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Book Review

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, CA



HANCOCK HOUSE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE LORIES by Rosemary Low. Published by Hancock House, Blaine Washington. 1998. \$70 U.S. + \$5 s/h.

I have never done a book review without actually holding the book in my hands — until now. Hancock House, though, sent me a plethora of extracts from the book that give a good overview. I include some of the material here so you will get a sense of the volume.

Dr. Roger Wilkinson, Curator of Birds, Chester Zoo, and Chair, European Parrot Taxon Advisory Group, wrote the Foreword which is a good opening to this limited review:

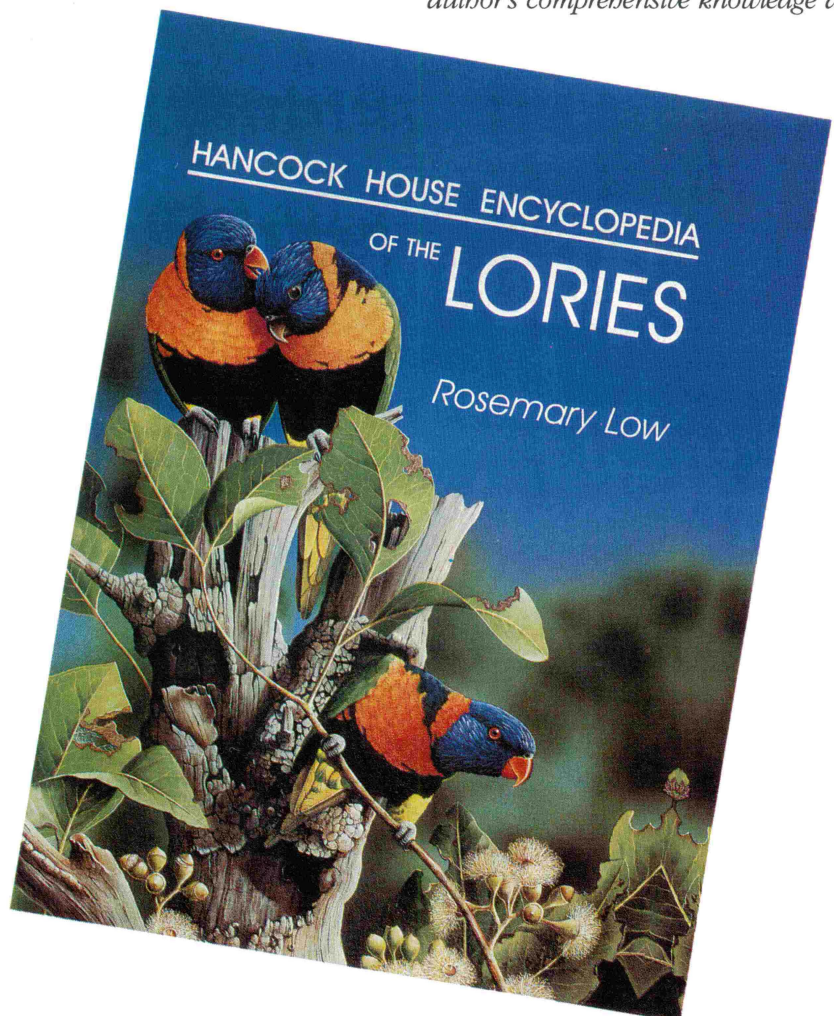
Foreword

I am delighted to write the foreword for this important book on lories, not only because I share the author's enthusiasm for these charming birds, but also her concerns about their conservation and welfare. Rosemary Low is uniquely qualified to write this monograph. She is the author of hundreds of articles and numerous books, including the standard reference Parrots, their care and breeding. Rosemary has a wealth of personal experience as former curator of two major parrot collections, Loro Parque and Palmitos Park, and continues to work with lories at home. She has also traveled widely, observing and studying lories in the wild.

Quintessentially tropical, lories are brightly colored, vibrant, highly engaging parrots whose avicultural popularity has, in the recent past, resulted in large numbers entering international trade. It is difficult to be certain of the numbers involved; figures from quotas, capture, transport and CITES permits are often in conflict with each other. Sadly, some lories, destined to be lost in living room cages, will have been purchased by pet-keepers ignorant of the biology of these specialized pollen and nectar feeders. Others acquired by well-meaning aviculturists and bred with some success no longer grace their aviaries simply because breeding them became commercially unprofitable. Zoos displaying lories must also consider the sustainability of their stock. Currently there is great diversity with a large number of species held but, with a few notable exceptions, little emphasis on managed breeding programs. Lories can make excellent educational exhibits and it would be sad to deny

future generations the opportunity to enjoy these attractive parrots. There are other good reasons to maintain lories in captivity. Knowledge obtained of their husbandry may one day be applied to their advantage should captive breeding be required as part of a conservation program. Information on basic nesting biology is difficult to obtain from wild lories; observations from captive breedings fill important gaps in our knowledge. All too often such information is not documented.

In this book Rosemary Low has ensured that her original observations and those of many of her colleagues are made available for the benefit of others. This excellent book fulfills its title by being encyclopedic in scope, addressing the natural history of lories and the conservation issues associated with habitat destruction and trade. It is in the detailed species accounts that the author's comprehensive knowledge and



total immersion in her subject shows most clearly. Her observations and experiences, and those of other aviculturists, are presented in such detail that no one with access to this book can plead ignorance of their loriest biology, behavior or particular requirements. The Hancock House Encyclopedia of the Loriest can be highly recommended. It should not only sit on every parrot enthusiast's bookshelf, but should be frequently off the shelf and regularly consulted.

ROGER WILKINSON, B.Sc., Ph.D.
Curator of Birds, Chester Zoo, and Chair,
European Parrot Taxon Advisory Group

In the words of Rosemary Low, herself:

This book has been arranged to provide rapid access to information. Part 1 covers many topics pertaining to the natural history and aviculture of loriest and lorikeets. These are presented alphabetically by subject. Part 2 comprises detailed accounts for each of the 53 species. Information is presented under set headings. At the beginning of each account the species is identified by its scientific name, followed by the name of the author who described the first specimen to science, and the date of publication of this description. Synonyms of common names follow, with native name, where known. These may vary according to locality (in New Guinea there are 500 languages), thus in some cases the name of the tribe precedes the name. Under the headings of Description and Immature bird, details of plumage and the color of bill, legs and soft parts are given. These descriptions have been made from live birds in many instances, or by reference to published descriptions, or a combination of both. Length is taken mainly from published sources and from live birds in some instances. Weight has been obtained by weighing live captive birds where possible or from published sources in other instances. All these features vary to a slight degree in individual birds. Notes on Range and Status reflect what is known at the present time. In many cases, this may prove to be incomplete or even inaccurate. Few

HANCOCK HOUSE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE LORIES

Rosemary Low

Hancock Wildlife Research Center is proud to present Rosemary Low's last 20 years of lorie research. This classic title will be printed in limited numbers. By restricting the sales to only direct mail (not available through book stores), we have kept the retail price reasonable — by simply not building a book store's huge discount into the pricing. To make ordering easier we have toll free phone and fax numbers and protected E-Mail or you can simply mail in your order to the address below.

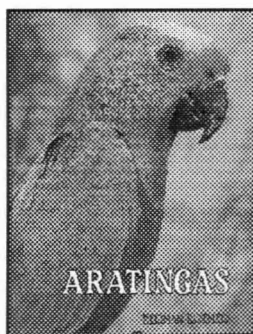
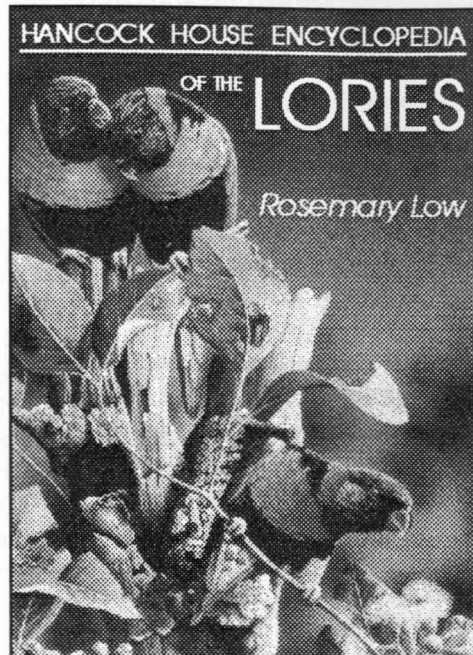
Special Limited Edition

(only 100 copies) includes special binding and signed print Red-chinned lorikeet (*Chamosyna rubrigularis*) by Gamini Ratnavaria

\$300.00

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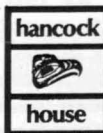
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field studies have been carried out on lorries and lorikeets, except in Australia. The information in the species accounts is based on personal experience, reviewing avicultural and ornithological literature up to 1996, and also originates from many contacts worldwide who made available unpublished records or anecdotal information. The source of such information is indicated by pers. comm. (personal communication) or verbal comm. The information under Chick weight table is derived from captive birds. Note that when these have been hand-reared from an early age, the weights for the first few days are much lower than those of parent-reared chicks.

In Part 1 and Part 2 cross references in capital letters refer to other relevant entries in Part 1 (e.g., see Feeding Behavior). Many islands on which lorries occur are little known to the general reader. Brief descriptions of these islands and their localities appear in the Gazetteer which comprises Part 4. The list of References Cited gives the sources of the published information referred to and, in many cases, allows the reader to obtain further information.

Taxonomic order

I debated long and hard before diverging from the established taxonomic order. This should surely reflect relatedness of the genera, insofar as is possible, or approximately. It is for this reason that I have placed *Lorius* at the beginning. It is closest to *Eos* and *Chalcopsitta*; its former placement between genera of small lorikeets with which it has little in common seemed quite illogical.

Now that you have an overview of the book, I'll describe a couple of sections that were sent to me. The first is Nestboxes (*Nest Sites for Captive Birds*). Under this head there are seven sub-heads, *Various designs*, *Suggested sizes*, *Keeping the interior dry*, *Nesting material*, *Natural nest sites*, *Location*, and *Cleaning*.

Each subhead contains a wealth of information based on the author's vast experience and her research among other aviculturists. For instance, many lorries will go to nest regardless of which direction the opening is facing.

But others will not. Low cites a case of a Swainson's Lorikeet laying an egg in her food dish. She never entered the nest box. When eventually another box was put up facing north, the hen entered within three minutes and eventually laid there.

Under Suggested Sizes there are numerous detailed drawings of nest boxes (you'll be glad to know that Low has already converted the metric dimensions into inches). There are numerous valuable hints at keeping nest boxes clean, placing them, nesting material, designs, etc.

The same abundance of data is attached to all the other subheads in the book.

The section of a bird book that is usually most interesting to aviculturists is that which treats the species. In Low's book, species fall under **Part 2 Lory Species Accounts**.


Under the Red-collared Lorikeet, two full pages are devoted to Description, Length, Weight, Key identification features, Sexual dimorphism, Range, Status, and Habits in the wild. Under Aviculture, you find Status, Clutch size, Incubation period, Newly hatched chicks, Young in nest, Chick development, and General. Under these subheads you will find a great deal about the Red-collared Lorikeet — probably about all that is known at the moment.

Of course, some species are so little known that their profile doesn't fill half a page.

Please refer to the large advertisement in this issue of *Watchbird* for more details on this new volume.

No one can dispute Rosemary Low's authority and experience regarding lorries. She is, perhaps, the most qualified of all people to author such an encyclopedia.

If you have any interest in parrots, and lorries in particular, the *Hancock House Encyclopedia of the Lorries* should be in your library.

[Reviewer's Note: A review copy of this book reached me as this was going to press. No time to rewrite but now, with the book in my hands, I can say it lives up to my expectations and more. I wish it had been available years ago when I kept many lorries. Be sure to get a copy. SLD] 

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Book Review

by Tom Marshall, Leesburg, Virginia

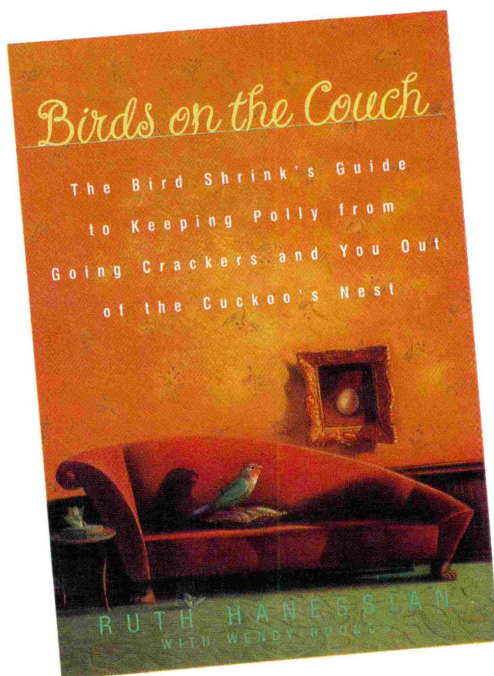
BIRDS ON THE COUCH by Ruth Hanessian, New York: Crown Publishers, 1998. (149 pages with drawings) \$17.00. ISBN 0-609-60239-X.

Every president of AFA has known Ruth Hanessian. Practically, everyone associated with the production of the *Watchbird* knows Ruth. She is one of us — a lover of birds and a defender of our right to keep birds. She has served AFA and the aviculturist as AFA Legislative Vice-President and as Washington, D.C. State Coordinator and has earned for her efforts an AVY Award in 1977. As a 20-year veteran pet store owner in an affluent Maryland suburb outside of Washington, D.C., she has fought anti-pet store and anti-aviculture legislation on the local, state, and national levels and has been closely associated with the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) for most of that time.

This work has earned Ruth gratitude from the pet industry and from her fellow aviculturists and pet bird owners throughout the country. This kind of effort has also earned her a reputation for being tenacious in defending aviculture and the pet industry. She is considered "one tough bird" by friend and foe alike because of her unrelenting commitment to birds and to their welfare in captivity.

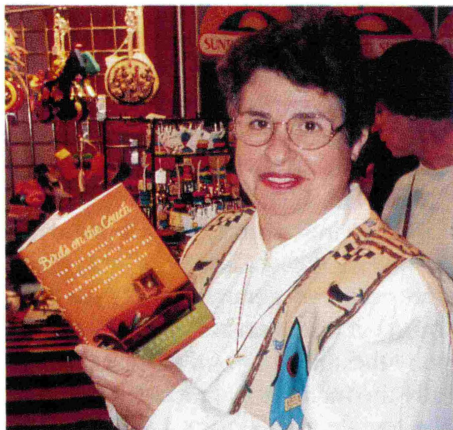
Few, however, have witnessed how her love of "the soft winged things" have affected the less public aspect of her personality. Read *Birds on the Couch* and (excuse the parody of the Sears jingle), "come see the softer side of Ruth."

This amusingly and amply illustrated labor of love can be enjoyed and



appreciated on two distinct levels. It can simply be read for pleasure and entertainment and/or it can be slowly digested, resulting in a possible attitude adjustment or, at least, a better understanding of your tame, but not domesticated, avian pet.

Photo by M. Jean Hessler



Author, Ruth Hanessian, signed copies of her book at the recent AFA Convention in Baltimore.

As a pet store owner, cancer survivor and the mother of three children, Ruth's advice is pragmatic and reasoned, demonstrating a genuine love of parrots, without exhibiting maudlin concern for their welfare. Her concern, her mission, has always been to promote the bond that can exist between people and their birds. She sees her pet store as a sort of hub where birds and humans "could find each other, start a friendship, and then spend years sharing the love and tranquility each has the power to give."

Over the years in running her highly successful pet store in Rockville, Maryland, Ruth has met some fascinating people and endearing pet birds and you will meet many of them in this delightful book. This book, first and foremost, is about the unique bond that can exist between people and their birds.

Ruth has an especially wonderful friend in her 94-year old mother who, in this reviewer's, mind has one of the best lines in the entire book. After Ruth's father died, her mother started to keep birds. And as she said to her daughter one day, matter-of-factly, concerning her rather late entry into the world of birds, "It is nice not to have to talk to chairs, Ruth."

Perhaps because of the closeness to her mother, Ruth Hanessian has become particularly active in promoting companionship between elderly people and the "right" bird. Some of the stories that she recounts about these special relationships will serve to inspire your thinking and brighten your heart about the potential joy inherent in companionship between people and their birds. What makes this book a success is the opportunity to relate to parrot behavior and people behavior.

One particularly touching story features an elderly radio repair shop owner and his companion of 40 years at the shop — a talented Double Yellow-headed Amazon named Jesse.

Circumstances necessitated a life style change that forced a separation between man and bird. Ruth Hanessian helped to ease the transition for both of them. In another equally moving story, the reader is introduced to a beautiful and cultured widow who shares her remaining years with a stunning green Senegal Parrot with a golden belly, named after the heroine of Willa Cather's famous novel, *My Antonia*. Like many of the *Poicephalus* family, Antonia was a quiet bird and Elizabeth was able to involve her pet in her favorite pastime of reading passages aloud from her favorite novels. Elizabeth fell victim to an age-related illness which robbed her of her eye sight and was forced to go to a nursing home without her beloved parrot. Ruth was asked to find Antonia a good home. Ruth could not live up to her promise; it just didn't seem right. She did, however, find a way to reunite the two and prove that some good-byes don't have to be forever.

Not all the chapters in this gem of a book are quite so sentimental. Some are very droll, as indicated by the following examples with their provocative titles and subtitles: Chapter 5. "The Woody and Tweety Complex — A Kama Sutra for Birds" or Chapter 4. "Taming the (Mike) Tyson Bird — What Was It About His Childhood That Made Him Bite?"

In addition, there is a considerably subtle humor found in the quotes chosen to introduce each chapter and its subject matter, although none of the quotes were ever uttered with birds in mind initially, such as *Animal Farm* author, George Orwell's "All animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others," and sex therapist, Dr. Ruth Westheimer's "There is no such thing as normal or not normal."

Birds on the Couch is also a guide to understanding and, in some instances, redirecting or modifying bird behavior. The lessons are made exceedingly palatable and highly unforgettable by the fact that it is uniquely well written, chockedfull of insights, compassion, and humor. I recommend this book for those of you who have that special bonds with your birds and to those who wish to develop such a bond. 