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A Monograph of Macaws and Conures

Author Tony Silva

Artist Eric Peake

Publisher Silvio Mattacchione & Co.

Price: \$175.00

reviewed by Sheldon Dingle
Los Angeles, California

The color, heft, texture and smell of books are satisfying. The grandest mansion is barren without a library but the humblest home is peopled with real friends if good books cover even part of one wall. These are friends you can listen to, argue with, learn from and return to. These friends can be from any part of the world, any culture, any language and any time in history. And they share with you their knowledge, thoughts, feelings and philosophies. Good books, these magnificent friends, are so much more than just the sum of their contents. They are reflections of humankind —

some soothing, some annoying, some humble, some arrogant, some true, some false, none perfect.

I love to be in the midst of these good friends. And it is from this position that I review and evaluate new books I meet. In this instance, the book is *A Monograph of Macaws and Conures* by Tony Silva with paintings by Eric Peake, published by Silvio Mattacchione & Co., 1793 Rosebanks Rd. N., Pickering, Ontario L1V1P5, Canada, telephone 905-831-1373, Fax 905-831-3734. There are two editions. The Remarqu  Edition is limited to 50 copies only — ever. It is for serious collectors who feel about books as I do and are willing to invest \$2,500. Contact the publisher for more information if you're interested in this edition.

The Subscribers Edition, which I have in my hands, is limited to 2,000 copies worldwide and costs \$175. It is this edition we'll look at.

A Monograph of Macaws and Conures by Tony Silva is a large, heavy volume 13-1/4 inches high by 9 inches wide by 1-1/4 inches thick. It will go on your coffee table or upon the shelves reserved for large books. It is black, bound in cloth and looks very much like Silva's 1989 *Monograph of Endangered Parrots*. Indeed, they'd make a handsome pair in anyone's library.

Earlier, I mentioned that, like friends, books can carry on a conversation with you. This is especially true in this volume. Silva converses with the reader. He relates a number of personal experiences and voices his personal opinions on things from classification to bird trade. He talks to you about purchasing a bird, the role of aviculture in conservation, husbandry of macaws and conures, incubation, handrearing and a number of other things. In fact, each of these subjects has a full chapter devoted to it.

In these chapters, the depth and breadth of Silva's experience comes out. He has devoted the past 20 years or so exclusively to aviculture and to the study of parrots in particular. When he speaks of bird trade, he takes you with him to the bumpy, red-dirt road deep in Argentina where he is in the hands of "Beto," a local collector and trapper of parrots. Silva presents a vivid description of bouncing along dusty roads in an old pickup truck, of going from village to village

where many of the palm shacks contain cardboard boxes of nestling parrots being handfed. Silva is one of the few aviculturists who has actually travelled the world, met many bird trappers and observed the parrot trade from the wild nest to the quarantine station.

One learns just how important the parrot trade is to impoverished and desperate people in the third world countries. Many of them depend upon selling baby parrots for the majority of their annual income. Even when laws change and trade is banned, the activity goes on — parrots are smuggled.

Many of the native people have learned to harvest nestlings carefully, leaving at least one baby in the nest so the breeding pair will be successful and return the following year. Others use devastating methods.

From first-hand experience, Silva pinpointed a concept that is rarely considered by the purists and preservationists. The fact is, many indigenous people have two choices regarding their local wild parrots — eat them or sell them. I confess, this concept staggered me. This reality has to be taken into consideration when discussing conservation methods in plush boardrooms around the world.

I don't always agree with Silva, or any other author for that matter, but I appreciate the chance to exchange ideas. Silva has plenty of ideas and it's profitable to digest them, argue them, refute or refine them. This is one of the main purposes of a good book. I found the chapters on the bird trade and on the role of aviculture in conservation very good reading — thought provoking.

Please keep in mind now, that Silva is engaged in a lively conversation with the reader. He is voicing his own thoughts and ideas stemming out of his own personality and experience.

Indeed, it is interesting to watch how ideas change over the years. In his 1989 *A Monograph of Endangered Parrots*, Silva advocated pulling and handfeeding virtually all parrot chicks hatched in captivity. Now he expresses second thoughts. In the chapter on handrearing, Silva suggests that the *first* clutch may be taken for handrearing but the *second* clutch might better be left for the parents to rear. He feels that rearing young is a learned behavior and babies reared by their own parents will, in turn, make

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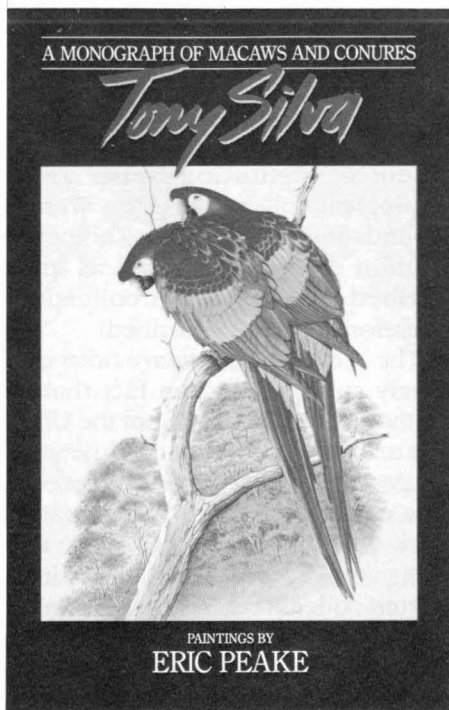
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better parents themselves.

Perhaps. But the point I'm making is that in this literary conversation with us, Silva is open and honest enough to recant his earlier position and explain why. This takes a certain amount of courage.

On the subject of conversation, I think you all know that if our normal conversational language were printed verbatim, it would be chaotic. We write differently than we speak. In Silva's case, this poses a difficulty. In writing, Silva goes way beyond the normal to search out esoteric and obscure words; and he sometimes misapplies them. If you are a professor of English, an editor or a linguistic purist, this book will drive you nuts. I attribute this to poor editing.

If, however, you are not hung up on the nuances and subtleties of language, if you are reading for information and enjoyment, don't let the odd words slow you down. Indeed, make a game of it. Keep a dictionary at hand as I do and check out the words you don't know. Silva used "tacit" where "quiet" would serve better. He used "skulked" when "hidden" makes more sense. He spoke of a "particularly nascivious problem" but I couldn't find "nascivious" in any of my dictionaries including the 13-volume Oxford English Dictionary. Perhaps the word is found in some dictionary of seldom used scientific terms — who knows? I *did*, however, get the sense that the problem was a

nasty one.

There are many such words and typos that leap out in the faces of the nit-pickers and perfectionists. Not to worry, though. You will understand, learn from and enjoy reading the volume knowing that it has its own peculiar language — just as each of our other friends has.

The volume has 380 pages. The vast majority of the pages are devoted to the species and subspecies of the macaws and conures. Each species profile is laid out on the same format. The genus is given, then the specific name in English and several other languages, followed by the scientific name and an explanation of what it means. I like that.

Next comes the Description, then Distribution, Habitat and Status. General Notes follow, then Feeding, Nesting, Eggs, Call, Flight, and finally, Aviary Notes.

Each genus has its own chapter with the appropriate species discussed by way of the above-mentioned format. Believe me, dear friend, there is a huge bulk of information presented. Some species, of course, are little known and take up little room in the book. But others more familiar to science and aviculture occupy many pages. The Hyacinth Macaw, for example, has 15 detail-packed pages of information devoted to it.

The Niceforo's White-eyed Conure, on the other hand, takes up only 20 lines of text with Status unknown; Feeding undescribed; Nesting not recorded; Eggs unknown; Call not recorded; Flight never described. There! Now you know it all.

In addition to the text, some of the species are illustrated. Eric Peake has created 40 exquisite original watercolors specifically for this book. These paintings won't jump out and smack you between the eyes as some of the muralists' works do. Peake's paintings are soft, delicate, detailed and rich in color. I'm not an art critic but I do appreciate good bird art and I have a fair number of original prints on my walls. Peake's work reminds me of some of Gould's prints. There is a certain style that I really enjoy. The birds and authentic plants are combined in beautiful compositions — sometimes with just a pastel hint of the background — with the full focus on the bird.

With Peake's work, take your time.

Savor and enjoy the composition, then the color. Get closer and observe the fine detail. These paintings are subtle and can't be fully appreciated in the blink of an eye. The more you look, the more you'll love them. I would dearly love to have the Rose-crowned Conure original on my wall. It's a great pity that there are only 40 plates.

For many reasons, I like *A Monograph of Macaws and Conures*. It is a valued addition to my own library and if you are interested in good conversation about macaws and conures, and enjoy beautiful bird paintings, you cannot go wrong buying this excellent volume. ●

A Monograph of Macaws and Conures

scientific review by
Jack Clinton-Eitniear
San Antonio, Texas

The companion volume to Silva's *A Monograph of Endangered Parrots* (1989), the current work covers all the typical macaws as well as the conures of the genera *Aratinga* and *Pyrrhura*. Chapter 21 also deals with the Thick-billed and Maroon-

Greenwings
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A MONOGRAPH OF MACAWS AND CONURES

Tony Silva



PAINTINGS BY
ERIC PEAKE

A monumental effort to bring together in one book the most complete and up to date information ever assembled on these magnificent birds. Whether parrot breeder, biologist, ornithologist this new book is an absolute must!

A *Monograph of Macaws & Conures* brings together a team of truly committed professionals. Tony Silva author of *A Monograph of Endangered Parrots*, Eric Peake internationally acclaimed wildlife artist and Silvio Mattacchione the Canadian Publisher who has brought some of the finest new parrot books to market.

The book is comprised of a text totalling almost 500,000 words plus 40 new images commissioned especially for this book. World wide circulation is limited strictly to 2,000 subscribers copies numbered, and 50 numbered and signed Remarqué Editions. Destined to quickly become a collectors item.

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Published by:
SILVIO MATTACCHIONE & CO.,
1793 ROSEBANK RD.
PICKERING, ONT., CANADA
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TEL: (905) 831-1373
FAX (905) 831-3734

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fronted Parrots, genus *Rhynchopsitta*.

Accounts are provided not only at the species but subspecies level. Each account includes information as to *synonyms, other names, etymology, description, distribution, habitat, status, feeding, nesting, eggs, call, flight* and finally *aviary notes*. Illustrations by Eric Peake are generally of the nominate race.

Silva attempts to provide information that would appeal to both the serious aviculturist and parrot biologist. While certainly a noble attempt was made, I am not certain that he adequately provides enough detailed information for either reader.

For example, while over seven names are documented for the Mexican Military Macaw (Birkenstein and Tomlinson 1981), Silva includes only one, then lists the species' common name in Germany and Spain where it does not occur in the wild. This becomes particularly irritating in the case of the Green Conure as not only are the French, German and Danish names provided but also the official Mexican name "Perico Aliverde" is not listed (see Sada *et al.* 1987).

Considering that neither color plates nor range maps are included, the *descriptions* section is rather brief. In most cases, however, it is assumed that the reader has a basic familiarity of at least the morphology of the nominate race. Several pieces of information, however, warrant clarification. Under the Red-throated Conure a statement is made as to the development of "full adult coloration" i.e. Definitive Basic Plumage. However, no citation is given. Since such development may vary, one can only assume that the author collected the data from a significant sample size.

Insufficient sample sizes appear in numerous areas such as adult weights and chick growth. Again in the Red-throated account, only one female and one male was listed under weights. This is unfortunate given that the species is rather common in captivity.

Much of the worth of the book appears under the *general notes* subtitle as Silva augments the current literature with numerous "tidbits" acquired through his correspondence with knowledgeable individuals. While he didn't consult *all* the individuals active in the field, given his residence in the Canary Islands and lack of academic training he did an

outstanding job.

The categories of *feeding, nesting, eggs, call* and *flight* are sufficiently treated. An exception being that some additional time should have been spent at institutions such as the Oological collection of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. In certain cases, eggs listed as undescribed are, in fact, in collections, therefore could be described.

The section titled *aviary notes* obviously suffers from the fact that the author has been away from the United States for some time. While early importations and European breeding are expanded upon, he appears to lack even the basic knowledge as to the status of various species in United States collections. This is, of course, understandable given that the author does not reside in the Western Hemisphere. A short telephone conversation with conure specialists such as Davis Koffron (Arizona) and Dale Thompson (California) would have resulted in a more accurate depiction as to the status of conures in the United States.

A final concern regards the format in which some citations are included within the text (much in the same fashion as is typical of a scientific short note) and the remainder are cited in typical manner with full details at the termination of the book. This mixing of formats becomes rather annoying, especially after one oscillates "back and forth" between citations for the hundredth time. Considering this format, one should not immediately turn to the reference pages in order to determine the book's worth, as most citations are not fully referenced.

Nevertheless, minus the aforementioned shortcomings, the book represents a major contribution to our knowledge of macaws and conures. Given that the book is very reasonably priced and is of outstanding production quality, it should be on the top of everyone's 1994 holiday gift list. That is if it is not sold out prior to the Christmas season. . . .

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