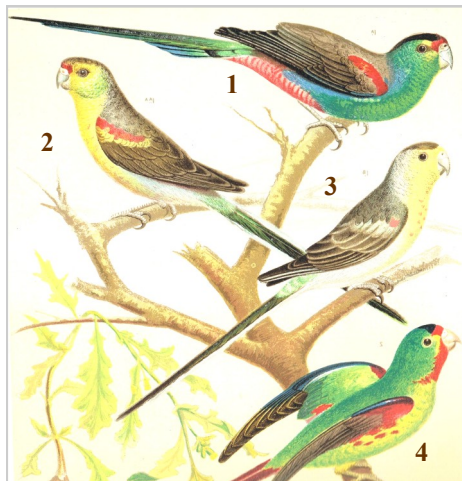


THE WAY THINGS WERE

*An extract from THE BOOK OF CANARIES AND CAGE BIRDS,
by W.A. Blackston, W. Swaysland and August F. Wiener, F.Z.S.
Published circa 1880 by Cassell & Company, Limited
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From *THE BOOK OF CANARIES
AND CAGE BIRDS*

Illustration drawn by W. Rutledge from
birds belonging to Mr. Jas. Abrahams

- 1 Male Paradise Parrot
- 2 Female Paradise Parrot
- 3 Juvenile Male Paradise Parrot
- 4 Swift Parrot

‘There cannot be two opinions that the Paradise Parrakeet is the most beautiful of all the Parrakeets, and it would be difficult to describe in words the splendour and variety of colour displayed in his plumage. As a male bird only attains perfection in his third year, and young males are often mistaken for hen-birds, Mr. Rutledge has drawn a pair of old Paradise Parrakeets and a half mature male, about one and a half or two years old. It will be seen that the female can be readily distinguished.

Beyond referring to what I have stated on page 437, [see next page Ed.] I cannot, in spite of many years’ observation, give any useful hints as to their keep. Once I had what I thought to be the most beautiful pair which could be seen, and I was anxious to procure a second hen, as the pair did not seem inclined to breed. In course of time I picked a good hen out of a number just arrived. The excitement of the male was great when I introduced the new hen. He spread his wings, and called and bowed, and all at once fell dead off his perch. Another time I introduced a male very slowly and cautiously, bringing his cage a little nearer each day; but he presently declined his food, and soon died of exhaustion. An opportunity to buy a pair very cheap led me to try an open-air aviary, but the first chilly night was the death of that pair. I could give numerous other examples, and yet one female lived in my aviary for years. Dr. Russ had a pair during four years, and a friend of mine at Baden-Baden is determined to be the first to breed these Parrakeets at some future time. So far my friend has succeeded only in obtaining eggs; which anyhow is more than anyone else has achieved.

Dr. Russ observed in his aviary that the Paradise Parrakeets were fond of hemp-seed, and ate fresh ants’ eggs, mealworms, and egg-food, eating but little canary and millet, whilst I fed mine on canary-seed, millet in the ear, and groundsel. An Australian bird-catcher informs me that the Beautiful Parrakeets build their nests in forsaken ant-hills, into which they burrow a hole. Can this be correct?’

THE EXTRACT FROM "PAGE 437" REFERRED TO ABOVE

'I have been informed that these Parrakeets live for part of the year on grass and other seeds, but when the so-called "wattle shrub" is in flower they chiefly feed on its blooms, and the birds caught when feeding on seeds will live, whilst those caught during the flower season will not endure. What may be the European substitute of the Australian wattle shrub blooms has yet to be found out, and will no doubt be discovered; meanwhile blooming groundsel does duty, and a plentiful daily supply certainly prolongs the life of these splendid Parrakeets in a very extraordinary manner. The Australian wattle shrub is a kind of acacia, and bears white (*sic*) ball-shaped flowers.'

A FOOT NOTE ON THE PARADISE PARROT

Several years ago I was shown a photo taken in the early 1960s by an aboriginal stockman of a parrot in a tree. The bird was purported to be a Paradise Parrot, but unfortunately it was so far away as to make positive identification possible.

I was told that a prominent New South Wales aviculturist, Joe Mattinson, now deceased, spent many years searching for the Paradise Parrot. In one district he came across stockmen who recognised the photos he showed them. They were adamant they knew where the bird could be found, but said it was only seen very occasionally.

Joe arranged for each of the stockmen to be given a simple camera, and offered £100 (\$200.00), a large amount in those days, for a genuine photograph.

Many months later he was contacted by the station owner who advised that one of his stockmen claimed to have photographed a Paradise Parrot. When the film was developed, and enlargements made of the part of the tree in which the bird was perched, Joe was convinced it was indeed the long lost Paradise Parrot.

Joe approached the fauna authorities in the state where the photo was taken, and offered to take and breed some of the birds in an effort to build up the numbers and conserve the species. His offer was brusquely rebuffed, but the authorities demanded to know where the photo was taken. Incensed by their attitude, Joe refused to disclose the location and told the wildlife authorities to get lost (I understand it was actually quite a bit stronger than that).

Unfortunately, Joe was accidently killed not long after, and the birds' whereabouts went with him to his grave.

R.V.C.