

***Encyclopedia of the Lories* by Rosemary Low.** Hancock House, Surrey, Canada and Blaine, U.S.A., 1998. Hardcover, 432 pp., 180 colour illustrations, distribution maps, 22 × 29 cm. RRP \$US70.

This monograph is primarily an avicultural treatise on the lories and lorikeets of the world, covering their biology, husbandry and propagation in captivity, but it includes much valuable, hitherto unpublished information on several Australian species in the wild, particularly the Musk and Little Lorikeets. Thus, it is supplementary to the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB) vol. 4 (Higgins 1999) and, for Australian species, is therefore equally worthy of consultation and citation. Owing to the almost parallel publication dates, the new information in Low's book was not available to, and therefore not mentioned in, HANZAB. Low's new field information derives largely from John Courtney's 35-year familiarity with nesting Musk and Little Lorikeets, and indeed the book is appropriately dedicated to Courtney, whose knowledge inspired it. Low visited Australia, and her field observations on the eastern species are also included. The benefit of aviculture, as practised by Low and her colleagues and presented in this book, is that (as she says) it produces knowledge that is difficult to obtain in the wild, for instance on nesting biology.

The book is arranged to provide rapid access to information. Part 1 is in encyclopaedic format of topics arranged alphabetically. As well as the usual avicultural subjects, it covers topics on birds in the wild such as bathing, behaviour, conservation, crop pests, display, drinking, feeding, feral populations, relations with honeyeaters, nest-sites (with much new data from Courtney here), predators, roosting, and vocalisations.

Part 2 is a catalogue of the lories of the world, arranged in standard handbook format of species accounts, with a strong avicultural component as well as biology in the wild (so far as the latter is known for non-Australian species). Not having the benefit of HANZAB, it is less thorough but nevertheless complementary. The taxonomic sequence departs from the traditional one in placing *Lorius* at the beginning near *Eos* and *Chalcopsitta*, to which Low believes it is related, instead of its 'illogical' placement among the genera of small lorikeets with which it has 'little in common'. Following Forshaw & Cooper (1989), the Varied Lorikeet is reluctantly placed in *Trichoglossus* (rather than *Psitteuteles*), although Low disagrees; HANZAB also favours *Psitteuteles*. I would defer to Low's taxonomic insights, deriving from her intimate familiarity with the calls, behaviour and displays of most species.

The species accounts in Part 2 are arranged under the subject headings of alternative common names (including avicultural), description (including measurements and weights), key identification features, colour mutations, range (including introductions, population changes), status, habits (habitat, movements, breeding), and aviculture. The last category covers biological data derived from captive birds: status (in aviculture), clutch, incubation, chick development, nestling period, growth, and general notes. For polytypic species, each subspecies has its own entry under its own common name, which for example runs to 23 separate entries for the Rainbow Lorikeet. Low's field experience of Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets is evident, and John Courtney's extensive field knowledge of Rainbow, Musk and Little Lorikeets shines through: for instance on the population structure, key food trees, precise nesting requirements, and demise of breeding populations of these species on the North-west Slopes of New South Wales. The logical outcome of Courtney's data is that the breeding populations of Musk and Little Lorikeets

west of the Great Dividing Range watershed deserve nomination as endangered populations, under the *N.S.W. Threatened Species Conservation Act*. His data are essential to anyone making or assessing such a nomination, or wishing to find nests or understand breeding dynamics as part of field research on these species.

Part 3 is a discussion of lorikeets in Australian gardens. Apart from relating the use by lorikeets of flowering native trees and shrubs in the suburbs of large southern cities, it sounds stern warnings about the misguided and detrimental practices of feeding wild lorikeets, and rehabilitating and releasing lorikeets affected by psittacine beak-and-feather disease (a viral 'moulting' disease). Basically, bread and honey (or jam), sunflower seeds, honey-water or sugar-water are a malnutrition diet causing crippling ill health in wild lorikeets; rehabilitated diseased lorikeets remain carriers that survive only a short time and infect other wild birds, whereas formerly they would have been culled early by predation. Furthermore, most malnourished lorikeets also test positive for beak-and-feather, suggesting a link between nutrition, disease resistance and cross-infection at artificial feeding stations. The lesson is clear and simple: don't artificially feed wild lorikeets, do have a vet promptly and humanely euthanase lorikeets found with beak-and-feather (these poor fliers are also often collision victims), and do provide flowering native trees and shrubs as natural food sources for wild lorikeets. (Though I would add beware attracting Noisy Miners if you want small birds too).

Part 4 is a gazetteer of locations mentioned in the text: a handy guide to all those islands from Indonesia to Oceania inhabited by the exquisite non-Australian members of the lory group. It describes the nature and location of each country, island or island group as applicable, along with a list of the species or subspecies that can be seen there, and gives a page reference to the distribution map that accompanies each species account. The book finishes with a comprehensive reference list, and an index of English and scientific names, people and institutions mentioned in the text. The pictures, mostly photos though some historic paintings, are mainly of captive birds and are intended to show plumages, growth stages and behaviour.

As one might expect, the book understandably has a strong avicultural bias that extends to the common preoccupation with colour mutations and hybrids. Nevertheless, Low sounds a commendable warning about the 'irresponsible' deliberate production of hybrids, which can lead to contamination of the gene pool especially of rare species. Although foremost a highly accomplished aviculturist, Low has done her research on the birds in the wild too. With my limited knowledge of the group, I cannot find fault with her text. In any case, the main point of this belated review is to draw attention to the important new field data. For those interested in the biology and conservation of wild Australian lorikeets, this book is as essential as *HANZAB*. It is available from the publisher: <www.hancockhouse.com>, <sales@hancockhouse.com>.

References

- Forshaw, J.M. & Cooper, W.T. (1989), *Parrots of the World*, 3rd (rev.) edn, Blandford, London.
Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999), *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, vol. 4, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Stephen Debus
University of New England