

BOOK REVIEW

Parrots: A Guide to Parrots of the World.

Tony Juniper and Mike Ross, illustrated by Kim Franklin, Dan Powell, Robin Restall, David Johnston, and Carl D'Silva. Yale University Press, New Haven and London (in association with the American Bird Conservancy) 1998.

In their Introduction, Tony Juniper and Mike Ross rightly pay tribute to the illustrious *Parrots of the World* of Forshaw and Cooper but justify the need for a more compact and up-to-date guide to the members of this very special family of birds. They follow the most recent taxonomic treatment in placing all members in a single order without formal subdivision. Even non-birders can recognize almost any member of this compact group as such, yet they range in size from the great Hyacinth Macaw at 1.5 kilograms, and the male Kakapo at 3 kilograms, down to Pygmy Parrots of 10 grams. Only in Passerines among other birds is such 300-fold mass factor approached.

The authors claim that the 88 plates, crowded with over 1 000 separate illustrations, are sufficient to identify all 352 species of parrot recognized and almost all of the subspecies and they are to be congratulated achieving this aim. The figures are good and copious and the book is worth getting for them alone but the text is ample, covering the essentials in some detail. I personally find the grouping of the plates in a single section, rather than adjacent to the species text, is somewhat tedious however economical, although each plate is accompanied by text useful for identification by sex and age to subspecies level. However, the arrangement may suit non-birders who are primarily interested in identification for regulatory purposes. At almost a dozen per plate on average, the individual illustrations are not large but no smaller than those general field guides. Those of small species such as Hanging Parrots approach life size. Birds on each plate are to the same scale, except for the useful in-flight studies, and always compared to a Budgerigar silhouette at the same scale.

I find the text a little small and fine for my aging eyes, although it is sharp and clean under a reading glass and a larger bolder print would make a bulkier, costlier volume. References are given under each species by name only, where a page or other specific direction would have been helpful. The references themselves are otherwise rather repetitious. A complete Bibliography is given to the References cited under each species, and many other works.

The Origins and Evolutionary Relationships of the group are briefly discussed but as usual in birds, few definite conclusions can be reached. The earliest fossils are from England and France but modern parrots have a Pantropical distribution, nowadays called Gondwanan. The only North American species was extirpated early in the 19th century and a small number of others have followed. The less recently extinct species are omitted in the main text and although this is customary in modern works, I see some value in including them in those with a strong conservation aim, as potent reminders of what has already been lost. Somewhat ghostly outlines are given of some extinct species in the Introduction and this has some impact, but not the disquiet that goes with the loss of our own beautiful Paradise Parrot.

Their relationships to other birds cannot be decided on anatomical evidence and molecular biology is of no help. It does not really matter to what they are related or from what descended, or where their ancestors wandered: they are wonderful, exciting, colourful animals in their own right. But it would be nice to know for example whether the few but special New Zealand species are relics of the ancient Gondwanan rifts, or more recent arrivals from Australia, or perhaps a mixture of both, e.g. Parakeets versus the rest.

Brief but useful sections are given on the Natural History of Parrots: General Behaviour, Distribution, Habitat, Movements, Social Behaviour, Diet, Breeding and Nocturnal Species. Conservation Status is given prominence. Extinct species include the Norfolk Island Kaka, and there is an uncomfortably long list of Threatened species in Australia, mostly in the Vulnerable category, but considered Critical for Night Parrot and Norfolk Island Parakeet. These authors affirm what many conservationists feel, that captive breeding of rare and endangered species should be part of a strategy that is primarily intended to secure a viable wild population. They suggest for example the cancellation of

debts owed by exporting countries to importing, which might help. But the real problems lie in human breeding, not parrot-breeding. Some species have reached the stage where they only *may* continue. And Kakapos *may* fly!

Five different artists contributed to the plates. Powell painted the Lorries and Lorikeets, as well as the Racket-tails, with a slightly hesitant style, but more lifelike and generally more colour-true than say Peter Slater's pictures of our species. Australian birders will be interested to see many of the numerous races of the familiar Rainbow Lorikeet, some very unlike ours — the Red-collared is included as one of them and it is certainly more like *haematodus* (at least superficially) than are some Lesser Sunda forms. Unfortunately his reds tend to be muddier than life, some plates perhaps more than others and none capture the real vibrancy of Lorieid plumage. Perhaps no one can do that, but Powell's postures are good and nicely varied.

Franklin executed over 30 plates for a rich variety of parrots ranging from Cockatoos to Pigmy Parrots, Fig and Tiger Parrots and many more, in a bold uncluttered style, more conventionally posing related species similarly, but not boringly the same. Again Australians will be able to compare their local form with extralimital ones in such magnificent species as Red-cheeked and Eclectus Parrots and the variable Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, and to wonder at the brilliant New Guinea relatives of the latter, and those of our comparatively staid King Parrot. Again, the plates do not quite do the living birds justice but perhaps that is impossible at this scale. Some of the Cockatoos are not quite to life in detail of form and or colour but they are, importantly, identifiable.

D'Silva contributed only seven plates, of the charming Hanging Parrots and the Afro-Asian Parakeets also in a crisp style good on greens, but I am less sure of the warm colours. Restall executed many of the plates of Neotropical parrots in a sharp style, with what seem like clearer reds, but I do not know the New World birds (yet!). There are several plates with no obvious signature which I assume are Johnston's, whose style is reminiscent of Powell's. Overall I value the artistic treatments as very good given the harsh constraints of the bird-guide format.

The text is generous in this same light, with sections for each species on Names (including old and modern vernaculars), Identification, Voice, Distribution and Status, Ecology, Description, Sex/Age, Measurements (wing, tail, 'bill' and 'tarsus'), Geographical Variation (even when 'none') and References.

Maps are necessarily small in a volume such as this and suffer as usual from wide differences in scale: it is easy to show every island in the Talaud-Sanghir chain for example, but not the 7 000 in the adjacent Philippines. I did find a number of discrepancies between the islands listed in the text and those actually coloured or arrowed on the maps. As a single example, No. 6 Violet-necked Lory is correctly mapped for the West Papuan islands of Waigeo and Misool, but not for Batanta-Salawati, not for Gebe/Guebe between New Guinea and the North Moluccas, and not for Tidore, Ternate, Mayu, Moti, Damar or (Kep.) Widi off Halmahera; conversely Tifore (perhaps by confusion with Mayu and/or Tidore), as well as Mandioti and Kasiruta off Bacan are coloured but are not listed as Lory localities. The text agrees with Rand and Gilliard (1967) and with White and Bruce (1986). Several other Meganesian species (at least) suffer in the same way, and the difficult case of the Rainbow Lorikeet, of great interest to Australians, is not well handled. This species occupies more separate landmasses than any other parrot, and on many of them is the, or one of the, most numerous birds or at least has the highest biomass. It deserves a well-executed map, difficult though that would be for the most fanatical nosophiliac.

This, however, is a minor blemish, and bird enthusiasts will get many hours of enjoyment from this packed and pleasing volume, however often or rarely they need refer to it for identification purposes.

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