

LONDON ZOO REVIEW 2001

by John A. Ellis

All in all, 2001 proved to be a busy year at London Zoo, both for birds and staff. The highlight and possibly low point of the year concerned the Seven-coloured Tanagers *Tangara fastuosa*. This beautiful species is currently classified as endangered and the fragmented wild population remains under severe threat from extensive logging and consequent loss of habitat. We were then delighted when two chicks fledged in April. However, one of these was lost eight weeks later. The pair had two further nests and a single chick was produced from the last clutch. Tragedy struck in late September when we lost the breeding female. While awaiting the results of DNA sexing, we can only hope that we have a female and that perhaps we can locate further birds held in the UK.

The colony of Black-footed or African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* continues to grow. Apart from a short break in late summer, the birds seem to breed year round and in 2001 produced a further nine young. London Zoo, as part of the breeding programme, sent Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* to Paignton and Chester Zoos in exchange for further European White Pelicans *P. onocrotalus*. This has succeeded in evening out the previous female-heavy sex ratio and now we have the foundation of a successful colony.

Hammerkops *Scopus umbretta*, which were last kept at Regent's Park in the late 1960s, are back in the collection again. The Abdim's Storks *Ciconia abdimi* failed to breed in the Southern Aviary as the result of their nests continually being taken over by Waldrapp *Geronticus eremita*. Hopefully this problem has been overcome by moving the latter to the Snowdon Aviary. Waldrapp, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* all reared young in 2001. The Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopis* had several nests but the eggs were always infertile. After re-sexing the birds, a doting female pairing has now been separated and we are attempting to pair one of the females with a somewhat imprinted male.

We were pleasantly surprised when two African Harrier Hawks *Polyboroides typus* fledged instead of the normal singleton produced by these consistent breeders. A surplus female was sent to the Hawk Conservancy to make up another pair of this attractive and interesting species.

A pair of captive bred Sunbitterns *Eurypga helias* has arrived, the male from Amsterdam Zoo and the female a present from Frankfurt Zoo. The two have paired well (Sunbitterns bred at London Zoo in 1865) and are currently in the Tropical Bird House sharing the large central aviary with

the colony of Roulroul or Crested Wood Partridge *Rollulus roulroul*. The colony method seems to work well with this species, with 20 chicks hatched and a total of 11 reared successfully. Some chicks are taken after hatching and hand-reared, others are left with the parents and reared in the aviary, where most of the losses occur. It is a learning experience for the birds and the level of success rises as the females gain experience.

Pigeons and doves had a relatively successful year. We were again successful with both the Chestnut-naped *Ducula aenea paulina* and Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeons *D. rufigaster*, rearing three and two chicks respectively, and had to cap breeding Green Imperial Pigeons *D. a. aenea*. One of the most exciting arrivals was that of one male and three female Socorro Doves *Zenaida graysoni*, which came from Frankfurt as part of the EEP/ESB. This species is extinct in the wild, not having been recorded since 1972. We plan to transfer some birds between London and Bristol Zoos, leaving London with two pairs. A pair of Mindanao Bleeding-hearts *Gallicolumba criniger* was received from Bristol.

Blue-crowned Lory *Vini australis* and Mount Apo Lorikeet *Trichoglossus johnstoniae* both successfully fledged chicks, as did Blue-throated Conure *Pyrrhura cruentata*. The Black-cheeked Lovebird *Agapornis nigrigenis* colony went from strength to strength until we had no option but to remove the nest-boxes. Over 60 chicks hatched and although we did lose some shortly after fledging, by the end of the year we had sent 57 to other collections and still retain a large and active colony. A female Red-vented Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* was sent to Chester as part of the EEP.

A male Fischer's Turaco *Tauraco fischeri* was acquired to pair with the zoo's single female. The male has to be kept under observation as he is somewhat boisterous with the female. The pair produced chicks but failed to rear them. Red-crested Turacos *T. erythrolophus* fledged a chick successfully, however, the following egg was abandoned and subsequently hatched in an incubator. The chick was reared using a puppet, skilfully made by keeper Patsy Joseph and readily identified with it, and shows no signs of imprinting.

During the year we lost a male Rusty-barred Owl *Strix hylophila*, sent originally from Tierpark Berlin to Antwerp in November 1978. At that time, the bird's age and origin were not recorded though it is known that it was an adult. It was at least 23 years old when it died, but could have been considerably older. We were fortunate in producing a chick from our other pair. The few Rusty-barred Owls in UK collections are mostly from stock originating from Berlin and new blood is needed to sustain the UK population. Late in the year, thanks to Chris and Alan Barnard, we eventually succeeded in pairing up our female Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*. Surplus Spectacled Owls *Pulsatrix perspicillata*, White-faced Scops *Otus leucotis* and Rufous-thighed

Owl *S. rufipes chacoensis* were sent to other collections.

Toco Toucans *Rhamphastos toco* returned to the Regent's Park collection. Chessington Zoo sent two males bred there in 2000 and following another exchange we now have a young pair. We also managed to pair up the Black-necked Aracaris *Pteroglossus aracari*. Never having previously shown much interest in breeding, it was most encouraging that one pair went to nest, even though on this occasion the attempt was unsuccessful. We also received a pair of Keel-billed Toucans *R. sulfuratus* on loan from Charlie Mason, who had so much success with his Red-billed Toucans *R. tucanus* now at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park.

Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*, Magpie Robin *C. saularis*, Bali Starling *Leucopsar rothschildi* and White-crowned Robin-Chat *Cossypha albicapilla* all successfully reared young. Three pairs of Pope Cardinals *Paroaria dominicana* managed to produce 22 chicks and although some were lost after fledging, the final total of 16 was quite a feat. Black-breasted Thrush *Turdus dissimilis* and Red Siskin *Carduelis cucullata* both hatched chicks but failed to rear them.

We feel we have a good base on which to build in 2002 and have some exciting projects unfolding, including a European wetlands area and renovation work on the Tropical Bird House.

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COTSWOLD HAPPENINGS

Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens (where the society held its Spring Social Meeting 2002) was in February 2000 asked to participate in the European Breeding Programme for the Vietnamese Pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis*. It was assigned two males from Antwerp Zoo and later received a female from a private collection in the UK.

In March 2001 a clutch of seven eggs was laid. Three were placed under a broody bantam and the remaining four were left with the female. Only three hatched and the two chicks which were reared, both males, will shortly go to other collections as part of the captive breeding programme.

The park has exhibited Great Hornbills *Buceros bicornis* in the Walled Garden since it first opened in 1970 and in 1983 was the first UK collection to breed this species. The original female died of old age in 2001, and a new female has been received from Chessington Zoo and already appears to be bonding well with the male. As part of a project administered by the Forestry Department of the Government of Thailand, the park has adopted a pair of these hornbills nesting in the wild in that country, and makes a payment towards the cost of protecting its nest site.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The article about the late Fred Shaw Mayer in Vol.107, No.3, pp. 105-108, brought the following response from Fred Barnicoat, a member since 1959 and a former Vice President, who lives in South Africa. Explaining how he came to acquire one of Fred Shaw Mayer's bound volumes of the *Avicultural Magazine*, which holds an honoured position in his almost complete set, he writes: "Through the list of members which used to be published annually, giving the name, address and date of joining of each member, I met a young Australian bird enthusiast, Peter Oderkerken, who for many years lived in Buderim, not far south of Nambour. He somehow heard about Shaw Mayer living in the retirement village and began visiting him on a regular basis. The elderly gentleman relished the companionship of a young like-minded enthusiast, and had a vast knowledge and endless fund of anecdotes to share. When at the end of 1988 Peter was due to move to Darwin, he paid him a farewell visit and as a parting gift Fred Shaw Mayer insisted on giving him his most cherished possession - his full set of the *Avicultural Magazine*, dating back from when he joined in 1922 - "so that it might not go the way of the wind". Fred Shaw Mayer died some eight months later."

"When during the 1960s I was collecting my set, mainly through W.B. Frostick, the natural history book specialist at Minster Precincts, Peterborough, a son of John Frostick, the last surviving original member of the Avicultural Society, I was told that the part most unlikely to become available was that for January 1923. That issue marked the beginning of a new series (the fourth) following the difficult years after the First World War. When, in an effort to salvage the critical situation, the Avicultural Society and La Société Nationale d'Acclimatation, of France, decided to share in the production of an ambitious series on aviculture, starting with an issue containing two colour plates, which were quite a luxury. The cost of producing that issue was, of course, exorbitant, and made possible only by the generous donations of some members. The issue resulted in a great revival of interest, membership rose rapidly and the society entered upon one of its most flourishing periods."

"Because of the high cost of producing the January 1923 issue with two colour plates, no surplus copies were printed and this accounts for its rarity. So, when in Australia in 1996, I was especially delighted when Peter Oderkerken agreed to swap his 1923 bound volume that had belonged to Fred Shaw Mayer, for my 11 loose parts in mint condition, plus a number from 1905-1912 with hand-coloured plates, that I had purchased as duplicates."

"It enabled me to fill one of the five gaps in my set. I deeply appreciate

having a book owned by the great man, one which he must have taken to New Guinea and other distant places. He had written in the front in the most beautiful handwriting: F. W. S. Mayer, "Walfruna", 88 Concord Road, Homebush. The volume is well thumbed with some of the names in the membership list - Amsler, Astley, Delacour, Ezra, Frost etc. - crossed in pencil. As well as the names, certain paragraphs are marked, most notably one in which Mr Wilfred Frost had made several journeys to New Guinea and the Aru Islands, in an article by Seth-Smith about birds of paradise."

"On my way home via Sydney, friends helped me try to trace "Walfruna", presumably the family home where Shaw Mayer grew up, but it seemed that old area of Sydney had been demolished for the construction, then in progress, of the stadium for the 2000 Olympics."

The aforementioned Wilfred Frost, another of the great collectors, joined the Avicultural Society in 1908. It was Frost who was commissioned by Sir William Ingram to collect Greater Birds of Paradise *Paradisaea apoda* from the Aru Islands for release on the Caribbean island of Little Tobago, which he purchased for these birds when it was feared that the species might be exterminated from New Guinea and the Aru Islands by the millinery trade's demand for its plumes. Forty-eight were released on Little Tobago in 1909 and in 1912 a further three were released.

In June 2001, shortly after returning from a visit to Trinidad and Tobago, Rosemary Low wrote to tell me that contrary to what I had written previously, Greater Birds of Paradise no longer exist on Little Tobago, having been extirpated by Hurricane Flora in 1963. Apparently the Government of Trinidad and Tobago approached the Indonesian Government about importing replacements but its request was not granted. However, the remains of the introduction cage which was optimistically built, can still be seen on Little Tobago.

When I was in London last October, I had lunch with Don Newson, formerly Head Keeper and then Overseer of Birds at London Zoo until his retirement, from whom I learnt that Frost had been a scenery shifter in the theatre, who had started out catching British birds, such as Goldfinches *Carduelis carduelis*, as a sideline.

I was working at the zoo and met Wilfred Frost when he brought over his last collection, which included four male Greater Birds of Paradise, their long plumes stained dark red by the wood shavings on the floors of the boxes. I also learnt that from Don that Frost had a son, who had lost an arm while serving in the Navy during the war. The son lived in Ealing, west London, and Frost stayed with him when he was in London.

Wilfred Frost died shortly after leaving for Borneo on what would have been his 54th expedition. He was aged 82.

BIRDS AND AVOCADOS

Rosemary Low writes: "Avocado as part of the diet of quetzals, bellbirds and umbrellabirds was mentioned in Vol.107, No.3, p.140 (2001). The statement that the flesh and stones of avocados are toxic to parrots, or to some parrots, was included. I have seen the tiny avocados no more than 5cm (approx. 2in) long, eaten by quetzals in the cloud forest of Monteverde, Costa Rica. They bear little resemblance to the cultivated fruits that we buy. Whether their chemical composition is the same I do not know. However, I do know that avocados can kill parrots. Let me quote information from the internet published in *Parrots* magazine, February/March 2000 issue":

"On Tuesday we were eating supper with our African Grey Parrot 'Monty'. I only gave him a little piece of green avocado flesh. I was unaware that avocado is unhealthy for birds. We spent the whole night up with him, giving him supportive care but the toxicity was just too much for his body. He passed away on Thursday morning at 8.00 a.m."

"We would like to let as many people as possible know that avocado is extremely toxic for birds. 'Monty' passed away at the young age of seven years. He had never been sick..."

In an attempt to learn more, I contacted the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and received a reply from Jill Turner, Centre for Economic Botany (website: www.rbgekew.org.uk/ceb/). About the poisoning of birds by avocado pears *Persea americana*, she wrote: "It seems that as long ago as 1989, studies had shown that avocado fruits could kill budgerigars and in 1994, ostriches. There are also many reports of their leaves causing the deaths of various grazing and foraging animals." Adding later: "Some humans also have to avoid avocados - those who have a latex allergy may experience a reaction to them, sometimes severe enough to provoke anaphylactic shock."

She was kind enough to print out three pages of information retrieved from the website - www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov - of the US National Library of Medicine. In one experiment, avocados of two varieties were mashed and administered to eight canaries and eight budgerigars. Six of the latter and one of the canaries died within 24-47 hours. Results indicated that avocados are highly toxic to budgerigars and less toxic to canaries. Post mortem findings observed in some birds included subcutaneous edema in the pectoral area and hydropericardium. (Avocado (*Persea americana*) intoxication in caged birds. Hargis, A. M., Stauber, E., Casteel, S., Eitner, D. Washington Animal Disease Laboratory, College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University. *J Am Med Assoc.* 1989 Jan 1;194 (1):64-6).

In another experiment pairs of budgerigars were given samples of plants

considered potentially toxic to pet birds. Of the 19 plants tested, only six induced clinical signs of illness; these plants were yew *Taxus media*, oleander *Nerium oleander*, clematis *Clematis* sp., avocado *Persea americana*, black locust *Robinia pseudoacacia* and Virginia creeper *Parthenocissus quinquefolio*. (Evaluation of selected plants for acute toxicosis in budgerigars. Shrophire, C. M., Stauber, E., Arai, M. Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine and Surgery, College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 1992 Apr. 1;200 (7):936-9).

Nine out of 120 ostriches died from congestive heart failure within 96 hours of ingesting avocado leaves and immature fruits in an avocado orchard containing Hass and Fuerte cultivars. (Cardiomyopathy in ostriches (*Struthio camelus*) due to avocado (*Persea americana* var. *guatemalensis*) intoxication. Burger, W. P., Naude, T. W., van Rensburg, I. B., Botha, C. J., Pienaar, A. C. Ostrich Research Centre, Oudtshoorn, Republic of South Africa. *J S Afr Vet Assoc.* 1994 Sep;65(3):113-8).

Jill Turner also sent photocopies of the page-and-a-half on the Avocado from a comparatively new book, *Toxic Plants Dangerous to Humans and Animals* by Jean Bruneton, Professor of Pharmacognosy at the University of Angers (France) School of Pharmacy. According to this the toxicity appears to be associated with only the Guatemala variety, its cultivars (e.g. Hass, Anaheim, Reed) and the Fuerte cultivar (*drymifolia* x *guatemalensis*). The exact nature of the toxic substance was unknown for a long time but, in 1994, a method was published for assessing avocado toxicity. The toxin is in fact an ester of a C₂₁ fatty alcohol, (2R)-(12Z, 15Z)-2-hydroxy-4-oxoheneicosa-12,15-dienol acetate, already isolated in 1975.

There is no known antidote. The onset of edema is an indication for prescribing corticosteroids and diuretics.

On the subject of humans and avocados, the author writes: "...those patients treated with some MAO inhibitors (monoamine oxidase inhibitors) must exercise moderation" and cites the example of a 35 year old man undergoing this type of treatment who had a hypertensive crisis after eating four avocados that must have been very ripe. He concludes: "This incident was probably induced by the fact that avocado contains a large quantity of tyramine, an amine normally degraded by the MAO."

Jill Turner concluded her letter: "In view of the personal and monetary value of parrots, other caged birds and dogs to their owners, the dangers of feeding avocado pears to these animals should be more widely known."

BOOK REVIEWS

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

One of the most poignant books you are ever likely to read *Hope is the thing with feathers* - is a unique account of the extinction of six North American bird species. It is not a cold scientific record but an imaginative and thoughtful book. Christopher Cokinos is an award-winning author and a professor of English at Kansas State University. One September afternoon in Kansas he saw an escaped parrot and this led him to research the extinct Carolina Parakeet, which once coloured the sky "like an atmosphere of gems".

His research prompted him to ask: "How could we have lost and forgotten so beautiful a bird?" In an attempt to answer that question and in an effort to make certain that we never again forget this species, he set about writing an account of the demise of this parakeet, plus the five other species. His painstaking research has resulted in this fascinating book, illustrated with black and white photographs and other pictures of extinct species and historical events. The most shocking one (though doubtless commonplace at the time) depicts a woman's hat decorated with a dead Carolina Parakeet. Surely the saddest one is that which shows a Mr Bryan with his pet Carolina in 1906. Like any tame conure, it is sitting on its owner's chest, snuggling close to his face. Only 12 years later, the last Carolina Parakeet known to exist died at Cincinnati Zoo. She is said to have died from grief after her mate of 32 years passed away.

Today it might seem incredible that the opportunity to breed this species in captivity was neglected but times were different then and the word conservation was unknown in the context we use it today. Among the many fascinating stories that surround the decline and demise of the Carolina Parakeet is that of film purported to have been taken in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp in 1937. When this colour film was presented in 1970 at a meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, the audience watched carefully, but no one could say if the birds depicted were Carolina Parakeets.

I suspect that it is more likely that they were escaped aviary birds of another closely related species of *Aratinga* conure, such as the Jendaya. Whenever I read about the Carolina Parakeet, the omission of one fact that would surely be obvious to anyone closely associated with parrots, always surprises me. The Carolina was so obviously a *Aratinga* conure, yet everyone seems to have missed the fact that as long ago as 1826 this parakeet was classified with the *Aratinga* species. The name of the genus was changed to *Conurus*, then back to *Aratinga*. Probably towards the end of the nineteenth century, someone decided to change the generic name of the Carolina to

Conuropsis. Soon after this the species became extinct - and the name stuck. Despite all his research, Cokinos makes no mention of this. Generally speaking *Aratinga* conures are not difficult to breed in captivity. If they had lingered on for a few more years, could they have been saved by captive breeding? Perhaps not. Some species are doomed when their numbers fall below a certain level because they needed large flocks as a stimulus to breeding, as in the case of the Passenger Pigeon.

The other species covered are the Heath Hen, Passenger Pigeon, Labrador Duck and Great Auk. Finally, there is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, so recently extinct that it is included in that indispensable volume *Threatened Birds of the World*. However, as Christopher Cokinos comments, it "may not be extinct although it has vanished from the gaze of all but a few..."

With interest in extinct species being rekindled by a couple of recent TV series, this book is a timely addition to the literature. It should be read by everyone who cares about the plight of birds today, though I must admit that I found it depressing. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing the start of an era of mass extinction in which many more birds species will be lost. Perhaps these tragic stories, so skillfully related, will help to prevent the extinction of another half dozen (6) bird species. Some are perilously near the edge and this book might provide the inspiration that will save them.

Hope is a thing with feathers (ISBN 1-58542-006-9), 360 pages, is published by P. Tarcher/Putnam of New York.

Rosemary Low

CHATTER OF CHOUGHS

OK, here is a break from aviculture. Or, perhaps not, for aviculturists look after birds because they love birds, not aviculture! So, in this respect, we are no different to birdwatchers or ornithologists. It is just that we study them at closer quarters, and notice different things. To find out about life patterns. Protect them. Breed them. Secure them. Pamper them.

So this is a book that will not worry you or make you feel inadequate. No feeling of "Oh, if I'd done that..." or "Maybe I should do that next season" or "Should I try this species or that species?" Instead you can sit back, and in odd moments dip into this delightful anthology of poems, essays and cartoons, all dedicated to the Red-billed Chough, or as many of us still think of it, the Cornish Chough.

When I imply that it would not make you feel inadequate, I should perhaps say that it may make you feel a little literately inadequate, for this slim volume of 128 pages is chocker with charming, amusing contributions. All of a very high standard, by contributors who are all connected with St

Edmund Hall, Oxford - which has four Choughs on its coat-of-arms (to find out why you will have to get the book!). The contributors include Terry Jones (of Monty Python) and renowned poets, including Tom Paulin, Kevin Crossley-Holland, John Powell Ward, David Constantine, Bernard O'Donoghue and Jenny Lewis. So this might be temptation enough.

The abundant illustrations come in a wide range of styles, some which may not totally impress our esteemed Editor, but all are funny, clever or evocative. Some of the cartoons remind me of Guy Troughton's work in those great little Whittet Books.

And when the entertaining is done, there's a heap of learning too. Everything you never knew you wanted to know about the history, folklore and mythology of this remarkable bird. Short on natural history perhaps but, like I say, that's not the point. It is a break from all that. And I doubt you will find a more treasured one.

Chatter of Choughs, A St Edmund Hall Anthology, is published by Signal Books Ltd., Oxford. The softback edition is priced £10 and the hardback £20. Copies are available from Lucy Newlyn, St Edmund Hall, Oxford OX1 4AR, UK (website: www.seh.ox.ac.uk).

Dr Richard Meyer

HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD

If anything, number six of this monumental series is more stunning than its predecessors. Of course it helps to have a volume devoted almost entirely to some of the world's most colourful and spectacular birds - kingfishers, bee-eaters, rollers, trogons and hornbills among them. By contrast with these dandies, the mousebirds look positively drab.

The sheer volume of high quality material available for this latest volume presented the publishers with a considerable dilemma and they have devoted some two pages to explain how they resolved the problem. The material in question has been split into two parts - Volume 6 (Mousebirds to Hornbills) will be followed in April by Volume 7 (Jacamars to Woodpeckers), with passerines starting at what will be Volume 8. As a result of these changes we are not quite at the half-way stage of what was planned originally as a 12 volume work, but has recently been increased to 16. The publishers looked at various options and eventually decided to poll readers in order to ascertain their views: (a) that future volumes should continue to be as comprehensively illustrated as possible or (b) to cut costs where necessary by including fewer photographs and illustrating fewer subspecies on the colour plates, as well as imposing strict word limits on authors. Ninety-three percent of readers polled want future volumes to continue to be as comprehensive and fully illustrated as possible, therefore nine volumes will be devoted to passerines.

In Volume 6 the HBW team has succeeded in carrying out a trial on a long-term aim of encouraging good photographers to go out in search of photos of species for which it has none of publishable quality. "On this occasion, Brian Coates very kindly agreed, at very short notice and with very modest funding, to travel to Sulawesi in search of photos for some elusive species. We are delighted to report that the results of this experiment include a fine series of shots, of which we are very happy to be publishing a selection in this and forthcoming volumes", said a spokesman. Examples of Brian's work can be found among the kingfishers, rollers and hornbills.

Layout remains the same of course, with lengthy family introductions providing much general information on Systematics, Morphological Aspects, Habitat, General Habits, Voice, Food and Feeding, Breeding, Movements, Relationship with Man, Status and Conservation. Species accounts, which are accurate and up to date, are provided under the headings, Taxonomy, Subspecies and Distribution, Descriptive Notes, Habitat, Food and Feeding, Breeding, Movements, Status and Conservation, plus a short bibliography appropriate to individual species. The 45 colour plates - the work of Richard Allen, Francesc Jutglar, Lluís Sanz, Norman Arlott, Douglas Pratt, Jan Wilczur, Hilary Burn, Chris Rose and Tim Worfolk maintain the high standards achieved in previous volumes. As usual, distinctive subspecies are also illustrated.

The photographs in Volume 6 provide irrefutable evidence of the importance of maintaining the status quo. They are of outstanding quality and while I have not checked every caption I believe the emphasis is solidly on the work of field rather than studio photographers. My personal favourites (not in any particular order) are: Resplendent Quetzal at nest (p. 95); Southern Ground Hornbills feeding on zebra (p. 469); Von der Decken's Hornbills with Dwarf Mongoose and Superb Starling (p. 451); Green Woodhoopoes at nest (p. 419); Long-tailed Ground-Roller (p. 384) and Red-faced Mousebird drinking (p. 69). Just about every facet of behaviour is captured in more than 380 photographs. That is what sets apart the photographs in all volumes, the fact that subjects are invariably engaged in activity of one kind or another - feeding, preening, displaying and rearing young.

As usual this is as good as you are likely to get. It is now simply a question of looking forward to further superlative volumes, for everyone who has made the acquaintance of those so far published will surely want to complete the set!

Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 6, Mousebirds to Hornbills, is priced £110. Further information, samples and ordering are available online at: www.hbw.com. Lynx Edicions have a new address: Montseny, 8, E-08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain. Tel: +34 93 594 77 10/ Fax: +34 93 592 09 69/E-mail: lynx@hbw.com

Frank Woolham

NEWS & VIEWS

PITTA BRED

Burgers' Zoo, Arnhem, the Netherlands, last year bred an amazing 26 Hooded Pittas *Pitta sordida*, of which just three failed to survive. Other birds bred included 17 Black-footed or African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus*, of which just three failed to survive and 30 Striated Herons *Butorides striatus* of which two failed to survive.

It also acted as a 'dating centre' for Great Hornbills *Buceros bicornis* from Amsterdam, Antwerp, Arnhem and Rotterdam Zoos, at the end of which some were re-paired. There were approximately 100 birds when the Great Hornbill EEP (European Species Survival Programme) was initiated 10 years ago, since when 30 adults have died and 15 chicks have hatched, of which 10 have survived. Only a couple of pairs have bred consistently, and their young may become over-represented in the near future.

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FROM WCS ANNUAL REPORT

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) (website: www.wcs.org), New York, manages the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks, led by the flagship Bronx Zoo. Parrots and pheasants at the Bronx have been trained to perch on a scale, eliminating the need to catch the birds to weigh them and its flock of young American or Caribbean Flamingos *P. ruber ruber* have been trained to enter their shelter at the sound of a whistle.

At the WCS's Queens Zoo construction began on a Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha* exhibit, and the zoo recorded its first successful hatching of this species (one of six during 2001 in the USA). Kori Bustards *Ardeotis kori* were introduced to the St. Catherines Wildlife Survival Center in the late 1980s in the hope that the hot Georgia climate and open spaces would be conducive to breeding. Despite males drumming and performing breeding and territorial displays though, no eggs were laid. However, following studies of bustard habitat in Namibia, changes were made to the birds' enclosure and in June 2001, an egg was laid and artificially incubated. It hatched in July.

A female Maleo *Macrocephalon maleo* dug her nest in the sandy substrate beside the artificial site created for her. As a result the single egg was undetected during the incubation period lasting 80 days, and the sudden appearance of the chick came as a great surprise. It represents the second generation of Maleos hatched at the center, the only collection to hatch this species from Sulawesi in captivity.

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WITHOUT A BIOLOGY DEGREE BETWEEN THEM

Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* is almost certainly extinct in the wild, the last remaining male not having been seen since October 2000. A female released into his area in 1995 died after hitting a power line a few months after being released.

All but the most knowledgeable will, I suspect, be surprised to learn that there are as many as just over 60 of these birds living in captivity, which would seem to be more than enough to establish a captive breeding programme, with the aim of eventually reintroducing this species back into the wild. However, Rosemary Low points out that genetically the pool is very small because so many are offspring from probably just one or two pairs belonging to Antonio de Dios in the Philippines - and are therefore related. Furthermore, many of the captive birds are owned by strong-willed, wealthy individuals, who seem unwilling to cooperate on terms other than their own.

This was the main theme of the cover story of *Times 2*, a section of *The Times* newspaper (Friday, January 11th 2002). A colour photo of a pair of Spix's Macaws adorned the cover, the species the subject of what was described as a story about "The good, the rich and the egotistical - Why human vanity threatens the survival of the world's rarest bird", with Giles Whittell's investigation on pages 1 & 2 headlined "Battle of the bird breeders".

Things came to a head when contrary to an agreement signed at a meeting in Houston, Texas, in 1999, whereby all transfers of Spix's Macaws between breeders or zoos would be approved by the Permanent International Committee for the Recovery of Spix's Macaw (CPRAA) set up by the Brazilian Government, Antonio de Dios of Birds International Inc., in the Philippines, transferred four macaws to the collection of Sheikh Saoud Mohammed Bin Ali Al-Thani, a member of the ruling family of Qatar, who is not a signatory to the CPRAA agreement. Amongst other rare birds, the Sheikh is also said to own several Lear's Macaws *Anodorhynchus leari*. Recently, Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation, owned by the Sheikh, advertised for a Bird Curator, whose qualifications were to include familiarity with the breeding of parrots, in addition to which, a knowledge of birds of paradise, would be appreciated!

What seems to have especially incensed Wolfgang Kiessling, owner of Loro Parque, is that the transfer was allowed or perhaps even encouraged by Natascha Schischakin, at the time a representative of Houston Zoo, who for most of the 1990s served as the International Studbook Keeper for this species. Recently relieved of her Spix's Macaw conservation duties, she is quoted as considering the home that the Sheikh has created for his macaws "impeccable" and, Dr Nigel Collar, of BirdLife International, is said to have



Ellis, John A. 2002. "London Zoo Review 2001." *The Avicultural magazine* 108(1), 32–44.

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