

Kenton C. Lint

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Part I

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Kenton C. Lint

In assessing a great life, it is often fitting to begin with details.

While attempting to decide where to begin in writing this appreciation, I was leafing through the *AFA Watchbird* for December/January 1993, when I came across the editor's note appended to an article on a still-all-too-infrequent breeding of the Gould's or Sparkling Violet-ear Hummingbird (*Colibri coruscans*) (Bieda, 1993). Our editors request that "if any person has knowledge of any species of South American hummingbird being successfully parent reared in captive conditions in North America, we would welcome this information."

In 1970, the San Diego Zoo hatched two Sparkling Violet-ears and reared one. The same thing happened there the next year. Finally, in 1973, both the chicks that hatched at San Diego reached adulthood. I extracted these dry facts from the august pages of the *International Zoo Yearbook* (Zoological Society of London, 1972b, 1973 & 1975). The 1970 hatching is far more engagingly documented in the pages of the San Diego Zoological Society's *Zoonooz*, where staff photographer Ron Garrison's typically magnificent pictures accompany a detailed, unsigned account of a U.S. first breeding (Anon., 1970). Uncredited as it may be, the style of this article is familiar, especially to long-time readers of *Zoonooz*, as its author, K.C. Lint, wrote or co-authored 98 articles for this magazine, from 1939 to 1991 (Lindholm, 1993).

K.C. Lint came to work at the San Diego Zoo in 1936. Though it was always his intention to work with birds, until 1938 he managed the cats and bears. In 1938, he effected a transfer to the Bird Department as a keeper, and, with the exception of his WWII service in the Pacific, he did not leave until 1976, when he retired as Curator of Birds, to which he had been appointed in 1947.

K.C. loved hummingbirds. For many visitors, the highlight of a visit to the San Diego Zoo was always the Hummingbird House. Designed by K.C. (Lint, 1966), its initial inhabitants were 105 hummingbirds of 23 species, collected by K.C. and Augusto Ruschi, the famous Brazilian ornithologist, and brought back by K.C., his wife

Marie, and his son Roland in 1964 (Lint, 1965). Through the '60s, before Newcastle's quarantine and government export restrictions, the hummingbird collection was rich and varied, and shared its exhibit with more than 20 species of tanagers, a wonderful array of shorebirds (Lint, 1971), and a startling variety of other soft-bills. Less than two years after its opening, Black-necked Stilts, Indian White-eyes, and Golden, Silver-throated and Lady Wilson's Tanagers had bred there. The first captive breedings of the Orange-breasted Cotinga (Lint & Dolan, 1966), and White-naped Honeyeater (Lint, 1968a) were other early successes in a building which continues to this day to be a site for important reproduction of soft-billed birds.

K.C. also loved Albatross. As long as the zoo had any, through the '70s, he personally handed them their daily squid. K.C. loved boobies and terns and todies and hoopoes and pittas. There will never again be an American bird collection on the scale that K.C. maintained at San Diego for years. In 1947, the year he became Curator of Birds, 1,266 birds of 319 species and subspecies were inventoried. A year later, there were 1,335 specimens of

361 taxa. December 31, 1959, there were 2,109 specimens of 559 taxa. December 31, 1962, San Diego's species and subspecies count was rapidly catching up with the New York Zoological Park's; 2,185 specimens of 635 taxa at San Diego, 1,533 specimens of 646 taxa at the Bronx. For more than 50 years, the Bronx Zoo had the largest collection of bird taxa in the Western Hemisphere. This was to change in 1963; at year's end, there were 1,543 specimens of 622 taxa at New York, and San Diego Zoo (the Wild Animal Park was still nine years from opening) held 2,234 specimens of 698 taxa. A year later, San Diego's taxon count stood at 854. Until Walsrode, in Germany (entirely devoted to birds), shot ahead in 1973, San Diego would remain the largest collection of birds in the world, and it has never lost its first place in the Western Hemisphere (with a count, at present, of somewhat under 500 species).

San Diego's year-end collection statistics reached an all-time high December 31, 1969, with 3,465 birds of 1,126 species and subspecies. And what a collection it was! A quick scan through my childhood memories of visits in the late '60s and early '70s calls up Black-footed Albatross, European Common Teal, Indian White-backed Vulture, Steller's Sea Eagle, Burmese Pygmy Falcon, Australian Brown Falcon, Wattled Brush Turkey, Maleo, Fiji Banded Rail, Heerman's Gull, Wild Rock Pigeons, Layard's Parakeets, Lear's Macaw, Giant Touraco, Tawny Owls (both the central and western European subspecies), American Great Gray Owl, Green-tailed Sylph, Costa Rican Quetzals, White-headed Wood-hoopoes, Black-billed Mountain Toucan, Clark's Nutcracker, White-capped Redstart, and Golden-winged Sunbird.

No doubt, by today's standards, many would regard such a collection as "not politically correct." I well remember a table-full of American zoo curators rolling their eyes and blowing tobacco smoke while K.C., presenting the luncheon address at an international symposium honoring Jean Delacour, cheerfully related: "And in 1960, we built the Tropical Rain Forest, and we put *a thousand birds* in it, and it was the *funnest* aviary anyone

ever had.” (K.C. later told me that more than two hundred species were involved — though 300 out of this thousand were Java Sparrows, which bred there freely).

It is certainly well to ask what breeding success could be achieved in so enormous a collection, furthermore maintained under the constraints of a public zoo with all its other animals.

From the *International Zoo Yearbook* (Zoological Society of London, 1972b), I compiled the appended list of birds reared to maturity at the San Diego Zoo in 1970 (Table I). I chose this year, as it opened, as noted above, with 1,126 taxa, the largest first-of-the-year inventory in the zoo’s history. (At the close of 1970, there were 1,097 taxa present). Thirty-four species and subspecies successfully reproduced.

In comparison to today’s avicultural activities, this may seem appalling. For instance, in 1989, with fewer than 500 taxa inventoried, the San Diego Zoo bred 104 of them (Lieberman, et. al., 1990). In the context of its time, however, the 1970 San Diego figure is impressive. I rather arbitrarily chose several U.S. zoos and bird parks, and tallied the number of fully reared bird taxa for each from the 1970 breeding records of the *International Zoo Year-*

book (Zoological Society of London, 1972a & b). Of course, it must be kept in mind that, with the exception of the San Diego Zoo (with fewer than 500 taxa), no one in the Western Hemisphere maintains as many as 400 species and subspecies today. In fact, only the New York Zoological Park and the San Diego Wild Animal Park (which only opened in 1972) otherwise presently hold more than 300 taxa in America.

In the context of 1970, San Diego’s breeding statistics are admirable, especially when the results of other institutions are analyzed. Of the 46 taxa hatched at St. Louis, 27 were Anatids (ducks, geese and swans), and 14 were Galliformes, primarily pheasants. New York’s figures of 40 taxa include six species of Fringillid finches that were bred that year only, in a separately funded off-exhibit research project. Fifteen of the other taxa at New York were Anatids. Eighteen kinds of Anatids and ten taxa of Galliformes make up a substantial percentage of the 41 taxa produced at the National Zoological Park. Los Angeles and Houston each numbered eight species of Galliformes among their successes for that year. It will be noted, on the other hand, that no Galliformes, and only one Anatid were

fully reared at San Diego in 1970.

This, to some degree, was deliberate. K.C. was having one of his parrot years. In his own words, “My philosophy is that the more species you have, the more you have to work with. Each year I tried to concentrate on a different family of birds, you see. Because I had a large collection, I could do this and I was able to establish a lot of breeding records with that collection” (Lint, et. al., 1990, p. 22). It must be agreed that 401 is “a lot.” Leaving out everything indicated to have died before independence, I counted 401 species and subspecies of birds hatched at the zoo between 1938 and 1976 (the period K.C. worked in the Bird Department) from a list that he compiled from his daily logs and distributed privately (I’m not certain if this was ever published anywhere). And this list is not entirely complete. We have all heard of people who’ve “forgotten more than the rest of us will ever learn.” I have published elsewhere a bibliography of K.C.’s articles for *Zoonoos* (Lindholm, 1993). In 1941, a Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) is listed among the 38 species hatched that year (Lint, 1941). K.C. told me this bird hatched in the great Scripps aviary. It does not appear in the above-mentioned list. Neither does the Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), one of 50 species hatched in the fiscal year June 30, 1949 to June 30, 1950 (Lint, 1950). When I asked K.C. about this record, in 1992, he told me both Cooper’s and Red-tailed Hawks raised young in the Great Flying Cage (now the Rain Forest), shared with Bald Eagles, Andean Condors, and other large and aggressive species.

A record of more than 400 species bred from 1939 to 1976 is even more remarkable when one considers that Lee Crandall (1930), the enormously erudite Curator of Birds (later General Curator) at the New York Zoological Park, was only able to compile a list of 199 species and subspecies bred in the U.S. through 1929. Out of Crandall’s total, only 16 Psittacine taxa were raised. One hundred thirty taxa of parrots figure in K.C.’s list. It is thus obvious that K.C.’s career spans the time when modern American aviculture evolved, and he himself played a most significant role in it.

(to be continued next issue)

Table I

Birds hatched and fully reared at the San Diego Zoo in 1970.

(Compiled from the breeding records of the *International Zoo Yearbook* (Zoological Society of London, 1972b).

Eastern Emu (<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>)	2	Red-collared Lorikeet (<i>T. haematodus rubritorquis</i>)	4
American Flamingo (<i>Phoenicopterus r. ruber</i>)	1	Swainson’s Lorikeet (<i>T. haematodus moluccanus</i>)	1
American X Greater Flamingo Hybrid (<i>P. r. ruber x P. ruber roseus</i>)	1	Perfect Lorikeet (<i>T. euteles</i>)	5
Cape Barren Goose (<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>)	5	Western Iris Lorikeet (<i>T. i. iris</i>)	1
Black-necked Stilt (<i>Himantopus himantopus mexicanus</i>)	1	Blue-thighed Black-capped Lory (<i>Lorius lory erythrothorax</i>)	2
Scheepmaker’s Crowned Pigeon (<i>Goura s. scheepmakeri</i>)	1	Yellow-backed Chattering Lory (<i>L. garrulus flavopalliatus</i>)	4
Port Lincoln Parrot (<i>Barnardius barnardii zonarius</i>)	1	Madagascar Lovebird (<i>Agapornis cana</i>)	2
Mulga Parakeet (<i>Psephotus varius</i>)	3	Fischer’s Lovebird (<i>A. personata fischeri</i>)	5
Red-vented Blue-bonnet Parakeet (<i>P. haematogaster haematorrhous</i>)	5	Black-cheeked Lovebird (<i>A. personata nigrigenis</i>)	5
Red-fronted Kakariki (<i>Cyanoramphus n. novaezealandiae</i>)	3	Indian Ring-necked Parakeet (<i>Psittacula krameri manillensis</i>)	3
Yellow-fronted Kakariki (<i>C. auriceps</i>)	8	Northern Plum-headed Parakeet (<i>P. cyanocephala bengalensis</i>)	7
Elegant Grass Parakeet (<i>Neophema elegans</i>) ..	2	Malabar Parakeet (<i>P. columboides</i>)	2
Turquoise Grass Parakeet (<i>N. pulchella</i>)	5	Grand Eclectus (<i>Eclectus r. roratus</i>)	1
Swift Parakeet (<i>Lathamus discolor</i>)	3	Sparkling Violet-ear Hummingbird (<i>Colibri coruscans</i>)	1
Black Lory (<i>Chalcopsitta a. atra</i>)	1	Southern Kookaburra (<i>Dacelo n. novaeguineae</i>)	2
Rothschild’s Red Lory (<i>Eos bornea rothschildi</i>) ..	1	Rothschild’s Mynah (<i>Leucopsar rothschildi</i>)	2
Ornate Lorikeet (<i>Trichoglossus ornatus</i>)	9	Ruby-crowned Tanager (<i>Tachyphonus coronatus</i>)	2
Black-throated Lorikeet (<i>T. haematodus nigrogularis</i>)	3		