

# A HAVEN FOR LORIES IN SINGAPORE

Photos and Text  
By Rosemary Low



*The Blue-streaked Lories prefer the company of their own species.*

The air was shrill with the chattering, shrieking calls of lories, winged rainbows flashing through the trees, dangling by one foot from a branch, or swinging on a liana. This scene of colour and activity was not set deep in a rainforest but in an industrial area of Singapore. Here is located what is arguably the largest and most diverse bird park in the world, with more than 8,000 birds of 600 species. It is visited by one million people annually. Forever expanding its attractions, the most recent is Lory Loft, a lory exhibit like no other.

About ten years ago zoos in the USA thought up

a new kind of entertainment – walking among lories that would feed from the hand. These colorful brush-tongued parrots that exist mainly on nectar and pollen in the wild, were trained to take “nectar” (man-made) from little pots of the liquid purchased by visitors who enter the walk-through aviary where the birds reside. I have visited a number of such houses in North America and in Europe. All are dwarfed by the magnificent structure at Jurong BirdPark, by far the world’s largest lory exhibit.

Its theme is an Australian one. The entrance to Lory Loft is marked by a spectacular 80-year-old bot-



Looking towards the entrance from within Lory Loft.

tle tree, with its huge bulbous trunk, imported from Queensland. As one enters the aviary, the size and height of the enclosure, and the airiness of the structure, make an immediate impact. With 3,228 square feet (3,000 sq metres), it is larger than a soccer field, 197ft (60m) long, 164ft (50m) wide and the equivalent of nine stories high! Some large enclosures are dominated by the framework but here it consist of stainless steel masts, and inconspicuous and neat welded mesh of very light appearance. It creates an ambience that is more pleasing than any large aviary I have ever seen.

Visitors enter at canopy height, looking down into a forest of trees. Two steel canopy bridges, very neat and solid in construction, lead from the entrance (with its Australian theme coffee shop), to the centre of the aviary. For the more adventurous, there is a well-constructed suspension bridge. The two-tiered feeding tower is the focal point, with dozens of lorries clambering around or sitting on the railings, waiting for a passing visitor to offer a cup of nectar. Then perhaps a group will descend, landing on heads and shoulders, staying a few seconds then departing to find nectar elsewhere, or flying to a three-tiered hanging basket filled with delicious fruits. There are no birds on earth more active and playful than lorikeets and when these

characteristics are combined with striking colors (which usually include scarlet), being in the centre of this riot is unforgettable!

The Green-naped Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus h. haematodus*) from New Guinea, and several of its sub-species, predominate. These include the Australian Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus h. moluccanus*). These are perfect birds for lory exhibits, being less aggressive than the larger species, and very attractive with their green wings and multi-colored underparts.

The “red brigade” consists of Red Lorries (*Eos bornea*) and Blue-streaked Lorries (*Eos reticulata*). It is interesting to see how the Blue-streaks go around in a single-species group whereas the Reds mix quite freely with the Green-napes. The Blue-streaks are beautiful birds from the Tanimbar Islands in Indonesia, classified as Near-threatened due to habitat destruction and formerly heavy trapping. Now that these birds are no longer imported into Europe, they have become much rarer in collections, so it was a pleasure to see a group here. This is also true of the little Violet-necked (*Eos squamata*) which was imported so frequently 20 years ago. Dusky Lorries (*Pseudeos fuscata*), predominantly shades of brown and orange, can also be seen. In New Guinea this is a common

and widespread lowland species.

The aviary houses one thousand lorries and lorikeets! Although Jurong had large numbers of these birds in the Waterfall Aviary, most of which have been moved here, it needed to import 600 more. I asked Dr Wong Hon Mun, the Director of the park, where they had come from. He told me that most had been supplied by breeders in South Africa and a few, such as the Musk (*Glossopsitta concinna*) and Scaly-breasted (*Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus*) Lorikeets, were imported from New Zealand. When I visited South Africa eight years ago, I saw the largest lorry collections in the world. The popularity of these birds was about to peak. Sadly, groups of parrots also go in and out of fashion and when lorries fell from grace there were many surplus birds available.

The timing was very lucky for Jurong as it would have been impossible to buy so many captive-bred lorries at one time in any other country. Australia does not permit the export of its birds, but New Zealand, which allows the export of non-native species, has a good nucleus of Musk and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, which have long been scarce in Europe, thus it was possible to include these two species in the aviary.

Lory Loft opened about ten weeks before my visit in early August. It was proving to be a very popular destination for visitors, easily accessed from the new monorail station. The monorail circles the large park, with convenient stops at popular points. This is a bonus for people who are unable to walk far, as they can still see most of the park, which is heavily planted and boasts numerous lakes and hillsides. Lory Loft is the first stop on the monorail.

Being inside is a joyous experience – especially for me, as lorries have

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*A young visitor is enchanted by the lorikeets.*



*Swainson's Lorikeets enjoying a selection of fruits and tomatoes.*

been my passion for more than 30 years! Their joie de vivre is infectious. They are eternally inquisitive, playful and inventive. Unfortunately, some species are not to be trusted with other parrots as they can gang up and kill them. This usually applies to the Lorius species such as the beautiful Black-capped. Here, however, the area is so vast that as long as Black-caps are greatly in the minority, peace reigns. I did notice that the Black-caps kept to themselves. This was also true of the beautiful Yellow-bibbed (*Lorius chlorocercus*) from the Solomon Islands; it has the most retiring personality of the Lorius species. One member of that genus that should never be housed with any other bird is the Yellow-backed (Chattering) because of its murderous tendencies.

When visiting a lory exhibit, the reactions of the visitors are almost as interesting as those of the birds. The delight of children, especially, in being able to interact with these colorful birds, is always evident. In a world where close contact with nature is denied to so many city-dwellers, lories and lorikeets are often ambassadors that

unite people and nature. After a close encounter with lories, a new appreciation of birds is born.

This is especially the case when lories are indulging in their favorite activity – bathing! Late one afternoon a keeper hosed down the trees – and the rain-bathing commenced! Suddenly the scene was one of frenzied activity as the birds fluttered their wings and assumed spread-eagled positions among the wet leaves. Lories must be the most enthusiastic bathers in the entire avian world. To cater for this and to maintain interest away from the feeding site, a special bathing area is to be created. At present the bathing facilities consist of some attractive shallow pools at ground level but, as yet, only a few of the lorikeets have learned to use it. A bathing area at canopy height (perhaps with continuously flowing water, as they use so much) would be a unique attraction. Lories need to bathe very often (almost daily). Many species have a gloss on their feathers which creates a polished appearance, but this is not maintained without frequent bathing.

Lories are not the only occupants of this aviary. It was a touch of genius to include a pair of Palm Cockatoos (*Probosciger aterrimus*). Absolutely nowhere else in the world, outside the natural habitat in New Guinea and Australia, can Palm Cockatoos be seen behaving as though they are in the wild! It took my breath away to see a pair of these magnificent birds in sustained flight. They like it so much here that already the female was on eggs! When she left her nest, the unforgettable courtship display of this species was seen, the male bowing low and spreading his unique crest of long, narrow feathers. I came away with an indelible memory of this pair of birds which gave me more pleasure than anything I have ever seen in captivity.

More lories can be seen in the area dedicated to parrots, known as Parrots Paradise. They include *Chalcopsitta* and other species that are not suitable for a mixed exhibit. Those bred regularly include Yellow-bibbed, Purple-naped, Chattering and Stella's Lorikeets.

With its latest exhibit, Jurong BirdPark has maintained its reputation for excellence that started when it opened in 1971. A stop-over in Singapore on the way to Australia or New Zealand is a must for every bird lover! ■



*The enclosure has a light and airy ambience.*



*Rosemary Low at Jurong BirdPark.*

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