

THE YELLOW-THROATED SCRUBWREN A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

By Richard Chilton

When visiting Sydney in January 1980 to promote “*The First National Avicultural Convention*”, I stayed with the late Doug Bailey (of Insectivorous Cake fame) of Hornsby. During my stay Doug took me to visit a great friend of his, the late Colin Percival. Colin had magnificent large landscaped aviaries that even had a natural running creek meandering through them. Colin’s main interest was in softbilled species, but he also kept a wide variety of finches and a few lorikeets, including the first lutino Rainbow Lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus*, I’d ever seen.

Among the softbilled species Colin was breeding was the Yellow-throated Scrubwren. Although I had previously kept the rather shy White-browed Scrubwren, *Sericornis frontalis*, I’d never seen the far from shy Yellow-throated before. Well, as they say in the movies, it was love at first sight...I just had to have some of these enchanting little birds.

Luckily Colin had some young unrelated birds just out of the nest and was happy to let me have a pair once they were all independent.

When I returned home an Import Permit was quickly arranged, and a few weeks later I was the proud possessor of a pair of the most engaging birds I have ever kept. They quickly settled into their new abode and became extremely confiding in no time at all. Whenever I was in their aviary they quite happily hopped around my feet as I carried out any of the various tasks required for their upkeep.



White-browed Scrubwren
Photo: "Fir0002/Flagstaffotos"

The diet I offered consisted of termites, mealworms, crickets, moths, Doug & Kay Bailey’s Insectivorous Cake and crushed dog chow. I also added mulch and leaf litter to the aviary, the birds continually worked this over in

search of any insect life present. They thrived in the environment provided, and even went to nest late in the same year.

There was a wire cylinder approximately 60cm (2') by 45cm (18") loosely packed with needle brush hanging in the shelter, and it was in this they chose to build their nest. Young were eventually hatched, and as I foolishly thought I might gain one of the Society's First Breeding Medals I let nature take its course. All went well until the young were about ten to eleven days old. Then disaster struck...I found the four young dead on the floor.

I was pleasantly surprised when the adults immediately laid again using the same nest. This time I sneaked a few peeks, and found there were once again four young. Mindful of the previous disappointment I vastly increased the amount of live-food each day in case an insufficiency of protein had been the cause of abandonment on the previous occasion. I also contacted Colin Percival to ascertain what his birds preferred to feed their young. Colin advised that they mainly used the "Jumpers" they found in the leaf litter on his aviary floors. Apart from horses, athletes and woolly ones I was ignorant of any other kind of jumpers, so I contacted Colin again, but he said he only knew the invertebrates concerned as "Jumpers", and that they were abundant in the Sydney area. Other than this he couldn't supply any further information. However, he undertook to send some "Jumpers" to me, as he was sure they must also occur in South Australia and sighting them would enable me to find the local ones. Unfortunately, when they arrived (by post) they were dried out, shrivelled up and unidentifiable.

Once again all went well until eleven days after hatching, when I again found the young dead on the floor. However, the adults were nothing if not determined, and back to nest they went yet again. This time there were three young and casting aside all thoughts of First Breeding Medals I waited until they were a week old and took them for hand-raising. As I had successfully hand-raised White-winged Blue Wrens, *Malurus leucopterus*, and several other softbill and finch species I thought the task wouldn't be overly difficult. But, alas, the Gods of hand-rearing didn't smile upon me, I just couldn't get the young to eat and lost them.

So my 1980-81 Yellow-throated Scrubwren efforts resulted in eleven young hatched, eleven young dead and all thoughts of first breeding medal glory well and truly forgotten.

In the Spring of 1981 the adults, although still only eighteen months old, showed no sign of going to nest, but I was hopeful of them going to nest before the breeding season finished, but my Yellow-throated Scrubwren breeding dream was never realised, as in the October I was offered, and accepted, a job in Papua New Guinea and had to dispose of all my birds.