

LORIKEET EXHIBITS IN UK ZOOS

by Rosemary Low

I bought my first lorries in 1971 and have specialised in these birds ever since. Indeed, my oldest bird, a Yellow-streaked Lory *Chalcopsitta sintillata*, which has now been with me for more than 35 years, originates from that decade. As Curator of Birds at Loro Parque, Tenerife, and Palmitos Park, Gran Canaria, during the late 1980s and 1990s, I was very fortunate to have in my care almost every species of lory in aviculture, excluding certain Australian species which were not permitted to be exported.

I have seen the popularity of lorries and lorikeets in aviculture rise and fall like a big dipper. In the late 1970s, when many species were imported commercially for the first time, they reached the height of popularity. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when dealers brought in large numbers of wild-caught birds at low prices, many breeders sold up. The birds went to dealers who sold them abroad. Gradually the numbers in the UK fell to the low level of the current decade.

In the early 1990s, some zoos in the USA followed the example of San Diego Zoo and set up lorikeet exhibits where the public could feed the birds, which would descend onto their hands to take nectar from tiny pots. The public bought this food and as a result the idea that money can be made from such exhibits gradually spread to the UK. New lorikeet exhibits, usually with Rainbow (Swainson's) Lorikeets *Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus* or Green-naped Lorikeets *T. h. haematodus*, are still being opened.

Unfortunately, some of these leave a lot to be desired. It seems that lorikeets are being exploited - the commercial aspect apparently taking priority over proper management. As an example of good management, Paradise Park in Cornwall can hardly be bettered. Indeed, staff from other lorikeet exhibits have visited Paradise Park to learn the correct method. This approach is to be recommended, especially if they act on what they have learned.

Source of stock

Quarantine methods

There are some important lessons that need to be learned by any zoo that is considering opening a lorikeet exhibit. At Paradise Park, Curator David Woolcock had the good sense to set up pairs of Rainbow and Green-naped Lorikeets well in advance of the exhibit opening and to breed the required birds. Indeed, from the initial 10 Rainbow Lorikeets acquired from a UK breeder in 2004, well over 60 young have been reared. These young are used in the exhibit, not the breeding pairs. The advantage was that the birds were

known to be healthy and could be trained to take food from an early age. The disadvantage was that large numbers were not available initially.

What other zoos have done when seeking to open a lorikeet exhibit is enquire about how many birds were available from UK breeders and, finding that sufficient numbers could not be acquired from a single source, at least three UK zoos acquired birds from a dealer in the Netherlands. These birds had come from various collections. The result was that these zoos received birds that tested positive for PBFD (psittacine beak and feather disease) and/or polyomavirus. One zoo decided to euthanase all these birds. In the same quarantine space, however, there were at least eight birds from a reliable breeder in the UK. They were in perfect health, but they too were euthanased. The breeder was devastated to learn this. A zoo should know better than to bring in birds before another group has completed its quarantine.

At another UK zoo

At another UK zoo, when several of its newly arrived birds tested positive for PBFD, it was decided to manage the flock as if it is in permanent quarantine. Keepers who look after these birds do not enter the aviaries of other birds, use foot dips at the entrance and change their boots and overalls when they clean out the lorikeet exhibit. It is to be hoped that none of these lorikeets will be allowed to leave the collection. I suspect that even disease testing is not adequate to identify diseased birds that could unknowingly be sold, because it depends on birds shedding the virus at the time they are tested.

Several lorikeets at this zoo died within the first two months and on autopsy were found to have the adenovirus. The risk involved in bringing in lorikeets that have not been blood-tested for disease cannot be overstated. Refusal to buy birds that have not been disease-tested does at least send out a message to the seller that the disease risk is being taken seriously.

Feeding of lorikeets in zoo exhibits

Another serious concern is that relating to the quality of food offered to the lorikeets. In one case, the manager of a lorikeet exhibit admitted that the birds were not in good feather and the breeding results were very poor. On enquiring about the food, I understood why. They were being fed a commercial product of inferior quality. Unfortunately, many lorikeets are fed this food because it is one of the least expensive and most readily available in the UK. Good quality lory foods are not cheap.

At Paradise Park an excellent mixture is made from a variety of nutritious ingredients and the staff there will readily share the recipe with anyone who enquires.

Does profit come first?

Despite the disease problems, the poor feather condition of the birds and poor breeding results, the management of one lory exhibit was delighted because it had proved extremely profitable through the sale of pots of nectar. I would appeal to all zoos that keep these delightful birds in walk-through aviaries to consider the welfare of their lorikeets first. Some zoos are doing a great disservice to lory keeping in the UK and to aviculture in general by entrusting these birds to the care of inadequately trained staff who often do not understand their requirements and whose superiors have not taken the trouble to find out what these birds need.

Warning

Lories and lorikeets are among the most aggressive birds and cannot normally be kept in a colony. The two subspecies mentioned are exceptions. Some zoos have, despite advice to the contrary, set up exhibits using several lory species - because it looks more colourful. This is irresponsible because it inevitably ends in deaths.

One zoo claims that young birds of various species can be kept together. This is another myth because even young lorikeets will kill those of another species. It saddens me greatly at a time when the numbers of lories and lorikeets in aviculture are declining that they are misused in this way - to say nothing of terrified birds being hounded and attacked by others and fatally injured.

Conclusion

Those considering opening lorikeet exhibits need to think long-term. The recommended procedure is to acquire young pairs and set them up for breeding - one pair per aviary - and use the young in the exhibit. These young birds will be much easier to train to take food from the public than birds (often of unknown age) acquired from a dealer. Even more importantly, this eliminates the risk of starting the exhibit with diseased birds.

The sixth annual Lory Conference, which was organised by Rosemary and Ventura Events and held at Twycross Zoo in Warwickshire on June 12th, was attended by 51 enthusiasts and was a great success. If you have any questions about keeping and breeding lories and lorikeets and, specifically about their diets, I am sure that Rosemary or David Woolcock will be pleased to answer your questions.

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THE CHESTNUT-BACKED THRUSH *Zoothera dohertyi*

by Gary Bralsford

The Chestnut-backed Thrush *Zoothera dohertyi* is an Indonesian species found on the Lesser Sunda islands of Lombok, Sumbawa, Sumba and Flores and in west Timor. It inhabits primary forest, mist forest and woodland, and can also be found in mountainous regions up to 1,050m-2,300m (approx. 3,500ft-7,500ft) above sea level. It is said to be quite common on Flores, but rare in other areas. It is usually found living alone, with the male and female coming together only during the breeding season, which is from August-early September, especially on Flores.

I purchased my first pair of these thrushes in February 2002. I obtained the pair from Dave Armer in Preston and the following year succeeded in breeding this species. It was the first time that the Chestnut-backed Thrush had been bred in the UK. My account of the breeding along with a photo of an adult bird was published in Vol.109, No.4, pp.150-153 (2003).

It is not an easy species to sex and DNA sexing is the most reliable way of ensuring that you have a true pair. Having kept a number of pairs of this species, however, and having since 2003 bred 26 young, I believe, I can now spot slight differences between the male and female. Males, I have noticed, are more brown than chestnut on the back. Females are larger and have more white on the belly, as well as being more chestnut on the back. I have heard it said by some breeders that nestlings can differ, with males being black and females being pink, but I have never noticed this.

There were not many Chestnut-backed Thrushes in the UK in 2002. There were just a few aviculturists mostly with single unpaired birds. Apparently, Dave Campbell had brought in several pairs in 2001 and, in 2003, a small number were imported from a dealer in Germany. Through my friend Bob Jewiss, I managed to obtain a further two birds to pair with those I had already bred.

I later sold some of my birds to Bob Jewiss and also sold a pair to Jim Jerrard. The latter described his mixed fortunes breeding this species in Vol.113, No.4, p.156 (2007). One or two zoos and bird gardens had Chestnut-backed Thrushes, but were often uncertain as to the sex of their birds. Andrew Owen, when he was at Waddesdon Manor Aviary, bought two of the young I had bred, to pair with birds they had at Waddesdon. These pairings were successful and further young were bred there and a Special Interest Group was established by Andrew, who collated breeding results and put breeders in contact with each other to arrange exchanges and pair-up single birds.

Andrew is, of course, now Curator of Birds at Chester Zoo and, because of



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