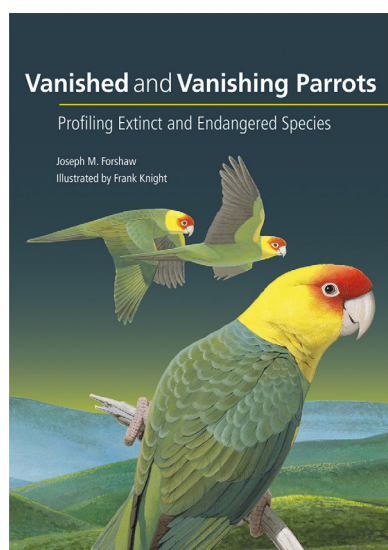


## Book Review



### **Vanished and Vanishing Parrots: Profiling Extinct and Endangered Species**

Forshaw, Joseph M., with illustrations by Frank Knight. 2017. CSIRO Publishing. Hardback 352 pp., colour paintings, illustrations and maps. ISBN: 9780643096325. RRP \$103.35

The current worldwide decline in biodiversity requires urgent action, but working out what can be done is often impeded by poor understanding of the diverse causes of decline and extinction. Parrots (Psittaciformes) exemplify this problem perfectly. They are among the most threatened bird orders, with 28 % of species (111 of 398) currently classified as threatened under IUCN criteria. Yet they have fallen far behind other major bird groups (e.g. the Passerines) in terms of the research required to set conservation actions in place.

Parrots have been popular as pets throughout human history because of their colourful appearance, great intelligence, and remarkable ability to mimic various sounds, including the human voice. This popularity has led many species to be captured from the wild and kept as pets. Although captive breeding is possible for many species, parrots remain the most common bird order reported in the wildlife trade. Parrots have long been exploited by humans worldwide for their plumage and meat, and for trade. It seems that being so important to humans brings mixed blessings! On the one hand, growing human populations mean ever greater pressure on wild parrot populations, whereas on the other hand, the high profile of parrots means that many people care deeply about their conservation.

Parrots exhibit many traits known to be associated with extinction: for example, many are large-bodied and slow-breeding (e.g. macaws and cockatoos), and most are ecologically specialized (e.g. forest species). Parrots are currently native to 124 countries and are mainly distributed in tropical and subtropical habitats in the southern hemisphere. Together with hunting and trapping, their main threats are habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation driven by agriculture and logging. In many cases, such threats are driven by human poverty in their countries of occurrence.

The new book by Joseph Forshaw and Frank Knight (illustrator) has an essential role to play in cataloguing and reviewing our state of knowledge concerning the multifaceted plight of parrots worldwide. This book is a visually stunning, up-to-date compendium of the status of parrots listed as endangered, critically endangered or extinct. There are also

some species listed as vulnerable that the authors felt needed special attention, but most endangered sub-species have not been included. The book reflects a life time of wisdom gathered by one of the world's foremost authorities on parrots. Joe Forshaw has been in the forefront ever since his publication of *Parrots of the World* 45 years ago. Back then, the information in his books was dominated by his personal store of knowledge as so little had been published about most parrot species in the wild. However, recent editions of his books have included excellent reviews of the published literature, making them superb reference material.

*Vanished and Vanishing Parrots* is beautifully laid out and easy to read. It has a moving Foreword by another parrot biologist, Noel Snyder, who reflects on three case studies, including an extinct parrot (Carolina parakeet) and two species that teetered on the brink before being pulled back. One of the main points from the Foreword that resonated with me was that we still have so much to learn and that it is only through species-specific research and knowledge that we can truly hope to save endangered parrot species. The Introduction is of huge importance and is, to my mind, the aspect of this book that sets it apart from Forshaw's other books on parrots. By writing at length about the processes responsible for parrot endangerment, the author sets the scene for interpreting the wealth of information that follows. I would recommend that everyone reads the introduction even if then time only permits the reading of the species accounts of special interest or high priority. In the Introduction, the reader will find a full account of the biological attributes that make parrots likely to be threatened, but also the anthropogenic and socioeconomic pressures that come into play. Direct human pressures are described, as is the current and future impact of climate change. The efficacy of recovery programs aimed at addressing threats to parrots, including case studies and future priorities, round out a thoroughly fulfilling read.

I did not quite understand the need for a major chapter on the Fossil History of Parrots, although I also found it interesting. Also, a bit out on a limb (i.e. isolated) was the detailed section on the Australasian Distribution of parrots (but not of other regions), although again this makes good reference material concerning a portion of the Earth's surface with 42% of parrot species.

The lay-out of each species account is superb, and this is where the artistic work must be put up in lights. To see each species brought to life in such vivid and accurate detail is truly amazing. In such cases one tends to hone in on the species one knows best. In my case, it was the swift parrots and I can verify that the art work captures them just perfectly as they feed on Blue Gum flowers. Each species section includes extensive information, including a description, distribution with map, status, habitats, movements, habits, calls, diet and feeding, breeding, and eggs. In summary, this is a beautiful book that combines the best and most recent scientific knowledge with visual presentation that is second to none.

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