

Lories and Lorikeets

by Robert A. Wall
Florida

BREEDING

In my opinion South Florida is one of the most ideal areas to raise Lories and Lorikeets. I say this because they can be housed outside all year without any problems. These beautiful birds are very active and therefore need adequate space to fly and move around.

The most commonly kept and bred varieties include Chattering, Black Capped, Purple Capped and Moluccan Lories; Swainson's, Ornate, Coconut (Rainbow) and Forsten's Lorikeets. I will not attempt to describe these birds because most aviculturists have access to books that give adequate information on them. Many other varieties are available and are being bred. Due to the importation last year of many of the rarer Lories such as Dusky, Yellow-Streaked, Blue-Streaked, Black Winged and Duyvenboide's there is even a greater variety available for your consideration.

Sexing is a definite obstacle in the breeding of Lories and Lorikeets. I have no sure way of sexing these birds except by observation. In my experience the hens are always more aggressive while the cocks are always rather "stand-offish" in a flight. Vent sexing has never been very accurate with our birds. Two birds of the same sex will be compatible in a flight but seem to have more conflicts especially at feeding time. While with a pair of cock will usually let the hen eat first. We have never had any activity in the breeding box except with true pairs. We have had moderate success with surgical sexing but they don't seem to stand up too well under heavy stress. With new and better sexing techniques being developed it should be easier to obtain true pairs in the future.

We have kept most of our breeding pairs in flights 4x10x6 feet. They need several perches with some of them placed almost vertical in the flight. Because of the lories diet their droppings are copious, so a layer of sand, shavings or finely ground corn cobs help keep the flight

looking neat. If ants are a problem they can be easily controlled by sprinkling Seven dust around the outside of the flight from time to time. Most of our breeding boxes are made of plywood measuring 12x12x18 inches. This seems adequate for all varieties. We use plain shavings in our boxes putting a heavy layer (at least six inches) on the bottom. Because of the consistency of the droppings from the babies the breeding boxes will get a little messy before the babies come out. We sometimes add shavings but we do not attempt to completely clean them out. Some pairs will tolerate the handling of babies in the box, others will not. It is an expensive lesson to learn as we have experienced. Some breeding pairs become very aggressive during breeding season. Breeding usually begins in the spring. Many pairs will go back to nest either in the summer or in the fall in our area.

The usual clutch consists of two white eggs very similar to a Ring-neck dove egg only slightly larger. Incubation is done entirely by the hen. Hatching time is about 28 days although this varies greatly depending on how well the hen incubates. In hot weather the hen will stay out of the box most of the day, incubating only at night. Fertility is usually good with both eggs hatching. Both parents share the feeding chore with the cock doing more than his share as the babies grow older. The offspring usually do not venture out of the box before ten weeks of age and are independent about three weeks later. The babies come out fully feathered looking like the adults except for dark beaks (some varieties have naturally dark beaks). Feeding has been discussed in a previous article but I failed to mention that fresh sweet corn should be fed at all times if it is available.

It is very rare to see any Lory or Lorikeet in bad feather. They seem to moult all year, but they are always in perfect show condition. These birds are very hardy and seem to adapt well to cage and aviary life. Lories and Lorikeets cannot be housed with other species. Babies can

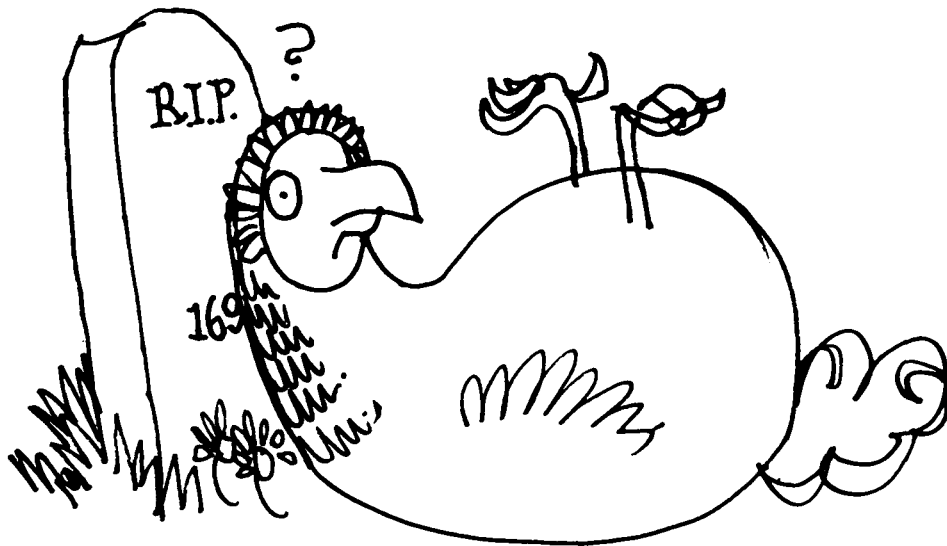
be easily handfed using the basic nector formula and adding ground monkey chow, high protein cereal, baby food fruit and vitamins. If you want to put color and entertainment in your aviary try a pair of Lories or Lorikeets. I think you'll be happy you did.

FEEDING

Some of the most colorful and exotic birds in the world make up the Lory and Lorikeet families. In addition they are all natural clowns, seeming to thrive on entertaining their owners.

In these articles I will only dwell on the varieties that we have kept or bred here at Tuwana Aviaries. Prior to 1970 there were many beautiful lories and Lorikeets imported but unfortunately most of them died because wholesalers, pet shops and new owners did not know how to feed them. I'm sorry to say but this situation still exists.

The diet of these birds is not at all difficult — it just requires a little extra effort. Basically, Lories and Lorikeets are fruit and nectar eaters. Keeping this in mind we must plan a diet made up mostly of liquid high in sugar. Our basic nectar diet is very simple. It consists of one (1) quart of water, four (4) tablespoons of Sustagen (vanilla flavored — available at any drug store), and two (2) tablespoons of honey. This should be mixed well in a blender and can be stored in a tight jar for several days under refrigeration. This can be fed plain or poured over a little pound cake or angel food cake for variety. Lories and Lorikeets have a "brush-like" tongue which enables them to actually lap up liquid much like a dog. We have found that one-fourth (¼) cup of this mixture fed morning and afternoon is about ample for a pair of lories. However, if it is not eaten within an hour you should cut down on the amount. There is a very good nectar formula containing canned milk but we do not use it because it sours rather fast in our climate. If any of our northern members want it I will be happy to give it to them.



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There has been so much said about feeding Lories and Lorikeets seed that I will not get involved in that argument. All I will say is that we have always fed ours sunflower seed and we think it should be part of their diet. Most will not consume many and non-breeding birds certainly do not need many. Some birds (especially new imports) do not take to sunflower easy but if you will keep a few in their dish they will eventually get the idea. We are a firm believer in feeding soaked sunflower seed to Lories and Lorikeets with babies. This is not difficult but one must be careful not to let the seed sour. We soak the seeds for about twenty-four (24) hours and then thoroughly wash them and place them in a closed container in the refrigerator. When ready to feed take out the amount you need, thoroughly wash them again and they are ready to be fed. All that is not eaten within an hour should be removed and thrown away.

In addition to the above foods you must feed a variety of fruits. We use whatever is available but mostly apples, bananas, canned fruit cocktail, canned sweet potatoes and oranges. We have always used citrus sparingly because of our belief that too much citrus effects the nervous system of birds. Try any fruit that you may have available, chances are they will eat them. Some of our birds will eat monkey chow or dog kibbles - dry or soaked. We keep a mineral grit containing oyster shell in our flights, although only a minute amount is ever consumed.

Keep in mind that because the Lory and Lorikeet diet is mostly liquid they do need feeding at least twice a day. All of our birds get the bread mixture that we feed to all the other birds. This consists of whole wheat bread, grated carrots, chopped endive, wheat germ meal, game bird breeder chow and vionate powder. Like all birds - fresh water is essential. We use a good vitamin in the water two or three times per week.

Owning Lories and Lorikeets can be enjoyable and rewarding but they are not the kind of birds that can be fed on Friday afternoon and not again until Sunday if you are a weekend camper. Nor is it wise to leave these birds in the care of a neighbor who is unfamiliar with their daily needs. So many people think that because Lories are hook-bills and classified as parrots they can survive on seed and water. This is not true.

Yes, Lories and Lorikeets require a little extra care - but I believe they are well worth it. Try them. I think you will agree. A future article will deal with housing and breeding these beautiful and exotic birds.