

## THE PRESIDENT'S GARDEN PARTY 1998 & 1999

by Stewart Pyper

The 1998 President's Garden Party was held on Sunday July 12th and that for 1999 on Sunday July 11th, by kind invitation of our President, Miss Ruth Ezra, and Vice President, Raymond Sawyer. There was an immense contrast in the weather for these two events - the 1998 garden party was held in overcast conditions, following a morning of incessant rain, while this year it was a hot day which made viewing the birds difficult, as they hid away until after tea, which was the best time to view them. In 1998 we were



**Avicultural Society President, Miss Ruth Ezra, was present when Chairman, Ken Lawrence (left), made the presentation to Raymond of a painting of 15 species bred at Cobham**

shown many interesting birds, including Blue-bellied Rollers which had bred and achieved what is probably the UK first breeding of this species. The pair bred again this year, and a second pair also bred. A detailed account of those breedings is being prepared for publication in the magazine. In 1997, I wrote about a pair of Red-billed Oxpeckers. In 1998, there were six at Cobham, which had hatched chicks but failed to rear them. This year there are two, four of them having gone to Birdworld, near Farnham. Waders, including Avocets, Black-necked Stilts and Masked Plovers, bred well in 1998 and again this year.

One of the highlights amongst the doves and pigeons in 1998 was that all three pairs of Bartlett's Bleeding Heart Pigeons bred successfully. This year we saw more young. In the waterfall aviary there is a group of Pink-



necked Fruit Doves, a species I cannot recall having seen before. Our member Derek Goodwin, in *Pigeons and Doves of the World* (Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History), 1970), was unable to provide much information about this species. This must have changed now though, because it is being bred in collections such as those at San Diego and Riverbanks Zoo & Botanical Gardens, South Carolina. It is a little larger than a Barbary Dove. The head, neck and upper breast are bright purplish pink, deepening to foxglove red on the middle of the breast, which is bordered by a white and then a greenish black band; the belly is grey. The back is green.

There appeared to be seven Carmine Bee-eaters which have been provided with new nest tunnels in an effort to encourage them to breed, but to date nothing has happened. The collection also includes Red-throated and White-throated Bee-eaters. I was really taken by a Garnet Pitta, which unfortunately was not easy to see. It is another species I cannot recall having seen before. There has been an increase recently in the variety of sunbirds being kept at Cobham, with the return of old favourites such as the Golden-winged, Bronze, Malachite, Scarlet-tufted Malachite (which Raymond calls *johnstoni*) and Tacazze, plus the Splendid, Beautiful, Scarlet-chested and a wonderful Mrs Gould's. The latter looked magnificent, displaying its full range of colours as it came forward to show itself off. Other nectar-feeders on view included a Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird and a Giant Hummingbird. The latter lives in the waterfall aviary, which is the aviary in which the second pair of Blue-bellied Rollers bred. The Blue-faced Honeyeaters are not breeding at present but the small colony was lovely to watch.

Red-billed Choughs had bred for the second year, after earlier disappointments, which included one surgically sexed pair later proving to be two females! Several collections have this species but breeding results are not very encouraging, while at Cobham they appear to be reproducing well. The Island Thrushes continue to breed, as do the Green Wood Hoopoes and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers. The Keel-billed Toucans have been moved to an aviary at the back in an effort to give them more privacy. As on previous visits, we saw a good selection of starlings, though only the Superb Spreos are breeding at present and appear to be prolific.

These are just a few notes on my personal observations made during the short time I had to look at the birds. There were undoubtedly birds which I missed that were seen by others and deserve a mention.

During tea Raymond was presented with a marvellous painting showing 15 species bred at Cobham, which were UK first breedings. The Chairman, Ken Lawrence, also presented a watercolour painting of Frinton-on-Sea to our much loved President, who kindly donated all the monies from the ticket sales, amounting to approximately £1,200 (about US\$2,000), to the Society's funds and for this we are all most grateful.



## LETTERS

### Saving the Endangered Orange-bellied Parrakeet (*Avicultural Magazine* 104, 2: 49-52) by J.R. Hodges

We wish to respond to this article on behalf of the Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team and all who have supported our endeavours over the last 15 years. The article contained some surprising inaccuracies and gives a false impression of the work we have done and the difficulties we still face. The team co-operated with Hodges (providing light plane transport for one of his visits to Melaleuca) and we are disappointed that he did not check his facts more carefully. The team strongly values input from aviculturists.

In his article, J.R. Hodges raised a number of his personal concerns with the recovery programme, and suggested that some could be solved by fostering more active involvement by aviculturists, and attracting revenue through the sale of captive-bred birds. Such matters have been considered by the team over the years and some of them have been actively implemented. For example, we have two experienced aviculturists on our team (Peter Brown and Len Robinson) as well as zoo staff. We welcome expert advice from aviculturists in relation to husbandry of the captive population. We recognise the obvious value of establishing more than one captive breeding colony and now have three captive colonies (not one or two as claimed), one in Tasmania and two in Victoria, including one with a private aviculturist. Last season a record 54 young birds were reared from a captive population of 83 adults in these three colonies. It is doubtful that such success would have been achieved if the birds had been more dispersed.

The captive breeding programme was instigated mainly as an insurance policy, to keep a healthy stock of captive birds in case the species did not survive in the wild. The programme has been far more integral and useful than that, allowing us to supplement wild stocks in new habitats and to learn much about the potentials and pitfalls of reintroduction by liberating banded birds as acknowledged by Hodges. We believe it has been a success, and although we will always strive for improvement and look at new ideas we do not accept that a radically different approach is needed.

Management of the wild population is the area where improvements really are needed. Here we share Hodges' concern that the species remains critically endangered, and numbers have only increased marginally in the wild since our work began. Nevertheless, some achievements have been made. The previous decline has been arrested, and much remaining habitat has been reserved. Valuable management initiatives have been implemented in much of the birds' summer and winter range, but clearly they have not worked as well as expected and new initiatives need to be tried.



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