

A CENTURY OF PARROTS

A Book by Rosemary Low

Reviewed by Josef Lindholm, III
Senior Aviculturist, The Dallas World Aquarium

Few people have had as long an association with the American Federation of Aviculture as Rosemary Low. Her contributions to the AFA Watchbird commenced in 1980, with articles on Eclectus and the St. Lucia Amazon (Fletcher, 1989), and so far continue to 2007, with an account, in the first number of Volume 34, of a visit to the Colombian Andes to witness local efforts to preserve the Fuertes' Parrot, and other indigenous species.

She has also been a favored speaker at AFA conventions over the decades, her reputation having long proceeded her because of the truly remarkable number of books she has written, going back, to my knowledge, to 1968, when her *Aviary Birds* was published in England, the American edition (Low, 1970)

appearing two years later. In the nearly forty years since then, she has written more than twenty books.

Many of these are treasured favorites in aviculturist's libraries. I will never forget the rush of sensory overload when I got hold of the TFH edition of *Lories and Lorikeets* (Low, 1977) in 1979. It was a feast of information, a catalogue of first importations and first breedings, and, throughout it all, there were her own engaging observations of birds in her aviaries, as well as those in zoos and other people's collections. By the time her *Hancock House Encyclopedia of Lories* (Low, 1998) was published, her already considerable personal experience had expanded enormously, as she had, in the interim, served as Curator, first at Loro Park, then Palmitos Park, both in the Canary Islands, and both with encyclopedic *Psittacine* collections.

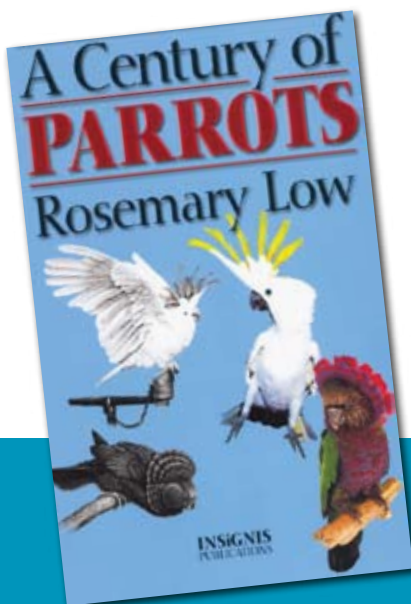
Between these two books, there appeared her *Parrots, Their Care and Breeding* (Low, 1980). In one remarkable volume, now rare and expensive in its original edition, she presented concise avicultural histories of every species of parrot (and a great many subspecies) for which she could find any record. More recently, she has produced books on Macaws, Amazons, and Cockatoos, and her *Endangered Parrots* (Low, 1984) continues to be an important reference.

Therefore, it was with much anticipation that I heard that *A Century of Parrots* was in the works. In many ways it turned out to be a very different book from the one I was expecting.

Rather than a scholarly catalogue of twentieth century achievements in psittacine aviculture, *A Century of Parrots* is a deeply personal work, and very full of strongly-worded opinions.

Rosemary Low is certainly no stranger to controversy. In 1996 "Aviculture at the Crossroads" was not only presented as a lecture at the AFA Annual Conference in Concord, California, but also published in the third number of that year's AFA Watchbird (Low, 1996 a&b). The response to this warning against the potential effects of certain U.S. Avicultural practices was immediate and violent (Heere, 1996), and itself stirred up some vigorous counterpoint (Dingle, 1996, Shearing, 1996, Stoodley, 1997, Strasser, 1996).

Ms. Low's opinions on the prevalence of hand-raising among U.S. Breeders of larger parrots, in order to produce companion birds, have not softened. To the contrary, her views on this subject, as expressed in *A Century of Parrots*, are as certain to offend as many people as they did ten years ago. In Chapter 2, she declares it "a tragedy for cockatoos that a television program called Baretta, which was shown from 1975 to 1978, starred a police



A Century of Parrots
by Rosemary Low

© 2006, Insignis Publications
Available in U.S. Through Cuttlebone Plus (\$49.95)

detective who kept a cockatoo named Fred". On the same page, the 1980's is designated "the dark age" of aviculture, when enormous numbers of breeding pairs were set up in "soulless conditions", and "the policy was to remove all chicks at the age of three weeks for hand-rearing". Concerning that decade, she writes, "It was now the vogue to keep pairs of parrots in tiny wire cages inside buildings. The size of these cages and the total lack of quality of life left me sad and bewildered." In Chapter 20 she forthrightly states that it should be illegal to sell unweaned parrots. (Describing a "huge bird food company" and a "huge pet store chain" in cahoots to retail enormous numbers of unweaned birds to the general public, she concludes this "was perfectly legal but totally immoral"). Forced weaning, in her view, is simple cruelty.

It's not that Ms. Low is against pet parrots. This book is dedicated to the memory of Lito, a wild-caught Yellow-fronted Amazon, which was imported to England as an adult in 1967, when she bought it fresh from the importer for ten pounds. Until this bird's death in 2006, as this book was going to press, it was her "most precious avian companion". Of course, she is the author of *The Loving Care of Pet Parrots* (Low, 2000), *Hand-rearing Parrots and Other Birds* (Low, 1987), *Why does my Parrot...?* (Low, 2000), and *The Parrot Companion* (2006). The entire final chapter of *A Century of Parrots* is devoted to tales of relationships between parrots and their humans. In this chapter she sums up her philosophy regarding companion parrots: "We might be privileged to share our lives with these birds, but we never own them. We co-habit."

A parrot ought to be treated like "a treasured member of the family". Any other treatment of a household parrot abuses it.

While restructuring the entire system of companion bird propagation and the subsequent integration of these birds into a household may seem farfetched and impractical, the idea should not be dismissed out of hand. In a time when the developed world is re-examining its impact on this planet, and contemplating altering entire civilizations accordingly, in a time when America appears poised to elect a President whose father was a Kenyan bureaucrat and whose mother earned her PhD on the persistence of traditional blacksmithing in 20th century Java, the idea of regarding the parrot one lives with as a sentient being,

with whom one actually communicates on a certain level, at least bears consideration.

But of course there is a whole other world of psittacine aviculture, where parrots in aviaries are collected and treasured like priceless works of art, and the propagation of these birds is treated as an art in itself. In other words, there is the circle of aviculturists who treat their parrots like softbills.

This book does not neglect these people by any means. Its author laments, in Chapter 2, that "emphasis has changed from the enjoyment of keeping beautiful parrots with character to breeding for the pet trade..." The first four chapters deal largely with this aspect of aviculture. The first two attempt to trace the evolution of 20th century parrot keeping. The third discusses some of the great zoo collections. The fourth is entitled "The Big Collections". These chapters comprise 72 pages of a 290 page book, and are the avicultural history which I had anticipated. While fascinating, they are a bit uneven. Only so much information can be fit into a given space. Certain major figures make the briefest of appearances or none at all. There is no mention of David West or the Rudkins or I.D. Putnam. In the chapter on zoos, while there is an interesting discussion of Australia's Adelaide Zoo and its director Ronal Minchin, nothing is said of Sydney's Taronga Park Zoo, where Sir Edward Hallstrom held court for many years, and exerted a considerable influence on parrot aviculture in Australia, and around the world.

The section on the San Diego Zoo, does of course, include a much-deserved homage to its long-time and much-beloved bird curator, K.C. Lint. However, Jim Dolan does not appear here (though he is briefly mentioned elsewhere); and to those readers unfamiliar with San Diego's avicultural achievements in that decade, it

might seem that Art Risser's curatorship (1976-1986) was chiefly distinguished by the reduction of the bird collection. Also unfortunate is the repetition of an avicultural myth that began with K.C.'s newspaper obituaries in 1993

Rather than a scholarly catalogue of twentieth century achievements in *Psittacine* aviculture, *A Century of Parrots* is a deeply personal work, and very full of strongly-worded opinions.

- that there were 40 species of birds at the San Diego Zoo in 1936. In fact, San Diego's bird collection in general, and the parrot collection in particular, had been impressive since the 1920's





(Lindholm, 1999). Jean Delacour (1937) describing his 1936 visit, considered it "one of the best in America", and found "Parrots, particularly Lories, very numerous, many breeding regularly".

I was startled to find Jean Marie Derscheid (1901-1944) listed as a casualty of the First World War (He was shot in a Nazi prison), especially since his work in Belgium with Pacific Lories in the 1930's is discussed in both of Ms. Low's Lory books. Actually, having labored against deadlines on lengthy projects that seemed like they would never end, I have done similar things myself, and some have shown up in print! Any one who has written extensively should sympathize. As this book was intended to cover the 20th century, but was published several years into the 21st, one can well understand that there might be a rush to complete it. Still, this book could have benefited from more editing (something which could not be said of her previous books!). A charming profile of Stephanie Belford, the pioneering importer of Indonesian rarities in the 1970's, in Chapter 2, reappears, almost

word for word, in Chapter 5. There was also at least one citation which I could not find in the references.

Some of this is due to the grand scope of this book. The twenty-one chapters cover a very broad range of subjects. An historical review of the commercial trade in parrots is followed by two chapters on the abuses associated with it. The evolution of diets, and the industry which sprang up around parrot keeping each merit a chapter. There follows a thought-provoking analysis of the captive propagation of threatened species and subspecies, the conservation significance of many of these projects being brought into question.

Several chapters explore the impact of human activities upon wild populations, both negative and positive. There are profiles of introduced populations, species discovered in the 20th century, and the forms that went extinct at the same time. Eco-tourism and conservation programs funded by zoos in developed countries are covered in separate chapters. A chapter discusses the results of research investigating the psittacine mind. This is followed with probing examination of the ethics involved in human/parrot interactions.

Needless to say, there is a tremendous amount

Cynthia Kulp
AVIAN ART

original oil paintings
giclee prints available on paper
and stretched canvas

www.cynthiakulp.com • 305-394-0387

DNA **NEW**

SEXING

AMR Laboratories is an independent biotechnology company specializing in cutting edge veterinary testing. **AMR Laboratories** offers accurate and fast sexing of your birds from DNA. It's no longer necessary to subject your birds to the trauma of surgical sexing. We can sex all species of birds from a single drop of blood (\$20.00) spotted on to our collection card. We guarantee 99% accuracy. Your results will be available within 3 business days sample receipt. Call or write for more information or visit us on the web.

AMR
LABORATORIES
ADVANCED MOLECULAR RESEARCH

P.O. Box 656
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462
www.amrlabs.com
Toll Free **1.877.424.1212**

of information in these pages. I learned a great deal. I was unaware that the building John Gould built in 1851 to exhibit his collection of preserved hummingbirds (often since misinterpreted as a zoo exhibit of living hummingbirds decades before such a thing was successfully achieved) did, in fact, come to serve as the London Zoo's Parrot house for almost eight decades. When I was recently asked, at short notice, to provide intelligent information on in situ restoration programs for the Yellow-eared Parrot (*Ognorhynchus icterotis*), I found everything I needed here.

This book is richly illustrated, with quite a number of color plates. Many of the photos were taken by the author, but, as one would hope, there is a nice series of historical pictures, including a number from the now obscure and long defunct Bird Notes, which I had never seen before. Along with such remarkable things as the picture of "Doodles", one of the last Carolina Parakeets photographed in life, there are somewhat less edifying sights, such as the attire worn by Jean Pattison at an AFA function, in homage to the African Gray Parrot...

Despite the faults I have noted, I recommend this book to anyone interested in parrots. It is unique. Only Rosemary Low could have written it.

It is obviously a labor of love. And while, as I have made plain, there are frequent expressions of dismay and admonition, there is also the author's pervasive joy that runs through this book. This is communicated again and again as she describes such things as Jurong Bird Park's waterfall aviary, where the great flock of lorries reminded her of "a child trying to use all the brightest colours in the paint box", her tattered copy of Bates' and Busenbark's *Parrots and Related Birds*, in which she first saw a species in captivity, her delight in her first visit to San Diego, and her childhood exploration of the now long-gone Parrot House at the London Zoo, her dawn visits to a clay lick in Yasuni Nation Park in Ecuador, seeing a roost of six species of feral Amazons in Miami, and the greeting that a Pesquet's Parrot, which she had hand-raised, gave her seven years after she had last seen it.

It is this sort of joy that should motivate all of us involved in aviculture; and we should be careful not to lose sight of it. Rosemary Low must be commended for reminding us of it, and encouraging us to pursue it as we work with our birds. 🐦



References.

Delacour, J.T. (1937) American aviculture – III. California. Avicultural Magazine. Ser.5, Vol 2: 125-139.

Dingle, S. (1996) Shameless Dingle! AFA Watchbird 23(No.4):55-56.

Fletcher, V. (1989) Watchbird index (Volumes 1-15). American Federation of Aviculture.

Heere, P. (1996) Shame on you, Dingle.... AFA Watchbird 23(No.4):55.

Lindholm, J.H. (1999) An Historical Review of Parrots Bred in Zoos in the U.S.A. Avicultural Magazine 105:145-184.

Low, R. (1970) Aviary Birds. A.S. Barnes and Company.

_____. (1977) Lorries and Lorikeets – The Brush-tongued Parrots. T.F.H. Publications.

_____. (1980) Parrots – Their Care and Breeding. Blandford Press.

_____. (1984) Endangered Parrots. Blandford Press.

_____. (1987) Hand-rearing Parrots and Other Birds. Blandford Press

_____. (1996) Aviculture at the Crossroads. American Federation of Aviculture Annual Conference Proceedings, 1996: 175-177.

_____. (1996) Aviculture at the Crossroads. AFA Watchbird. 23(No.3):20-21.

_____. (1998) Hancock House Encyclopedia of the Lorries. Hancock House Publishers.

_____. (2000) The Loving Care of Pet Parrots. Hancock House Publishers.

_____. (2000) Why Does My Parrot...? Souvenir Press.

_____. (2006) The Parrot Companion. Firefly Books, limited.

Shearing (1996) Opinions. AFA Watchbird 23(No.6):26.

Stoodley, J. (1997) Stoodley Responds to Heere's Letter. AFA Watchbird 24(No.1):55.

Strasser, P. (1996) Opinions. AFA Watchbird 23(No.5):34.

BOOK REVIEW



**Looking For The Best Lory Diet?
You Just Found It!**

**LORY LIFE™
POWDER & NECTAR**

AVICO

Sugarglider Nectar, Universal Insectivore Diet,
Gecko Gourmet, Sunbird Nectar, Mynah Pellets,
Poop Off™ ~No Work~ Cage Cleaner
Finest Cuttlebone and the Best Prices Available
Featuring Pellet Diets and Bulk Seed Mixes

From **all** of the **top** Manufacturers
KAYTEE · ZUPREEM · GOLD CUP · LEACH · MAZURI
Soak & Cook, California Spray Millet, Vitamin Supplements,
Hand Feeding, Nest Boxes, Breeder Mixes, Speciality Diets
Breeder discounts are available

**CUTTLEBONEPLUS
AVICO™ SPECIALTY DIETS**

810 North Twin Oaks Valley Road, #131, San Marcos, CA 92069
Order Desk (800) 747-9878
Dick Schroeder (760) 591-4951 • Fax (760) 591-4556
www.cuttleboneplus.com • Email: cuttleboneplus@aol.com Owner: Dick Schroeder, Breeder/Authority on Softbills, Lorries & Pet Parrots

**Watchbird XXXIV
Number 4 Correction**



The St. Louis Cathedral, located in New Orleans, LA, mistakenly graced the pages of the article about our 2008 convention in St Louis, MO in the last issue. **Our apologies!**



Trust the laboratory chosen by more veterinarians and zoos.

DNA SEXING - WE ARE THE SPECIALISTS!

 **Zoogen**

Committed to Avian Conservation since 1990. Committed to Quality - Always.
www.zoogen.biz (800) 995-2473 customerservice@zoogen.biz



CRITTER-CAGES.COM



Your one stop Internet Shop

- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| - Bird Nest Boxes | - Cage Screens | - Coops & Aviarys | - Starter Kits |
| - Supplements | - Wire Mesh | - Hardware Parts | - Hutches Parts |

We stock a wide selection of supplies and equipment for your feathered friends. You will love our selection of quality products and you will love our low prices!

for questions call: 310.832.9981

AND MUCH MORE!!

Online Store
www.critter-cages.com

GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT THERE!

ADVERTISE IN THE WATCHBIRD TODAY!



Safe and affordable handmade parrot toys for parrots of all sizes!

Also available are parrot pinatas, treats, cages and much much more!

Esther Graham
Phone: 717-424-2318
Fax: 877-808-9676

www.grahamsparrottoycreations.com



NPRPF

THE PARROT FESTIVAL FOLKS

FESTIVAL 2009

January 23,24,25

www.parrotfestival.org

713-557-BIRD (2473)

FestivalInfo@parrotfestival.com

EXOTIC BIRD SPECIALTY SHOP & ONLINE RETAILER



Bird Supply of New Hampshire

SHOP ONLINE at www.birdsupplynh.com

* Great Prices and Personal Service *

* Breeder & Wholesale Pricing Available *

Mastercard - Visa - Discover - Amex - Paypal

Abba Seed ~ Avico ~ Cede ~ Harrisons ~ Higgins ~ Goldenfeast
Kaytee ~ Lafeber ~ L'Avian Plus ~ Nemeth Farms ~ Orlux
Pretty Bird ~ Roudybush ~ Versele-Laga ~ Vetafarm Au ~ Zupreem
522 Amherst St. Nashua, NH • 888-319-0136 • 603-882-4737



K&K Parrots

We sell hand-fed babies, Cockatiels to Macaws!

- Toys • Food
- Cages • Grooming
- Boarding and more!

Call today!

302-354-4843

Visit our Website
kandkparrots.com

www.FlockStockandBarrel.com

TRJ Enterprises

David & Terri Jones
Supplies for Your Pet Bird

Freehold, NJ 07728
Ph: (732) 462-0625
Fax: (732) 462-0377
Dave@FlockStockandBarrel.com



QUAKERS & LINEOLATED!!

LARGEST SELECTION of mutation colors ANYWHERE!!!

Breeding stock only NO PET SALES

Bob Nelson David Palmer

(541) 396-2360

BIRDTOYOUTLET

As breeders you care about your birds!

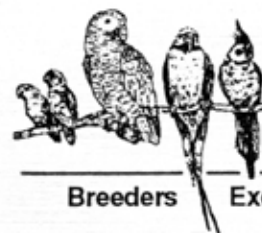
Fast Shipping!

Great Prices!

We provide all types of bird care resources to help keep birds healthy and happy!

Remind new bird owners to

Visit www.BirdToyOutlet.com



MYERS MENAGERIE of BIRDS

Breeders Exotic Birds • Hand Fed Babies

SEEDS & SUPPLIES REASONABLY PRICED

Bob, Joyce & Rob
M • W • F 10 am - 4 pm
OR call for appointment

Ramona, CA 92065
B: (760) 788-5848
H: (760) 789-3815

Extreme MAKEOVER AVIARY EDITION

Improved plumage and overall health with Harrison's Bird Foods



July '06



Jan. '07

Improved plumage and overall health with AVIx Sunshine Factor



March '06



Nov. '06

Plumage and pruritus disorders resolved with AVIx Booster



July '06



Nov. '06



Harrison's Bird Foods
Premium Certified Organic Bird Foods



AVIx Health Care Products
Natural Supplements and Nontoxic Pain Relievers

**CALL 800-346-0269 TO
REQUEST FREE INFORMATION**

- Handbook for a Healthier Bird booklet
- Tips for Conversion flyer with "How to Evaluate Your Bird's Droppings"
- The Avian Examiner #27 "Advances in Companion Bird Nutrition" newsletter in Adobe Acrobat format
- Product information cards for AVIx products and Harrison's Bird Foods
- Red Palm Oil Brochure



HBD INTERNATIONAL

Tel 800-346-0269 / 615-221-9919

Fax 615-221-9898

www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com

www.AVI-x.com