

Australian Lorikeets

by Stan Sindel
Sydney, Australia

In Australia, there are six species and one subspecies of lorikeets. The subspecies, the Red-collared Lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus rubritorquis*, is quite distinct and, for avicultural purposes at least, I feel it should be dealt with as a separate lorikeet.

When one considers the vastness of the Australian continent and the extensive climatic and habitat variations, and the fact that the nearest neighbor, New Guinea, has a wealth of lorikeets, it is surprising how few species we have in Australia.

All Australian species of lorikeets

have extensive ranges, all are doing well within their range, and some species are extending their range, perhaps with the help of aviary escapees.

The lorikeets' presence in an area is totally dependent on the food source. It has often been recorded how the arrival of lorikeets in an area coincides to the day with the flowering of a particular species of native tree. Some species are so reliable in their arrival to and departure from a certain area that they could be termed migratory. Because of this dependence on flowering and fruit bearing trees and shrubs, all species are mainly nomadic, but there are some resident populations in certain areas, of the Rainbow and Scaley-breasted Lorikeets, where a constant food supply is available. This situation is particularly noticeable around our cities where the native food diet is supplemented by the fruits, flowers and seed of introduced flora.

I have been able to observe all species in their native habitat, and have bred all species in captivity.

Rainbow Lorikeet

(*Trichoglossus haematodus haematodus*). Length 12". The sexes are alike in this species.

The Rainbow Lorikeet ranges continuously from the northeastern, through the eastern, to the southeastern half of Australia. It is a very extensive range, and includes a great variation in habitat from rainforest to dry, open Eucalypt forest, to mallee scrubs and mangrove swamps.

Their diet, like their habitat, is quite variable, but mainly consists of pollen, fruits, seeds and vegetable matter, plus a few insects.

This species of lorikeet is doing particularly well in the wild. It has adapted to human habitation, and may be seen on the outskirts of all towns and cities within its range, and is very common around Sydney.

In captivity, this lorikeet is particu-

larly hardy and, unfortunately, because of this it is often kept on a seed diet which usually results in the bird taking fits or suffering paralysis of the legs due to dietary deficiencies. When fed a good, balanced diet, they are very active, long-lived aviary birds.

Rainbow Lorikeets are free breeders and have been known to rear four broods per year, each brood taking three months. They lay two eggs. The incubation period is variable, but takes approximately 23 days, and the chicks fledge in about eight weeks. I prefer to use a nest box for all lorikeets as cleaning, which is often necessary during the rearing period, is easier than in the case of a log. I use fine wood shavings for nesting material, and find it is reasonably absorbent and easy to clean from the box.

Incubation is carried out by the female in all Australian lorikeets.

Red-collared Lorikeet

(*Trichoglossus haematodus rubritorquis*). Length 12". The sexes are alike in this species.

The Red-collared Lorikeet ranges over the northwestern section of Australia. I have seen this species mainly in open forest country, but it may be found wherever food is available.

Their diet is similar to the Rainbow Lorikeet but, due to their tropical range, their food is more of a tropical nature. They are particularly fond of the fruit of the cultivated mango.

I saw this species constantly in large numbers, so I would say their status in the wild is good.

In captivity, this species is similar to the Rainbow Lorikeet, perhaps not quite as hardy or quite as good a breeder, but it is still capable of rearing four broods a year. They lay two eggs and the incubation period and rearing time is similar to the Rainbow Lorikeet.

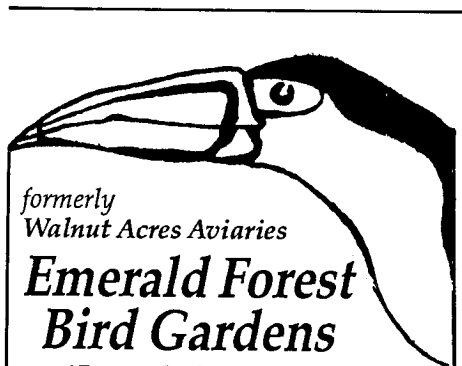
Scaley-breasted Lorikeet

(*Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus*). Length 9-1/2". The sexes are alike in this species.

This lorikeet ranges over northeastern and eastern Australia in forest and scrub land, and most habitat where there is flowering trees. It is often seen in mixed flocks in the company of Rainbows.

Their diet is similar to that of Rainbow Lorikeets with a little more preference for pollen and some native seeds.

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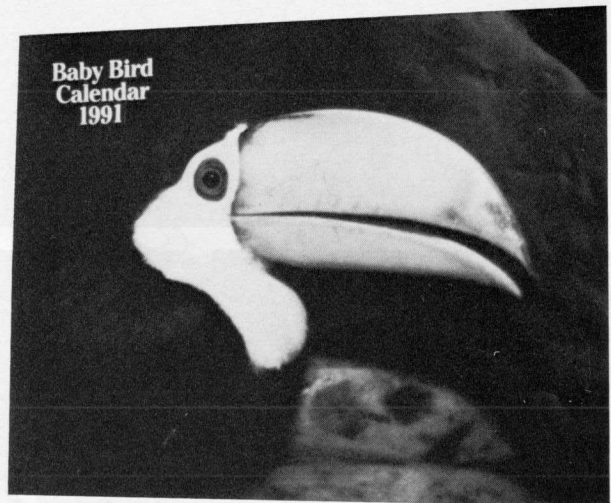
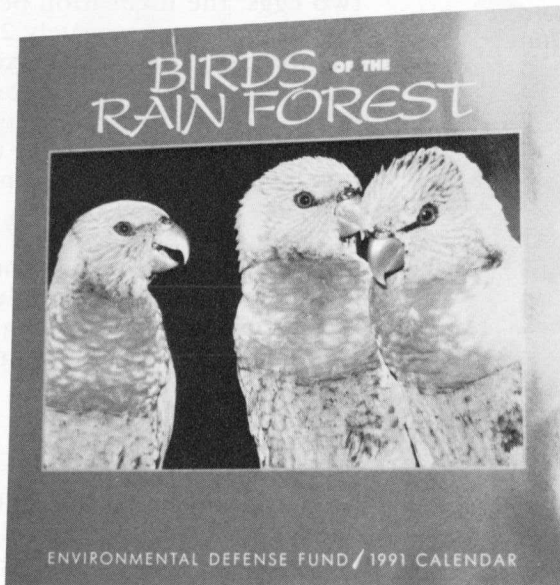
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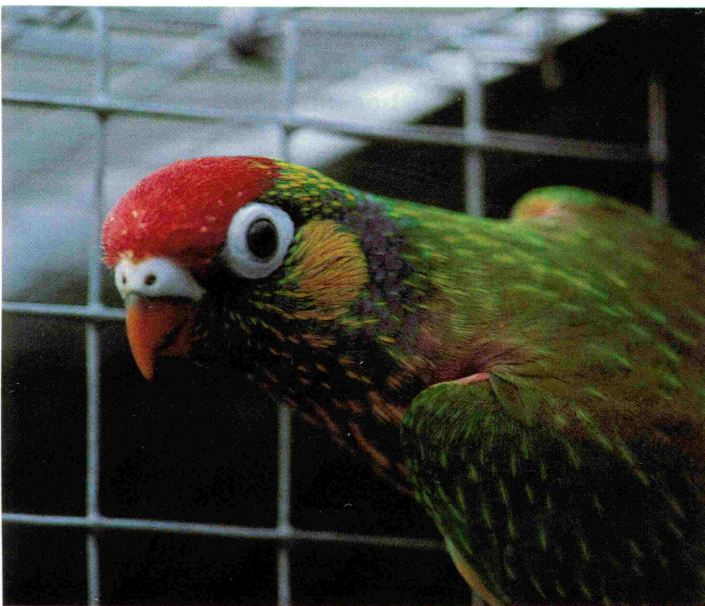
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The Red-collared Lorikeet is one of many subspecies of the Rainbow Lorikeet. This race is found in northern Australia.



This adult pair of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets stand guard over their natural log nest.



The small, colorful Varied Lorikeet is found in northern Australia and is rarely found in American aviculture.

their range, and are becoming more numerous in the Sydney area. I recently observed Scaly-breasted Lorikeets in the suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, where apparently an isolated colony exists.

This lorikeet does well in aviaries, and is quite a free breeder. They lay two eggs, the incubation period is variable, but approximately 22 days, and the chicks spend approximately eight weeks in the nest. They will often have two or sometimes three clutches consecutively, but usually stop breeding in the late summer and autumn.

This is the only species of Australian lorikeet in which mutations have been recorded, namely blue and olive. I am currently working on the olive mutation, which is dominant.

Varied Lorikeet

(*Trichoglossus versicolor*). Length 7". This is the only species of Australian lorikeet which is dimorphic, the males being brighter in color and having more wine color on the chest.

The Varied Lorikeet's range is tropical northern Australia. I have seen this species in large flocks in dry, open forest country and in the trees bordering dry water courses, feeding on the pollen of Blood-wood trees, the Bohemia tree and Melaleucas. This species is totally dependent on pollen, vegetable matter, fruit and



Huge flocks of lorikeets, mainly Swainson's and Scaly-breasted, are attracted by food put out by the Currumbin Sanctuary which is near Brisbane, Australia. This is a wonderful tourist attraction as many thousands of lorikeets from the wild come to feed at the feeding stations set at certain times of the day.

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insects, and I doubt that it ever eats seed of any kind.

The Varied Lorikeet is numerous within its range, and a particular section of the population I have observed over the last 20 years appears to be migratory. Their arrival coincides with the flowering of the Blood-wood trees; they stay in the area to breed, and depart four or five months later.

In captivity, I feel this species is the most difficult of the Australian lorikeets to maintain. They have adapted well to the suspended cage system and, although aviary numbers are low, I am hoping to see gradual increases. The clutch size is three to five eggs, incubation period approximately 21 days, and the rearing period is about five weeks. It is strictly an early spring breeder in the Sydney area.

This species of lorikeet has been shifted from one genus to another by various authors. Joseph Forshaw classes it as a *Trichoglossus* and Rosemary Low classes it as a *Glossopsitta*. The bird resembles neither genus and has too many distinctive features of its own, and I believe it should be in a monotypic genus. It is the only lorikeet with a white eye ring, and the time spent in the nest by the young is much less than any other Australian lorikeet.

Musk Lorikeet

(*Glossopsitta concinna*). Length 9". The sexes are alike in this species.

The Musk Lorikeet ranges through eastern and southeastern Australia and Tasmania wherever there are flowering trees and shrubs.

Their diet is similar to the *Trichoglossus*, but they are more dependent on pollen, fruits, vegetable matter and insects and less on seeds.

This species is quite plentiful within its range, particularly in the southern parts. It is often seen in the company of other species of lorikeets.

In aviaries, this species breeds well, it lays two eggs, has an incubation period of approximately 22 days, and the chicks spend about seven weeks in the nest. They are strictly early spring breeders.

I have often bred this species in large, mixed aviaries, but I have found they do better in suspended cages, a pair to a cage.

Through hybridization with the olive Scaley-breasted Lorikeet, I have produced an olive Musk Lorikeet. I

hope to produce olives in all the Australian lorikeets using the same technique, as all hybrids between Australian lorikeets appear to be fertile.

Little Lorikeet

(*Glossopsitta pusilla*). They are the smallest of the Australian lorikeets, being 6" in length. The sexes are alike in this species.

They range over eastern and southeastern Australia in forest and open woodland.

The diet is similar to the Musk Lorikeet but with the total exclusion of seeds.

As with the other lorikeets, it is numerous within its extensive range, but this species has not adapted well to human habitation, as have other species, and is seldom seen in suburbia.

Although not extensively kept in aviaries, it has proved to be a reasonable breeder. I had three pairs nest last season, rearing two clutches of four and one of three. So far, my birds have only been single brooded. They lay three to five eggs, incubation period is approximately 21 days, and they spend six to seven weeks in the nest.

Little Lorikeets are strictly spring breeders in my aviaries. All my pairs are housed in suspended cages eight feet long.

Purple-crowned Lorikeet

(*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*). Length 6-3/4". The sexes are alike.

This lorikeet ranges over southeastern and southwestern Australia where it inhabits Eucalypt forests, open forest, mallee and coastal scrublands.

Their diet is similar to the Little Lorikeet, but the pollen from flowering Eucalypts is preferred.

This species is also plentiful in its range and, due to its nomadic habits, its numbers vary greatly in localities from year to year. They are often seen feeding on flowering trees in and around towns and cities within their range.

The Purple-crowned Lorikeet is becoming a very successful aviary bird. They breed freely and will nest at any time of the year. The clutch consists of three to four eggs, incubation period is approximately 21 days, and they spend about seven weeks in the nest. All my pairs are housed in suspended cages eight feet long.

Housing

I had kept Australian lorikeets for

over 20 years in conventional and large, planted aviaries, but it was not until after I attended the AFA convention at San Diego in 1981 that I started to keep them seriously. At the convention, I heard a lot about, and saw little of, keeping parrots in suspended cages. I immediately realized the advantage of keeping lorikeets under these conditions. Due to the liquid nature of lorikeet droppings, their aviaries soon become very dirty. Wire cages eliminate this problem and very little cleaning is necessary.

Although Australian lorikeets will breed in flock conditions, I find that when they are housed in cages in individual pairs but within sight of other lorikeets, better results are obtained. Like species should not be housed side by side.

The cages I use are eight feet long, two feet three inches wide, and three feet high with a shelter on one end and the nest box fitted externally. Two perches fitted at the extremities of the cage promote maximum flying.

Diet

Australian aviculturists have always associated lorikeets' diet with nectar. Consequently, various sloppy nectar diets have been fed, which soiled the birds' plumage and made their droppings even more liquid. These wet food diets also have the problem of souring in our warm Australian climate.

Recent studies on Australian lorikeets have shown that they eat far more pollen than first thought and they are, in fact, more of a dry food eater.

I have developed a high potency nectar which is rich in vitamins, minerals, animal protein, etc. One tablespoon full (20 ml.) of this nectar is fed per pair per day. This is usually consumed within an hour and not left to sour or be contaminated. The birds also have a dry food available to them at all times, which I feel substitutes for pollen. Each pair is also fed half an apple, a small piece of plain cake and silver beet daily.

Since I have housed my lorikeets in suspended cages and fed a mainly dry diet and the limited nectar, I have had no outbreaks of salmonella infection.

Prior to this feeding method and suspended cage housing, sudden outbreaks of various bacterial infections would inflict periodic losses in my aviaries. Although antibiotics usually control these outbreaks, they do not save those first losses. ●