

Breeding and Preserving the Family Loriidae

by John Vanderhoof
Woodlake, California

I have been raising lories as a hobby since I was seven years old but it is only in the last seven or eight years that it actually became a business. I had not owned any lories for quite a while and happened to obtain a couple of pairs in a trade (that was back when lories were considered messy and hard to take care of). I tried them again at that time and was hooked. I have many more lories now, and have removed all other species to concentrate completely on lories.

In 1985, I heard Stan Sindel (New South Wales, Australia) speak on

Besides a great variety of fruits, lories and lorikeets should be fed a nutritionally balanced nectar. Their tongues are adapted for feeding on nectars and pollens.



Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

Photo by John Vanderhoof



During the early spring and summer, Johnson grass is allowed to grow to high lengths through the bottoms of John Vanderhoof's cages. This is especially enjoyed by the playful lories.

Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson



Lories make excellent foster parents as can be seen by this female Yellow-backed Chattering Lory feeding a baby Purple-capped Lory.

Photos by John Vanderhoof



Lories of the same species are placed in a large, open flight so pair bonding can occur.

A typical cage design with the boot-type nest box used by John Vanderhoof. These are Musschenbroek's Lorikeets.

lories at the AFA convention in San Francisco. He told me about a powdered diet he had been working on for several years and mentioned that it was working very well. I told him I would like to try a dry diet here in this country. I worked with the dry formula about three years and finally put it on the market, primarily because whenever I spoke on lories, everyone was interested in what I fed, and when I mentioned a dry formula, many wanted to buy it.

The powdered diet is what I want to stress at this time. This makes feeding and maintaining these birds much easier. I am sure you have heard how messy lories are . . . you put them into a flight and in two days the place is a mess. That's because they eat a nectar diet. The droppings are like water and they can shoot them horizontally as well as vertically. The powdered diet does thicken up the droppings considerably.

In experimenting to develop a formula conducive to breeding lories, I let the birds tell me what they liked. I have 90 lory cages set up and was able to put ten on this, ten on that formula, etc. Lories are some of the

easiest birds with which to try new foods, because they are so curious.

I experimented with some of the common Green-napes. I set up four pairs I knew had raised young and gave them just the dry diet and water, nothing else. I wanted to see if they would raise babies on it and all four did so. However, I don't recommend feeding the dry diet exclusively to breeding pairs. My pairs have been very successful on a regimen that consists of: 70% dry, 15% nectar, 15% fresh fruit. I now have some birds that have been on the diet for four years and they are doing fine. I have also achieved breeding results into the third generation as of this year.

The formula is a fine flour consistency. I tried pellets and crumbles, and the birds do not like it. This food is more like the pollen from a flower, which is a very fine powder. It is natural for them and may be why they went for it so quickly.

I received one comment that someone lost some lories because of a build-up of food around the beak. After talking with a couple of veterinarians, in their opinion, it could have

been due to an existing candidiasis. So, if you observe an obvious problem such as this, have it checked.

One point I would like to make is that some of the varieties, such as the Stella's, the Fairies, and the Duyvenbodes, are a bit more reluctant to go to the new food than others. These birds may lose some weight initially. When the weather is really cold, I add some sweet nectar to their diet. Without the nectar, you could have some birds lose weight. The dry formula may not contain enough carbohydrates for extreme cold conditions. The birds begin to lose weight. The problem doesn't seem to occur in the summertime. Lories are so active that the nectar just goes right through them. They need more carbohydrates than seed eaters.

I use the same product for hand feeding. I just add applesauce and water and heat it up. It makes it easy to wean the babies; they are still eating the same food. I just remove the water. My purpose in developing the dry diet was to help increase demand for lories in the pet trade. In my experience, they make extremely good pets; they are naturally curious, they

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make good talkers, especially the larger species and, of course, their colors speak for themselves. The last hurdle to overcome was the mess. People didn't always want to keep them as pets because of this fact. The new dry diet will help eliminate that and already in the last year, demand for lorries has increased dramatically in both the pet trade and breeding.

Setting Up Lorries

My aviaries consist of an open-style building, 40 feet by 75 feet. There is an opening at each end that is covered with wire. It gets up to 110° in the summer in the San Joaquin Valley, and I do allow air to circulate through the buildings. In the winter, the sides are enclosed so there is protection against the wind.

Inside, there is a middle aisle with cages suspended on either side. They are suspended 34 inches off the ground. I had grass growing under the cages for about three years and the birds loved it. It was Johnson grass and it would grow up through the cages and the birds would chew on it. After three years, however, it quit growing. I feel that the acid from the droppings eventually made a hostile environment and it just couldn't grow. I don't know if it offers any nutrition, but it did give them something to do. The grass also raised the humidity level, which was what I wanted.

One thing about lorries . . . no seed hulls build up under the cages. Cleaning under the cages becomes necessary less often, and there are no heavy sacks of refuse to lug out. The birds don't get down in that area at all, so if I have to put off cleaning for awhile, there is no harm to the birds.

There are two 24-inch wide, wire-covered openings in the roof, which run the entire length of the building. These openings, allowing sunlight and rain, are situated over the center of each row of six-foot cages. The front and rear two feet of each cage are covered so feed bowls and nest boxes are protected, but the birds have exposure to some of the natural elements.

A black hose running down the supporting 2" x 6" beam is part of my misting system. Every four feet there is a little nozzle sticking up that puts out a very fine mist. It is the same sort of nozzle used in orchards and orange groves in the Valley for irrigation. I have this system hooked up to a little water computer that

turns on eight times a day for five to ten minutes at each station, and just lets out a fog-mist. If I look down the middle of the building in the sunlight, the mist takes on a smokey, hazy appearance. The mist maintains the humidity and it also keeps the birds cooler on those exceedingly hot days.

For the feeding areas, each cage has an "L" shaped protrusion that comes out toward the center aisle a distance of 12 inches. Each cage is 3 ft. high, 6 ft. long and 2 ft. wide. The top ledge of the feeding area is a handy shelf on which to write my notes or set a bucket of fruit as I feed. I keep a bowl of dry powder in front of the birds at all times. A disposable 5 oz. plastic cup is used as the nectar dish. The nectar is placed in this and they finish it in about an hour. Then I throw the cup away and use a new one for the next feeding. This saves much cleaning time and potential nectar spoilage.

The low pressure watering system consists of a plastic tube coming down into a little stainless steel nipple. I have a pressure regulator on my watering system which reduces it to between 6 and 8 pounds of pressure. The birds hit the little needle with their beak or tongue, which offsets it enough to let a bead of water down. I have that same system on all my lory and cockatiel cages. I have used it for four years and it sure saves a lot of cleaning time. As for bathing for the birds, the lorries hang upside down under the misting system, from the tops of their cages, like they would in a natural rain. I can flush out the watering system any time I want with a disinfectant such as Nolvasan or Clorox.

I mount the nest boxes on the outside of the cages so I can go down the aisle and check them. I use three different sizes of boxes. One is for the large species such as the Chattering Lorries and the Black-caps. The next size is two to three inches smaller all around for the smaller birds, and one is even smaller yet, for the little guys. I prefer the "L" shaped box. For the first few years I bred lorries I used the regular vertical box as you would for a rosella, for instance. I raised a few birds, but I found that some, like the Black-wings, for example, are skittish. They would break eggs very easily, or not take care of their babies. As soon as I converted to the "L" shape, I had much better production right away. I feel the reason for this is that the nest box is darker and the birds feel more

secure. Every one of the species, when given the "L" shaped box, goes to the furthest, darkest corner they can find. This tells me that they want to distance themselves from the entrance hole.

I have been told that, in the wild, many of the species don't necessarily nest in trunks of trees, but in limbs. In other words, they like a horizontal nest. They like to go in and back, rather than in and down like other parrots.

Because lorries are so playful, I have been experimenting with different perches. One perch consists of a 2 ft. by 2 ft. square with dowling stuck through at different angles, and hung by a hook so it has a lot of free swinging motion. Lorries are extremely strong in their feet and legs. Those of you who have had them know what I mean. I wear gloves because their nails are sharp, like pins. They have a grip like raptors — very, very strong, and it will pierce right through your skin.

Lories do a lot of walking and climbing in the trees in the wild to reach out and get nectar and pollen from flowers. They do a lot less flying than other types of birds who spend more time in the air. Lorries need that strength in their legs and feet. They like to play on swings. I use orange tree branches for some perches because the branches are so irregular. I get some vertical as well as horizontal limbs coming out in all directions, sometimes at 45° angles, and they love to play on and around them. Of course, they chew it up, but it is easy to replace.

I also maintain a pan of disinfectant for shoes. Anyone who walks through my aviaries, walks through this. This is something I really believe in. A lot of people do not employ this precaution in their aviaries. During the four years I worked for Birds Unlimited, they did this, and I thought it was a good idea. I've had some veterinarians tell me it works very well, others say no, but it helps me to sleep better, so I do it. Studies have found that a large majority of pathogens, bacteria and so forth, can be transmitted from one aviary to the next on the soles of shoes.

Overall, lorries and lorikeets in aviculture are increasing in popularity in both the pet trade and with breeders. The loriidae family is extremely inquisitive, curious, and playful, and are a delightful addition to any collection. ●