

BIRD KEEPING IN THE TROPICS

by Robin Restall

When I lived in England, I, like so many aviculturists, often had wistful thoughts about the avicultural joys of living in a tropical land in which the sun shone 12 hours a day, where there were never any problems acclimatizing birds and there were bound to be endless supplies of insects. Well, I have been living here in Venezuela for 11 years now, ever since my retirement from business, and for those who believe the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, there follows an account of a weekend in the life of a bird keeper in Venezuela.

On a Saturday afternoon recently I was sitting quietly reading the newspaper when it occurred to me that I really should go to the birdroom to check everything was in order. My birdroom is attached to the house, but it is open to the elements, with half of the roof covered by metal mesh. There is a metal mesh door into the garden, which is kept locked, and another into the aviary, which is also attached to the house. Right now, I am working on a project to breed the Slate-coloured Seedeater *Sporophila schistacea* and have recently succeeded in breeding the Sooty Grassquit *Tiaris fuliginosa* (see *Avicultural Magazine* Vol.111, No.2, pp.64-74 (2005)). The latter included a photo (p.68) showing some of the 12 breeding cages in my birdroom, each of which houses a pair of these species.

I trotted downstairs and into the birdroom and was at once attracted by a rapid flapping sound coming from one of the upper cages. Only one bird, the male, was perched, and I thought the poor female had in some way become trapped by something on the floor of the cage and was flapping frantically to free herself. I stood on tiptoes so I could see what was happening on the floor of the cage and was confronted by a snake, which opened its mouth wide and threatened me, while at the same time vibrating the tip of its tail like a rattle. The female finch was nowhere to be seen.

I stepped back to collect my senses and decided that a couple of nets might come in useful. I also brought the birdroom chair to stand on and opened the door on the left side of the front of the cage and managed to get the small net inside. The snake was very agitated and after attempting to strike at me dived towards the front of the cage and succeeded in squeezing its head and half of its body between the bars. However, having swallowed the missing bird, it had a bulge in the middle which caused it to become stuck and unable to escape. To cut a long story short, it eventually managed to make a rapid retreat and I took out a feeding pot and fixed the feeder flap open, through which the snake emerged and was caught by me in the big net. I attempted to kill it by applying pressure to the nape, as I wanted it to

remain undamaged in order to take to the museum. However, the snake was very angry and escaped from the net and charged towards me. I managed to kill it by stepping on its head. Later identified as a Brown-lined Snake *Mastigodryas boddaerti*, it measured over 1m (3ft 3in) in length, but was only as thick as my thumb - except that was for the bulge in the middle!

It was our third snake. The first was caught by our cat, a magnificent achievement, as the cat is both old and small. The next was killed by the gardener. Long, slender, beautiful creatures with bright golden yellow eyes, they were a type of tree boa. Of course I checked all the cages and looked around the aviary and wondered if there was anything I could do to prevent a recurrence. We had been having a great deal of rain, and as we live on the top of a hill it seems likely that the snakes had travelled uphill to escape the flooding below. As I walked out of the birdroom I glanced into a large jug I had put aside. It was half-full of rainwater, floating on top of which was a dead spider. Including its legs, it measured almost 20cm (8in) across and had a horrid face and large jaws. It was the first of its kind I had seen but unfortunately was not sufficiently intact for me to take it to the museum for identification.

On the Sunday afternoon, I decided to take a nap in the bedroom and switched on the air-conditioner. I went to the open window to close it and there, in the well between the outer louvred window and the sliding inner window, was another snake. It was the fourth snake in a month. It made me jump so much, that I nearly hit the ceiling. It rattled its tail fiercely and with a lunging open mouth threatened me. This time I eased the window open a fraction and sprayed some powerful insecticide into the space between the two windows. It took about 15 minutes to do the trick, during which time the snake demonstrated its amazing skill at climbing up the sides of the apparently smooth window frame. This snake was about the same length as the one in the birdroom, but was slimmer and had a smaller head. The gardener said it was a *Macagua*, a very poisonous species, but to me it looked like another tree boa. It had reached the window via the fronds of a palm tree that is growing in front of the house, the fronds of which touch the bars covering the window.

Over the past three years, I have lost some birds in the aviary - they have simply disappeared. Three others in the cages were found dead on the nest, when sitting on eggs. In each case part of the head and both eyes had been eaten away and the corpses were riddled with ants. I had never figured how the birds disappeared from the aviary and thought the cage deaths were the result of egg-binding followed by an instant ant attack. Now I have two possible villains, snakes and spiders.

On the Sunday night we had a ferocious storm of the kind that leaves branches of trees on the ground and forces rain under roof tiles that have

never leaked before. For some reason, the birds in the aviary always build their nests in the bushes in the front half of the aviary, which is open to the rain, even though the rear half that joins onto my studio, has plate glass over the metal mesh. These storms regularly destroy their nests. My hard-working male Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina* has had four nests wrecked in as many months. One had eggs in it and another containing a chick.

I have bought a small industrial freezer just to keep my tubs of seed in. We have a moth here that lays its eggs in the seed pots. The tiny larvae eat the seed and weave cocoons which have seed mixed in with them, so that what might look like a full pot of seed, may in fact be only a thin layer of seed, beneath which the rest of the pot is filled with moth cocoons. Therefore the seed pots need to be emptied more often - usually onto the bird table where the local Ruddy Ground Doves *Columbina talpacoti* stuff themselves silly. Keeping the seed in the freezer helps prevent the moths' eggs from hatching. There is no such thing here as super-cleaned seed.

This is not meant as a litany of woe, but as I do occasionally get letters from envious correspondents who think I live in a bird keeper's paradise (which in so many ways I do), following the snake and spider incidents, I thought the above account might be of passing interest to members who occasionally look over the fence at the grass on the other side.

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PROBABLE FIRST UK BREEDING

Cage & Aviary Birds, July 28th 2005, p.3, reported that Andy Younger, a falconer living in Scotland, had achieved what is thought to be the first successful UK breeding of the South American Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*. An egg was laid on March 15th, but was broken the next day. A further three eggs were laid and were incubated for 25 days, before they were mysteriously broken and thrown out of the nest. There followed a further clutch of three eggs, two of which were removed after 14 days and placed in an incubator. The first hatched on June 11th and the second on June 14th. The third egg, which was left with the parents (along with two large duck eggs filled with plaster), started to hatch but there were difficulties, so it was removed to an incubator, where with increased humidity the chick eventually managed to free itself. A photo showed all three chicks being reared by the female, the male having been removed when the female became aggressive towards him.

BOOK REVIEWS

AMAZON PARROTS

Amazon Parrots: Aviculture, Trade and Conservation by Rosemary Low is a useful and attractive book which is divided into two more or less equal parts. The first part is a general account divided into 11 chapters dealing with Amazon parrots in aviculture, as companion birds and in the wild. The second part focuses on the individual species accounts.

An introductory chapter precedes chapters on housing, diet, captive breeding, Amazon parrots as companion birds and health care. The author's lifetime of experience working with these birds ensures that good advice is given on all these subjects. She favours natural varied diets and her preference is for outdoor aviaries rather than suspended indoor flight cages. Rosemary also indicates which species are most suitable as companion birds and for novice Amazon breeders.

Following this section are chapters on introduced populations, life in the wild, conservation, extinct Amazon parrots and trade. Amazon parrots that have escaped or been released from captivity have become established in the southern states of the USA and can be seen flying free in Barcelona and some of the other major cities in Spain. Even in their native countries Amazon parrots may now be found living in cities. On a recent visit to Mexico, whilst staying in urban areas of Mexico City, I regularly observed small flocks of several *Amazona* spp. - all far from their natural forest habitats.

The popularity of Amazons as pets both in their native countries and abroad has had serious consequences for the conservation of many species. The IUCN *Red List* for 2004 lists 16 species as threatened of which seven rank as Endangered or Critically Endangered. A further two species are Near Threatened and many distinctive subspecies are at risk. The preference for captive bred birds both as companion birds and good avicultural subjects relates not only to ethical considerations over sustainable trade but also to the fact that these birds are so much more suitable and better adapted to captive life.

Currently 27-31 species of Amazon are recognised, the most recent of which Kawall's Amazon *Amazona kawalli* was proposed in 1989. Parrot taxonomy is unstable and the definition of species subject to debate. All currently recognised species and subspecies are dealt with in this book although perhaps not surprisingly there are occasional inconsistencies within the text as to the number of species recognised. Rosemary notes 28 species in the introduction but delivers accounts of 29 - the additional species perhaps being Kawall's Amazon.

The species accounts are each subdivided into sections entitled:

Distinguishing Features, Immature Birds, Subspecies, Aviculture, Country of Origin, Habitat, Habits and Status and Threats. A map indicating the range of the species is included and numerous colour photos illustrate not only the species but most importantly the various subspecies. At Chester Zoo we have had the privilege to work with many of these birds and I must thank Rosemary for mentioning our breeding successes with the Red-tailed Amazon *A. brasiliensis* and Ecuador (Lilacine) *A. autumnalis lilacina*. Less well known may be the history of the zoo's previous successes with the Yellow-billed Amazon *A. collaria* and Green-cheeked Amazon *A. viridigenalis*. Much original information comes from the author's own experience gained whilst working with the excellent parrot collections at Palmitos Park and Loro Parque on the Canary Islands. She also includes accounts of captive breedings from a diversity of other sources including those of many successful private breeders.

I happily recommend this book to all who are interested in keeping and breeding Amazon parrots. As is always the case with Rosemary's books this is well written, beautifully illustrated, a joy to read and a mine of authoritative information.

Amazon Parrots: Aviculture, Trade and Conservation (ISBN 0-9531337-4-5) by Rosemary Low, 324 page hardback, numerous colour photographs, published 2005 by Dona Publishing/Insignis Publications. Available in the UK from Hampshire Breeders and Books (Tel: 01730 301340) and Natural History Book Services (Tel: 01803 865913). It is currently being offered by Hampshire Breeders and Books, price £24.95 including p&p, for Europe add 10%, for the rest of the world add 20%.

Roger Wilkinson

A MULTICOLOURED FINCH OF UNRIVALLED BEAUTY

Several years ago, during a birding trip to Australia, my travelling companion and I stopped at a water hole. We were hoping to photograph cockatoos as they came to drink, but instead a more imposing gem appeared - a multicoloured finch whose beauty is unrivalled. That finch is the subject of *A Guide to...Gouldian Finches and their Mutations*, a completely revised edition of the original *Guide to Gouldian Finches* which was published in 1991. In this new revised edition, Dr Rob Marshall, one of the original contributors, is joined by Dr Milton Lewis, Dr Terry Martin and Ron Tristram as co-authors. All are Australian and possess an intimate knowledge of this finch.

A Guide to...Gouldian Finches and their Mutations covers every imaginable aspect of the Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae* in the field and aviary. The table of contents includes:

The Gouldian Finch in the Wild
The Gouldian Finch in Captivity
Mutations and Colour Breeding
Health and Disease

In each of these important sections the authors share their knowledge of this species with the reader.

The Gouldian Finch used to be placed with the grassfinches in the genus *Poephila*, but this taxonomic decision was not to everyone's liking. Some, for example, regarded it as being closer to the Asian mannikins. Nowadays taxonomists lean towards treating it as a parrot finch of the genus *Erythrura*, as do the authors of this guide, who explain why in their view this current treatment is justified.

In its native Australia its range has contracted and there has been a decline in its numbers. Part of the problem has been caused by habitat modification; in Australia many plants have evolved with a fire regime, which spurs new growth and even profuse seeding, but introduced hoofstock, rabbits and even birds and controlled burning have affected the natural cycle. The Gouldian prefers savannah woodland with a grassy understory and permanent water. It has often been suggested that it is insectivorous, but it feeds almost solely on seeds, which require the aforementioned fire regime.

The Gouldian Finch has evolved to live in a hot, dry climate. This explains why many pairs prove poor sitters. This is not due to poor breeding or genetic deterioration but is normal behaviour: in the wild the heat of the day insures that the eggs do not cool down if they are not being continuously incubated. This same habit is seen in other birds that share a similar environment (e.g. the Golden-shouldered Parrot *Psephotus chrysopterygius*).

Learning about the habits of the Gouldian in the wild is important if a breeder is to maximize breeding results in captivity. This book covers this aspect amply. It is one of most valuable features of the book. For the breeder of mutations, it offers the most recently available information on genetics. It is richly illustrated and virtually all mutations are represented. Husbandry is also well covered. The contentious issue of fostering Gouldian Finches under Bengalese is addressed, with the arguments both for and against it.

ABK Publications has in recent years produced some superb books. They are concise, informative and richly illustrated. These traits are evident in this title, which is highly recommended to those interested in breeding the spectacular Gouldian Finch.

A Guide to...Gouldian Finches and their Mutations, 160 pages, extensive photographic collection, is published by ABK Publications, PO Box 6288, Tweed Heads South, NSW 2486, Australia. Tel: 07 5590 7777/Fax:07 5590 7130/E-mail:birdkeeper@birdkeeper.com.au/Website: www.birdkeeper.com.au In the UK it is available from Hampshire Breeders and Books, 12

Inwood Road, Liss, Hampshire GU33 7LZ (e-mail; pollywood@supernet.com). Price £24.95 including p&p, for Europe add 10%, for the rest of the world add 20%.

Derian A. Silva Moraton

A GUIDE TO...BLACK COCKATOOS

A Guide to...Black Cockatoos by Neville and Enid Connors is a book on aviculture based on years of practical experience and sound common sense which is uncommon (unfortunately). When it is also written by acknowledged experts in their field, it becomes a rare gem, worth its weight in gold. This is how I would describe the book under review. It is an impressive example of a husband and wife team who truly know what they are writing about, passing on their expertise, for this and future generations of breeders.

It follows ABK's usual formula of discussing all avicultural aspects, such as housing, feeding, breeding and hand-rearing, then covers each species in depth, in the wild and in captivity, under a series of useful headings that are consistent for each species. This makes it easy to find information on specific topics.

Neville and Noddy (as she is known) have been breeding black cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus* spp. for more than 20 years. By the mid-1980s they had bred and hand-reared all members of the genus. They are known especially for their successes with the delightful Glossy Cockatoo and they not only achieved an Australian first breeding with it but have also reared young consistently ever since.

I love their common sense observations, such as those on the subject of commercial bird diets (pellets, etc.). Noting that black cockatoos in the wild either move from one food source to another or use one source that changes seasonally in nutritional value, they write: "...there have been few comprehensive studies carried out in the wild on the species featured here and nothing of note with captive species. Manufacturers' claims that they have formulated the ultimate diet must be viewed with suspicion if not contempt unless there is 'proof' that research has been undertaken."

On the subject of aggressive male cockatoos, they offer an alternative to clipping the feathers of one wing and suggest that at the commencement of aggressive behaviour black electrical tape is wrapped around four or five of the primaries. This can be removed when desired. They make the very pertinent observation that: "...aggressive behaviour is not as sudden as usually described. There are always subtle telltale signs of disharmony between the pair. It is when these signs go unnoticed by the aviculturist that more serious and determined aggression is seen."

On the subject of hand-rearing they comment that it is inconceivable to use a commercial mix that has, as its major components, grain types that are seldom taken by the adult birds and that does not contain a greenfood - a chlorophyll component. "The result is droppings that resemble a sick child's, rather than a bird's droppings with the clearly defined faeces and urates."

Information on the various species covers pp.69-147. In addition to the *Calyptorhynchus* spp., it includes the Gang Gang Cockatoo and the Palm Cockatoo. There are countless interesting photos, such as that by Peter Odekerken of a wild Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo devouring a grub that it has just extracted from a tree trunk. The photographs are also invaluable in the often difficult task of identifying different subspecies of *Calyptorhynchus*.

Readers should realise that comments such as those about Gang Gang and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos making excellent pets are not relevant outside Australia, where so few exist and their high price would deter pet owners.

In Australia the Palm Cockatoo is almost non-existent in aviculture. The chapter on this species and most of the photos are the work of William Horsfield of South Africa, one of the world's most experienced breeders of this species. This is an extremely detailed and useful chapter. He shows an interesting sequence of five photos of a Palm Cockatoo from pipping to hatching. The book concludes with a useful section on diseases by avian vet Bob Doneley.

ABK's *A Guide to...* series, now boasting more than 20 titles, are user-friendly books, printed on glossy paper and loaded with colour photos, one or more to a page. The name is synonymous with quality and this latest title is one of the best.

A Guide to...Black Cockatoos as Pet and Aviary Birds by Neville and Enid Connors, 160 pages, 300 colour photographs, is published by ABK Publications. In the UK it is available from Hampshire Breeders and Books, 12 Inwood Road, Liss, Hampshire GU33 7LZ (e-mail: pollywood@supernet.com). Hard cover price £27.95 including p&p, for Europe add 10%, for the rest of the world add 20%.

Rosemary Low

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US BANK ACCOUNT

Those who would prefer to make payments in US dollars are reminded that the society now has a US bank account. Overseas membership for 2006 will remain at US\$38 for receiving the magazines by regular mail or US\$50 for air mail. Checks and money orders should be made payable The Avicultural Society and sent to: The Avicultural Society, c/o Jane Cooper, 12650 Hearst Road, Willits, California 95490-9231, USA.

NEWS & VIEWS

POSH PIGEONS

According to the latest scientific survey, quoted in *The Times*, September 10th 2005, p.33, the UK population of the Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is increasing by 30% a year and is likely to reach 100,000 by the end of the decade. The colony that roosts at the rugby ground at Esher in Surrey, just to the south-west of London, is the largest in the country and is estimated to number 7,000 birds. In parts of London the parakeets are said to be referred to as “posh pigeons”. They compete for nesting holes with native species such as the Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* and Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* and perhaps the Green *Picus viridis* and Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*. A vineyard had its expected 3,000 bottles of wine reduced to 500, after parakeets descended on it and devoured most of the season’s grape crop.

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LONG-LIVED GLOSSY STARLINGS

In *Gefiederte Welt* 128:101 (2004) Dr Heinz-Sigurd Raethel provided a potted history of an extremely long-lived Purple Glossy Starling *Lamprolornis purpureus*. It arrived at Berlin Zoo in 1909 from the former German colony of the Cameroons, West Africa. In 1928 it became blind in one eye and during 1930 became totally blind. Its keeper Paul Dähne noted in *Gefiederte Welt* 66:385-387 (1937), that despite being blind the bird never missed its daily bath and was a magnificent specimen. Sadly, it was killed during the bombing of Berlin in 1943, which destroyed the large bird house. It had lived in the zoo for 34 years, which must surely be a longevity record.

Dr Herbert Schifter, who has a special interest in the longevity of birds, was kind enough to send a copy of Dr Raethel’s letter in *Gefiederte Welt* and Christopher Brack kindly translated it from German to English. Dr Schifter knew of the Berlin bird and at his suggestion Dr Raethel researched its history and published his findings. Details of Dr Raethel’s research were not available in time for inclusion in Dr Schifter’s compilation of longevity records of starlings published in *Gefiederte Welt* 127:201 (2003). At that time the longest-lived starling for which details were available to Dr Schifter were of a Long-tailed Glossy Starling *L. caudatus* that had lived in Basle Zoo, Switzerland, from 1948-1977. It lived there for 28 years, three months and 18 days.

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SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Chester Zoo supports a number of conservation projects around the world, one of which, the work with hornbills in the Philippines, where earlier this year on the island of Panay the Critically Endangered Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* was bred for the first time in captivity, was mentioned in the previous issue (see News & Views Vol. 111, No.2, p.92 (2005)). It also continues to sponsor Great *Buceros bicornis* and Rhinoceros Hornbill *B. rhinoceros* nests in Thailand (as does the Avicultural Society). The zoo also gives major financial support to the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme on Palawan Island and supports the Greater Adjutant Stork *Leptoptilos dubius* rescue and rehabilitation project in Assam, India. Funding is also provided for the Birecik Northern Bald Ibis Project in Turkey. The Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* breeds only at a few sites, one of which is in Turkey. The project manages and protects this important breeding population and helps increase local conservation awareness through a visitor centre.

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PROBABLY FIRST RECORDED BREEDING

On the subject of the Guira Cuckoo *Guira guira* (see News & Views Vol. 111, No.2. p.96 (2005)), Christopher Brack has written from Germany to say that in 1987, Berlin Zoo imported a small group of these cuckoos from Uruguay. They bred rapidly and during 1987-1988, from 11 clutches of eggs, 42 young were hatched of which 28 were reared. This was probably the first recorded breeding of the Guira Cuckoo in a German zoo. Many of those bred at Berlin Zoo were acquired by other zoos and bird gardens in Germany.

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PARROT JUNGLE SETTLES INTO NEW HOME

Parrot Jungle, Miami, Florida, USA, moved to a new home in 2003. It moved to a custom-built site on Watson Island, a man-made island which helps connect downtown Miami with Miami Beach. The new park was designed with the aim of recreating the best attractions of the old park and enhancing some of the most popular activities. The shows performed at the old Parrot Jungle always topped the list of attractions visitors enjoyed most, therefore when the new park was being designed, great effort was put into designing three larger and distinctive show theatres.

The largest of these, the Parrot Bowl, is capable of seating over 1,200 visitors and is the venue for the park's new bird show - Winged Wonders. A greater emphasis is now placed on displaying the birds flying, rather than just performing tricks. The new show also features a greater variety of

species, which in addition to the familiar performing parrots, includes a King Vulture *Sarcoramphus papa*, Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus*, Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*, Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* and even a Southern Cassowary *Casuarius casuarius*.

The Serpentarium has a show presentation - Reptile Giants - with performances throughout the day, which feature a variety of reptiles including alligators, crocodiles, snapping turtles, monitors, iguanas, tegus, pythons, boas and venomous snakes. The exhibit area features a variety of reptiles including two crocodilians of note: an adult albino American Alligator *Alligator mississippiensis* and an adult Saltwater Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* which measures 20ft (approx. 6m) in length and weighs 1,800lbs (just over 800kg). The Jungle Theatre features a variety of small to medium-sized mammals, that include primates and carnivores.

Perhaps the most striking exhibit is a walk-through aviary, which has a waterfall and a stream and along one entire side, an artificial cliff wall, which is modelled after the famous claylick cliffs in the Manu National Park, Perú. More than 60 macaws of five species - the Blue and Gold *Ara ararauna*, Green-winged *A. chloroptera*, Scarlet *A. macao*, Severe or Chestnut-fronted *A. severa* and Red-bellied *Orthopsittaca manilata* - currently live in this exhibit. Living along with them are smaller groups of Mealy Amazons *Amazona farinosa*, Orange-winged Amazons *A. amazonica*, Yellow-crowned Amazons *A. ochrocephala* and Blue-headed Pionus *Pionus menstruus*.

Alongside many of the pathways through the park are exhibits featuring a good variety of other parrot species. These include the St Vincent Parrot *A. guildingii*, Red-vented Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia*, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus banksii*, Palm Cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus*, Blue-throated Macaw *A. glaucogularis*, Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*, Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus*, Illiger's or Blue-winged Macaw *Propyrrhura maracana* and Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis*.

Two walk-through aviaries in which visitors will be able to feed the birds, the first which will house lorikeets and the second which will house Australian parakeets, are being completed. Non-parrot species on display include kookaburras, crowned pigeons, fruit pigeons and turacos. Other softbills will be added to the collection in the coming months.

Miami sits close to the edge of the Everglades National Park, and the Everglades exhibit, with replica habitat, various waterbirds, alligators, turtles, fish and a host of plant species, is a popular attraction and serves as an outdoor classroom for over 100,000 school children each year.

Flamingo Lake was a central feature of the old Parrot Jungle and has been included in the new park. Although best known for its bird collection,

the park also features a number of mammal species particularly primates.

The lush tropical landscaping and horticultural collection have in a short time surpassed those of the old park and provide a perfect backdrop for the park's existing exhibits, and will provide a wonderful backdrop for those which will be added in the coming years.

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MONITORING FLAMINGOS' HEALTH

Richard Kock, Zoological Society of London Wildlife Epidemiologist, has for the past 10 years been studying populations of Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* on Rift Valley lakes in East Africa. One of the most widespread and abundant African birds, it is vulnerable because it has so few suitable breeding sites.

The large number of deaths at some lakes, for example at Lake Nakuru and Lake Bogoria in Kenya, have been associated with droughts and sudden changes to the lakes' algal flora. Subsequent research has identified bacterial disease as a significant component of ill health. Tuberculosis, avian cholera and other infections have been diagnosed as the cause of death of many of the birds, but what is more important to understand are the possible contributory factors relating to a breakdown in the immunity of these birds. These may include nutrition, algal toxins, disturbance and other environmental stressors.

Richard and other workers have found that monitoring flamingos' health can act as an indicator as to the overall health of the ecosystem, and have used data to create baselines to assist with ecosystem assessment techniques.

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PAINTINGS TO BE CATALOGUED

With a £30,000 (approx. US\$50,000) donation from The Michael Marks Charitable Trust, the Zoological Society of London is to embark on a programme of cataloguing the estimated 6,000 paintings in the ZSL Library, which include works by such renowned artists as Joseph Wolf and Edward Lear. It is part of a wider scheme which will also include the cataloguing of the books and the zoo archives.

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BRED FOR THE FIRST TIME

In an e-mail sent in mid-October, John Ellis, Curator of Birds at the Zoological Society of London, mentioned that the Toco Toucans *Ramphastos toco* had bred again and had hatched three chicks and the Red-billed Toucan *R. tucanus* had bred for the first time at the zoo. One chick had already fledged and another was still in the nest-box.

BRED AT HAREWOOD IN 1985

Dr Herbert Schifter was asked recently if he could provide information on the breeding of the Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* in captivity? The *International Zoo Yearbook* Vol.27, p.395, listed two has having been bred at Harewood Bird Garden, near Leeds, in 1985. He had also found a reference to this species having been bred at Chester Zoo in 1996. However, neither breeding was included in Dave Coles' UK *Breeding Records* and in his Chester Zoo Bird Review 1996 (*Avicultural Magazine* Vol.102, No.4, pp.174-179 (1996)) Roger Wilkinson did not mention this species having been bred there. Could I, Dr Schifter asked, possibly find out about these breedings?

David Haines, a friend and former colleague from our days working together in the Bird House at London Zoo, who later worked at Harewood with Peter Brown, visited the bird garden and asked Peter Stubbs, who has worked there for over 30 years, about the breeding. He confirmed that two were bred there in 1985 when Bill Timmis was in charge. Roger Wilkinson said the reference to this species having bred at Chester Zoo in 1996 was obviously an error as at that time the Black-naped Oriole was not represented in the collection at Chester Zoo.

I also referred Dr Schifter to the breeding of a Crimson-breasted Oriole *Oriolus cruentus* in 2000, listed in The Foreign Bird Federation *Register of Birds Bred in the UK under Controlled Conditions for the Years 1999-2002*.

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PUBLISHING PHENOMENON SPANNING 65 YEARS

Neville Brickell wrote recently from South Africa with the news that the new *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa* has just become available there. Austin Roberts' *The Birds of South Africa* was first published in 1940 and has been in print ever since. In all, well over 300,000 copies have been sold. This latest edition, the seventh, runs to 1,296 pages and has completely new text and new specially commissioned artwork, though in a fitting touch of nostalgia, Norman Lighton's original frontispiece, depicting a bushveld scene with ostriches, a ground hornbill and Bateleur Eagles soaring majestically overhead, has been retained.

In the same letter, Neville mentioned that the Javan Munia *Lonchura leucogastroides*, whose numbers in South Africa had declined to no more than 10 birds, has now increased to about 80 individuals. This follows the purchase by the Indigenous Bird Breeders' Research Group of all the odd birds and the setting-up of a breeding colony. Neville said that unfortunately the Green Avadavat *Amandava formosa* is no longer available in South Africa, so we must be thankful for the present breeding programme in Australia.

In *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Indonesia* by Morten Strange, p.348 (Helm, 2002), the Javan Munia is described as being a widespread and common resident on Java, Bali and Lombok, which has expanded its range into southern Sumatra where it possibly has been introduced. In the *Avicultural Magazine* Vol.93, No.3, pp.130-135 (1987), Robin Restall wrote about the Javan Munia and described watching this species feeding on the balcony of his first floor hotel room in Singapore. This munia was, Robin wrote, introduced to Singapore from Indonesia in the 1920s.

* * *



Paignton Zoo Environmental Park requires **EXPERIENCED AVICULTURISTS**

Paignton Zoo Environmental Park is seeking two experienced aviculturists to assist a joint project with the RSPB and English Nature rearing Gull Buntings for releases in South West England. The positions are required to cover 4-6 months starting Spring 2006 with the possibility of recurring work at a similar time in 2007/8. Applicants will have experience of hand-rearing birds, particularly passerines. Accommodation at the release site will be provided.

Please apply in writing to Colin Bath,
Curator of Birds, Paignton Zoo Environmental Park,
Totnes Road, Paignton TQ4 7EU.

Closing date: 1st January 2006

Paignton Zoo Environmental Park, Living Coasts and the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust are education and conservation charities dedicated to protecting our global wildlife heritage.



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Restall, Robin. 2005. "Bird Keeping In The Tropics." *The Avicultural magazine* 111(3), 132-134.

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