

The large and colorful parrot family, which includes the cockatoos, macaws, parakeets, lorries and lovebirds, numbers 316 species. These are distributed throughout the tropics and occasionally in temperate regions. With their large heads, powerful, hooked beaks and short legs, parrots are easily recognizable; and their attractiveness as pets has made them one of the most familiar families of birds.

PARROTS

BY M.A. TRAYLOR, ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF BIRDS
AND E. JOHN PFIFFNER, STAFF ARTIST

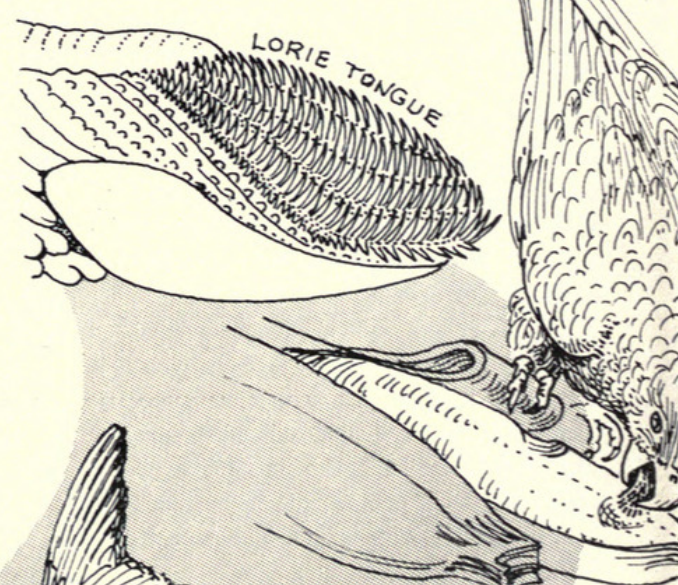
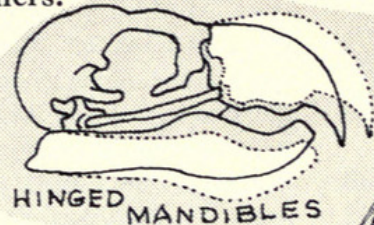
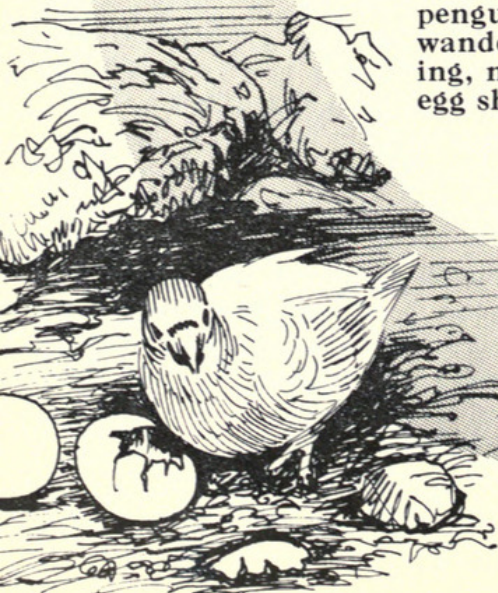


Parrots were mentioned by Greek writers as early as 400 B.C., but the first live birds (probably the Indian Parakeet) were brought into Greece by Alexander the Great's soldiers about 325 B.C. They quickly became popular as pets.

feeding



Parrots may be divided into two groups, those feeding on seeds, nuts and buds and those feeding on fruits and nectar. The former have strong, blunt tongues and powerful bills; this group is best exemplified by the macaws, which are capable of crushing a Brazil nut. The latter types, including the lorries, have brushy tips to the tongue, which they use to lap up soft fruits and nectar. Some parrots have developed quite peculiar tastes: the Kea of New Zealand has become partly carnivorous through feeding on the discarded offal of sheep, and will now sometimes attack and kill live sheep; the Macquarie Island Parakeet lives on an island where there are enormous penguin colonies, and has been seen wandering around the rookeries eating, not the contents, but the empty egg shells.



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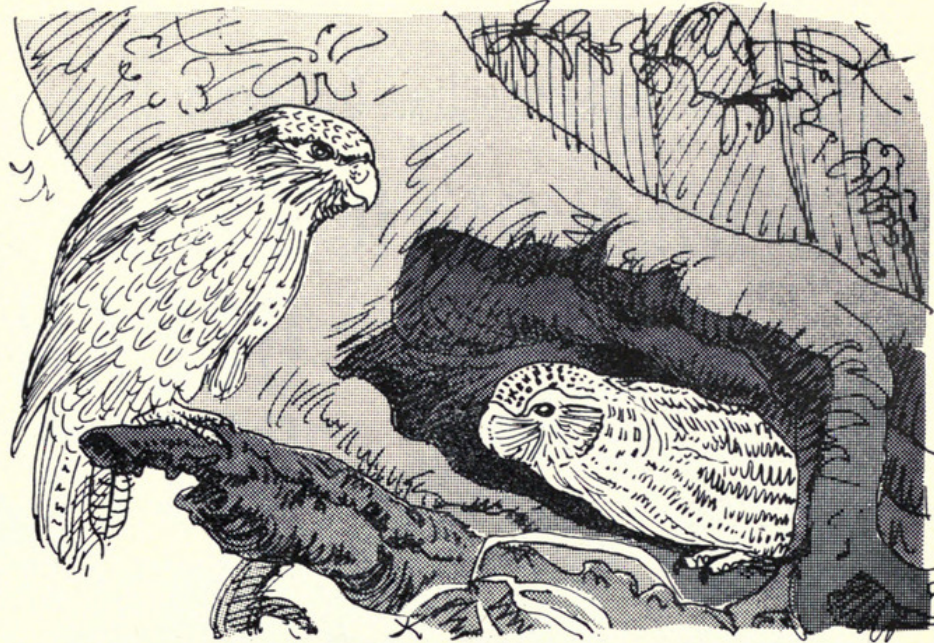
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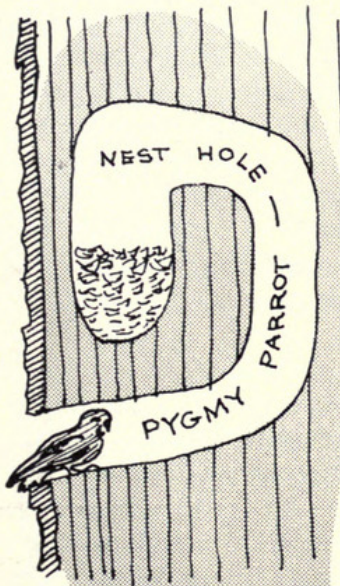
CAW



The only parrot that ever reached the northeastern United States was the yellow-headed Carolina Parakeet. It is now extinct, the last unquestionable record of a wild bird being 1904, while the last zoo bird died at Cincinnati in 1914. The main cause of extirpation was almost certainly persecution by man, but the early settlers should not be judged too harshly since enormous flocks would virtually destroy grain fields and orchards. Now the only United States parrot is the Thick-billed Parrot, which occasionally is found in southern Arizona and New Mexico.



The most aberrant and interesting of the parrots is the flightless Owl Parrot of New Zealand. Before the coming of the white man and his carnivorous pets there were no serious predators on New Zealand, and the Owl Parrot was widespread; now it is confined to the forests of North Island. Here it keeps to dark forest glades, clearing trails along which it forages, and feeding on rootlets, tender twigs and fruits. It occasionally climbs trees, using its rudimentary wings to assist it in hopping from limb to limb.



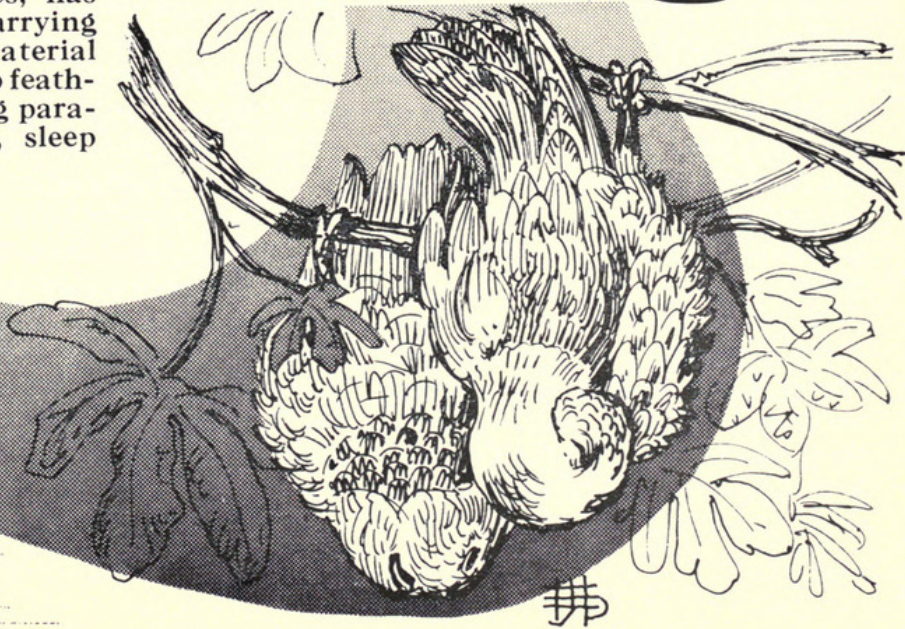
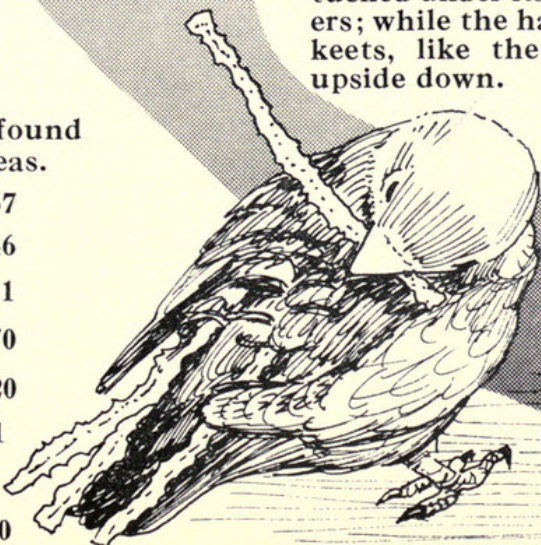
The vast majority of parrots nest in hollow limbs or holes in trees, and less frequently in crevices in rocks. Odd variants occur, however. The Pygmy Parrot of New Guinea, rather than have his tunnel run down from the nest hole, has it run up, so that the nesting chamber is above the entrance. Even more peculiar are the large communal stick nests of the Monk Parrot of South America: not only do several pairs of these parrots nest together, but they have been reported to tolerate ducks and opossums as guests. The Rosy-faced Lovebird, which nests in rock crevices, has the strange habit of carrying strips of nesting material tucked under its rump feathers; while the hanging parakeets, like the bats, sleep upside down.



nesting

of parrots found
native areas.

Australia	57
Guinea	46
India	11
Brazil	70
Africa	20
America	1
Europe and Asia	0





Traylor, Melvin A. 1960. "Parrots." *Bulletin* 31(10), 4-5.

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