attacked and bit "quicker than a cobra". Despite some serious injuries they persevered and - suddenly - Morty fell in love with Birgitta and became totally devoted to her.

I like this book a lot because it describes problems that many parrot owners face, and how they were successfully overcome. Some of their observations, with which I totally agree, are rarely published elsewhere. For example, the authors felt it was important to show a Cockatiel her dead mate, so that she could understand he had gone. Otherwise she might scream for a long time, not knowing where he was. The authors ask: "How many veterinarians are aware of this?"

The section on Budgerigars as pets is outstanding. Their huge popularity of the 1950s and 1960s declined when larger parrots became available. Like the authors, I have always maintained that they are perfect pets, being intelligent, charming and easy to manage. It was interesting to read that under Swedish law, Budgerigars must live with at least one of their parents for the first six weeks of their lives, to ensure that they are fed properly.

The photographs by Peter Tössberg (one or more to a page) are superb. He took an incredible 40,000 shots to achieve the desired results. Those of the Blue-fronted Amazon in flight show the full beauty of this species. All their birds are in such perfect feather condition that the photos alone are worth the price of the book. Cockatiel and Budgerigar owners will enjoy the enchanting photos of chicks at different stages of their development and of adults in flight.

I would describe this as a book of extremely useful and very readable reminiscences, and can recommend it unreservedly.

Living with Parrots of Different Sizes by Birgitta Magnusson and Peter Tössberg ISBN 9789197847322, published by Tossmet, hardback, 144 pages, 290 photographs, is available price £23.50 via the following website: www.bokus.com/bok/9789197847322/living-with-parrots-of-different-sizes/

Rosemary Low

NEWS & VIEWS

CHRISTMAS COCKS-OF-THE-ROCK

Each year I look forward to receiving a Christmas card from Josef and Natalie Lindholm with the latest news from the Dallas World Aquarium in Texas. In this year's card, Josef wrote to say that if the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock *Rupicola peruvianus* eggs due to hatch on Christmas Day did so successfully, the chicks would be the 28th and 29th hatched there since 2007. Two other breeding females were thought to be about to lay.

Dallas World Aquarium again had a very successful year with araçarís, with multiple clutches of Curl-crested *Pteroglossus beauharnaesii*, Ivory-billed *P. azara* and Green Araçarís *P. viridis*. A subspecies which Josef calls Humboldt's Letter-billed Araçari *P. inscriptus humboldti* hatched young for the first time at the Dallas World Aquarium.

Quite a number of new species were added to the collection during the year, these included Flame-faced Tanager *Tangara parzudakii*, Saffron-crowned Tanager *T. xanthocephala* and Beryl-spangled Tanager *T. nigroviridis*, Montezuma or Mearn's Quail *Cyrtonyx montezumae* and a pair of Bronze-winged Pionus *Pionus chalcopterus*.

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A MIXED BAG

In the 2010 breeding season Bernard Sayers bred: one Chaco Owl *Strix chacoensis*, three Burrowing Owls *Athene cunicularia*, seven Boobook Owls *Ninox boobook*, two White-faced Owls *Ptilopsis leucotis*, three Indian Scops Owls *Otus bakkamoena*, three Tropical Screech Owls *Megascops choliba*, two Black-winged Lories *Eos cyanogenia*, five Black-cheeked Lovebirds *Agapornis nigrigenis*, two Grey Peacock-Pheasants *Polyplectrom bicalcaratum*, 10 Triangular-spotted or Speckled Pigeons *Columba guinea*, three Lemon Doves *Aplopelia larvata*, one Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* and about 20 Java Sparrows *Padda oryzivora* of the grey wild-type. By Bernard's high standards it was not, he wrote, "a brilliant breeding season," but there were "just enough babies" to keep him "amused."

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NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL

Dr Mark Pilgrim, who joined Chester Zoo as a bird keeper in 1988 and is European Studbook holder for the Equadorian Amazon *Amazona autumnalis lilacina*, became the zoo's new Director General on October 1st 2010, taking over from Prof. Gordon McGregor Reid, who stepped down after 18 years at the zoo.



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