

Blue Mountain Lorikeet

OR
SWAINSON'S LORIKEET

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Lories and lorikeets are small to the medium sized parrots whose brush-shaped tongues are uniquely adapted to feeding on nectar and pollen. Birds of the genus *Trichoglossus* have long been popular as aviary birds but have presented taxonomic problems because of their wide distribution and the close resemblance of some forms. As a group these Rainbow lories, as they are sometimes called, are distributed among many of the Indonesian islands, east through New Guinea and the adjacent islands to the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, New Caledonia and the Royal Islands, and along northern and eastern Australia, including Tasmania. Currently there are twenty or twenty-one recognized subspecies of *Trichoglossus haematodus*, although in the literature there has been some argument as to the validity of some of these subspecies. (See, for example, Rosemary Low's article in the Nov/Dec 1974 and B. Sayers, April/June 1975 issues of *Aviculture Magazine*.) Some aviculturists and authors choose to drop the scientific name, *haematodus*, and refer to the Rainbow lories only by their subspecific name. Thus, Swainson's or Blue Mountain lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus moluccanus* is sometimes seen as simply *Trichoglossus moluccanus*.

The Blue Mountain lorikeet may have received its name from early Australian settlers who found the bird common in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. As is true of most of the Rainbow lories, the Blue Mountain lory is nomadic, being found in greatest abundance where there are flowering eucalyptus trees. Distributed in far eastern and southeastern coastal Australia and Tasmania, they inhabit all types of timbered country, occurring in pairs or flocks of few to hundreds, depending on food abundance. They are noisy, active birds displaying

quite comical acrobatics especially when feeding. In their native Australia, they make their nests in hollow trees, depositing two (sometimes three) rounded, spirical white eggs on a substrate of decaying wood chips. Nesting takes place from October through January.

Rainbow lorikeets are aptly named, possessing a multitude of variously colored plumage distributed over the body. The Blue Mountain subspecies has the following characteristics: general color above, including back, wings and tail, green, head, violet blue with violet-blue shaft streaking; the breast is yellowish orange with little or no barring, abdomen is a deep violet blue; the nuchal band or collar, greenish yellow; under wing coverts, orange, strongly washed with yellow; bill, red; legs and feet, ashy gray; iris, orange or reddish yellow. Sexes are very similar but the male may have a head which is slightly more bulky than the female. Immature Blue Mountain lories differ from the adults in having a more yellowish breast, a more narrow nuchal collar and a blackish bill.

There are several records of Rainbow lories having bred successfully in small cages. One account in *Aviculture Magazine* (1946) mentions a case of lorikeets breeding in a cage which measured 48" x 18" x 18" although substantially more flight space is recommended. A nest box measuring about 12" tall and 8" square in size or slightly smaller with an entrance hole about two and one quarter inches in diameter may be used. A mixture of peat and sawdust should form a bottom layer as this will serve as a suitable substitute for decaying wood chips that are used in nature. All lories, because of their habit of feeding on nectar, have very liquid excreta and the peat/sawdust mixture forms a convenient absorbent. Eggs are generally laid two days apart with the incubation period being 24-26 days. Young-

sters which are fed by their parents do not become completely independent until eight to nine weeks of age.

Although brush-tongued parrots can be fed strictly on seeds and fruits they generally do not live long on such a diet. A simplified lory diet can be made by mixing four tablespoons of cane sugar syrup, two tablespoons of sweetened condensed milk, about eight tablespoons of precooked baby cereal, two tablespoons of wheat germ and two or three drops of multivitamins. These ingredients are mixed with about a pint of water to make a sweet liquid solution. In addition, fruits such as apples, oranges, bananas and pound cake may be offered daily. Some lories will occasionally eat sunflower seeds, especially when feeding youngsters. Greens of various sorts may also be added to the diet.

Lories in the San Diego Zoo collection are fed a diet which was worked out under the direction of Dr. Milton Scott, a nutritionist from Cornell University, who spent a sabbatical leave at the Zoo. Our current adult lory diet consists of a powdered premix which is prepared as follows. Sugar, 2400 gm; trout chow, 360 gm; Gevral (protein supplement), 270 gm; iodized salt, 21 gm; L - Cystine, 1.5 gm (an amino acid which must be obtained from a pharmaceutical supply); Vitamin, 15 gm. The premix can be prepared and stored until ready for use. To prepare the adult lory diet blend together in a large blender the following ingredients: 1500 gm apples, 240 gm carrots, 1 head lettuce, 1 loaf bread, 150 gm raisins, 4 ounces canned evaporated milk. Sufficient water is added to blend into a thick homogenate. To this mixture is added 300 gm of the powdered adult lory premix, along with sufficient water to make three gallons of creamy liquid which we have found sufficient for the daily feeding of about 100 lories. The proportions

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Swainson's, or Blue Mountain Lory (*Irichoglossus haematodus Moluccanus*).
See color photo on front cover.

of ingredients listed here will have to be varied depending on the number of lorries being fed. Food is poured into a stainless steel pan and placed on the ground where the lorries will come, sit on the edge and lap up the liquid like a kitten. Where ants are a problem it may be necessary to place the food pan in a larger pan filled with water to create a water moat around the food.

It is sometimes necessary, due to dis-

turbances in our collection or to the temperament of certain parental birds, to remove the youngsters from the nest for hand feeding. The birds are placed in a heated brooder box on a piece of terry cloth toweling where they are cared for by lorry string keeper, Roby Hewitt. The brooder unit consists of three separate sections. For the first two weeks or so the babies are kept at 90°-92°F. During the four through about six weeks stage

of development, the temperature is kept at about 87°-89°F. For the remainder of time, the babies are kept at about 70°F, in a section where there are perches on which to sit. A powdered premix to be added to the baby diet is prepared as follows: bonemeal, 4 gm; Gevral, 200 gm; Hydramin (protein-mineral supplement), 100 gm; Vitamycin, 5 gm; iodized salt, 3 gm; L - Cystine, 0.6 gm; manganese sulphate, 0.5 gm. After the powdered premix has been prepared, the baby lorikeet diet is formulated as follows. Bring one pint of water to a boil. To the water add 48 grams wheathearts, 40 grams dark karo syrup, 12 grams trout chow. These ingredients are mixed together and boiled until the wheathearts are cooked (3-5 min). After the mixture has cooked, one egg yolk with about 50 cc of water is stirred into the solution. To this is added 36 grams of the premix along with the leafy portion of one large lettuce leaf. These ingredients are then homogenized in a blender and heated until warm. A tablespoon bent upwards along the outer edges to form a more exaggerated trough is used for feeding the warmed solution to the babies. During the first two or three weeks, youngsters are fed every two hours. Youngsters have been allowed to go through the night without feeding with no apparent harm. Gradually the intervals between feedings lengthens until, at about the pin feather stage, the youngsters receive only three or four feedings daily.

While the above diets are somewhat complex, although easily prepared in our kitchen, a more simplified diet for hand feeding lorries is given in Bates and Busenbark's *Parrots and Related Birds*. To a teaspoon of honey are added two teaspoons of cooked wheathearts, a teaspoon of powdered milk and a heaping teaspoon of the following strained baby foods, mixed green vegetables, applesauce, and creamed corn. The mixture must be quite thin in the beginning and water may be necessary for thinning. Consistency should be such that it runs off the spoon easily.

Hand reared lorries are placed in a separate aviary where, as youngsters, they engage in the most intriguing, playful behavior, highly reminiscent of young puppies or kittens. It is not uncommon to see these youngsters rolling on the ground on their backs, grappling with feet and bill, first one individual temporarily assuming the role of aggressor and then the other. The constant activity and playful antics enhance the popularity of the Rainbow lorries in an aviary, and the Blue Mountain subspecies add to the attraction. ■