

THE VULTURE RECOVERY PROGRAMME

by Nick Lindsay

Since the late 1990s field biologists in India, Pakistan and Nepal have been concerned about the decline in the numbers of three species of vulture, the White-backed *Gyps bengalensis*, the Long-billed *G. indicus* and the Slender-billed *G. tenuirostris*, which were becoming less numerous in all areas. By early 2000, literally millions of vultures had died, but the cause remained unknown. A coordinated effort involving scientists from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and The Peregrine Fund was undertaken with the aim of identifying the cause of this catastrophic mortality. The cause of the die-off was traced to diclofenac, a veterinary drug to which vultures are highly sensitive. A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, it is used widely in south Asian countries to treat domestic cattle and buffalo for a variety of illnesses. During treatment, and for a short period afterwards, the tissues of the treated animals contain diclofenac, and if treated animals subsequently die during this time the carcasses can be toxic to vultures and have fatal consequences.

We estimate that more than 98% of the population of each of the above three species of vulture has died within the past 10 years at a rate of over 50% per annum. At this rate these species could be virtually extinct within five years. Although research into vulture mortality continues, the programme has moved forward with an aim in all three countries to establish breeding centres into which wild-caught vultures can be placed and breeding populations established. Vultures are known to do well in captivity and there is great confidence that the affected south Asian species will thrive in breeding centres, although the numbers required to ensure a viable population for the future presents considerable resource and expertise challenges.

An international meeting was held in February 2004 in India to devise an international recovery plan for the affected vulture species and to ensure that all the range states work together to avoid possible extinctions. Since then there has been considerable activity and signs are encouraging that plans will be well advanced for the coming breeding season.

Although getting the vultures into captivity and, therefore, away from the risk of contaminated carcasses is of the highest priority, finding a solution to the continuing use of diclofenac is also urgent. The sooner that this drug can be taken out of the system and replaced by one safe for vultures and other wildlife the sooner we will be able to consider releasing birds back into the wild. Diclofenac is a very effective and economical drug and is therefore widely used. As yet no suitable alternative is known, but work on this is ongoing.

Vultures play an extremely important role in the ecosystems of countries that support a huge population of cattle. Dead animals are left in the open for nature to take care of. Vultures strip the carcasses clean, removing potentially hazardous material from the environment. It has been found that when vultures do not carry out this important job there is a risk to public health. Following the catastrophic decline of vultures the number of feral dogs is increasing and, with this, there is an increased risk to humans of dog attacks and diseases such as rabies. The cleaned bones are collected for use in the production of fertiliser and this source of income has now been lost in many areas.

Andrew Cunningham, Head of Wildlife Epidemiology at the Zoological Society of London's Institute of Zoology, has been leading the society's involvement with the vulture programme. With funds from the Darwin Initiative, Andrew, with Dr Vibhu Prakash of the Bombay Natural History Society and the RSPB, constructed the Vulture Care Centre at Pinjore in the State of Haryana, north of Delhi. This centre, opened by Elliot Morley MP in February 2003, currently holds 38 vultures of two species - the White-backed and the Long-billed - many of which were brought in as sick birds and survived following successful treatment. These birds will form the nucleus of a population at the centre. Funds from ZSL, the RSBP and the National Birds of Prey Trust (NBPT) will enable the centre to be expanded with the construction of breeding aviaries, both to hold colonies of vultures (up to eight pairs in each) and single pairs. This work is only possible with the tremendous commitment of the Forestry Department in the State of Haryana working closely with the BNHS. This centre will also be the model for a further five or six centres in India, one in Nepal and possibly two in Pakistan.

The challenge is now to find sufficient birds to establish the founder population. Where vultures still occur they are very nervous of humans, which may be related to the reduced numbers now present at any one site. The capture of adult birds is going to prove difficult. The alternative is to take fledglings from nests, which is not an easy task as nests are often high above the ground in trees or on cliffs. There is also concern that chicks are dying in the nest as young as four weeks of age, presumably after being fed contaminated meat. This may force the collection of chicks at a younger age, making the rearing of the chicks more complex.

The aim is for each centre to hold 25 pairs of each appropriate species. In most cases this will mean a total of 50 pairs of two species depending on the centre's location in relation to the distribution of the three target species. We are working on a 10 year programme, but with a more realistic target of 15 or even 20 years. With vultures maturing at five years of age we hope the vultures in the breeding centres will increase and we are aiming to double the captive population over the next 10 years.

Each vulture breeding centre will have its own dedicated team, comprising a site manager, a veterinary officer and four or more staff who will work with the birds on a daily basis. The team of field biologists will increase the amount of time spent monitoring the remaining wild birds as it is hoped that some remnant populations will continue to survive. It is also important to monitor other species that may be vulnerable to the same problem. Each centre will require a considerable amount of food and the safest option may be to produce food for the vultures on site to ensure it is safe and of sufficient quality. All the centres will use local staff and the Pinjore Vulture Care Centre will be used as the training base for new staff. Not only does this provide an opportunity for ZSL staff to assist with the training, but also to develop their expertise, both in the training and in the management of vultures on this scale.

Andrew Cunningham has now received an Extension Grant from the Darwin Initiative which will enable further expansion at Pinjore as well as covering the costs for ongoing research and staffing costs for the next two years. ZSL is committed to supporting the Vulture Recovery Programme over at least the next two years during which time it will support the development of new centres in India and Nepal, working with the Bombay Natural History Society, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Nepal and Bird Conservation Nepal. The RSPB, NBPT and The Peregrine Fund are also committed to the programme in the long term, but more partners and funds are required if we are to meet the required scale of operation to ensure the survival of these species.

The above account is based closely on A Decade of Decline, The Vulture Recovery Programme by Nick Lindsay, Head of International Zoo Programmes, Zoological Society of London, published in Lifewatch (Autumn/Winter 2004, pp.10-11), the magazine for members and supporters of the Zoological Society of London, and is reproduced here by kind permission of ZSL.

Nick Lindsay reports that the signs for 2005 are very encouraging and they hope that good progress will be possible in India and Nepal, however, there is a real need for further funds to support this work. If you would like to make a donation to The Vulture Recovery Programme you can do so through the Zoological Society of London. Please contact Nick Lindsay, Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 2LF, UK or e-mail: nick.lindsay@zsl.org.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CARRION CROW AND A MAGPIE

by Robin Restall

The notes by my old friend Derek Goodwin (2004) on interactions between Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* and Magpies *Pica pica* reminded me of my own experiences with these two species when I lived in Spain some 35 years ago. We lived in a house set within a walled garden in an old artists' colony on the northern outskirts of Madrid. I maintained an ever changing collection of birds, mostly locally caught and acquired from the Sunday morning bird market in the old part of town. The dealers there knew me as a regular visitor each week and I suspect that occasionally they would catch birds not normally saleable on the near certainty that I would buy them. After I had painted and analysed them, most of the birds I bought were subsequently released. One old couple in particular always had the most interesting birds, often broods of nestlings, and it was thanks to them that I hand-reared European Rollers *Coracias garrulus*, European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* and other species aviculturally totally new to me. On one of my sorties however, I returned home with a comparatively prosaic nestling Magpie.

Like most crows, it was easy to rear and a delightful creature that undoubtably thought it owned me. I would take it to the office each day in order to feed it on schedule. It was transported in a shoe box which had a small window cut out of it, that was large enough to allow it to poke its head through and not only call to me to demand to be fed, but to observe me as I went about my work. On one occasion I had to attend a business lunch and, fearful that the heat of the sun on the trunk (boot) of the car would cook the bird, I took the shoe box containing the bird into the restaurant and placed it beneath my chair. Towards the end of the meal we were alerted by a shriek of fear from a lady at a nearby table. There perched on the back of her chair and noisily demanding to be fed was the Magpie. I leapt into action and, moving as fast as I could, grabbed the bird and left the restaurant. Before the poor thing knew what was happening, I had thrust it into the trunk of the car and slammed the door closed. Upon my return to the restaurant I was applauded and presented with a glass of brandy as a reward. Nobody had realised it was my bird!

A few weeks before I had acquired the Magpie, a friend had come to my house with a shoe box (the same one) and pleaded with me to save the life of the poor bird in the box. It was a newly-fledged Carrion Crow that had been saved from a couple of dogs that had been attacking it. The bird, which at the time seemed unable to fly, had been cowering, with its beak open, between

the roots of a tree, as it faced the dogs. It walked around our garden and ran to be fed whenever it saw me. We used to sleep with our bedroom window open and the bird, which by then could fly, would fly up and roost on the window sill, facing indoors so that it could watch me. Each morning I arose at dawn and drove out of town to an area of marshland on which the grass grew tall and lush. There I was able to collect a hundred or so fairly inert - because of the cold - large grasshoppers. These were taken home and formed the morning feed for the Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* and Azure-winged Magpies *Cyanopica cyanus* I was keeping at the time. As soon as I left the bedroom each morning to go downstairs, the crow would turn around so as to watch me as I went to the car and drove off to collect the grasshoppers. Upon my return, it would be waiting on the drive, and as soon as I climbed out of the car, it would run towards me, begging pitifully, like a starved and tragic orphan. I would give it a couple of fat grasshoppers, which it would gobble down, and then the third would be taken, at a run, to the base of a tree where it would be swiftly buried. The bird would then run back to me and once more plead pitifully to be fed. It was a great game to see whether I could get to the door of the house before the crow caught up with me again.

I soon found myself with two free-flying, hand-reared corvids in the garden. Both would wander away, but never went very far and never for more than a few hours at a time. Mostly they preferred to be on the ground in the garden. Each had a very distinctive personality. The Carrion Crow always roosted on the window sill. The Magpie slept in one of the trees. The morning grasshopper-begging routine with the Carrion Crow never changed. The Magpie was never seen on these occasions. It was during the day, especially at weekends when I was at home, that their interaction was most noticeable. The Magpie was a prankster, always playing with things, with people and with the crow. Playing with the crow was invariably a one-sided game for the crow never responded and was seemingly devoid of any sense of humour.

The crow would walk around sedately and with dignity. It never tired of begging and whatever it had scrounged would invariably be poorly hidden at the base of one of the trees near the front door of the house. The Magpie would follow the crow about, always keeping 1m (approx. 3ft) or so behind it. Then suddenly it would run at the crow and jump onto its back and, as the crow turned to face it, would jump off and run and hide behind a tree. The Magpie would peer out from behind the tree, first from one side and then from the other, and when it was apparent that the crow was not looking, the Magpie would run out and jump on its back again. If the crows attention had been successfully diverted, that is to say, it had turned and walked back, the Magpie would run to where the crow had hidden its latest cache and

steal it. However, this behaviour was not always, it seemed, aimed at stealing the crow's food, at other times it seemed to be simply a form of play. The children would delight at the "catch me if you can" play of the two corvids.

In Spain there is an old saying, "*Cria cuarvos te sacan los ojos*", which loosely translated means, "Breed a crow and it will poke out your eyes". Obviously a neighbour believed this, for one morning the crow was not on the bedroom window sill and when I opened the gate to drive out, I found it had been laid out dead where I was sure to find it. Following this, I feared for the safety of the Magpie, and some weeks later when we left for a holiday in England, we took the Magpie with us and released it in Devon.

Until I read Derek's notes, I had always regarded the behaviour of the two corvids as having been friendly and playful. I now suspect that I was being more anthropomorphic in my interpretation and can now see that the Magpie might have been indulging in an intuitive attack behaviour that in the wild would have been reinforced by learning. The Carrion Crow's fairly indifferent response, but a reaction nevertheless, could have been equally genetic in origin but lacking any learned aspect that would have made it more vicious.

Reference

Goodwin, D. 2004. Magpie rescuing its mate from a Carrion Crow and other crow versus magpie encounters. *Avicultural Magazine* 110, 3:104-107.

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BEALE PARK DAY

Dave Coles has written to say that four new aviaries have been opened at Beale Park. One houses African birds, another houses Australasian birds, a third houses birds from the Americas and the other houses birds from the Himalayas. Species on view in these aviaries include the Superb Starling *Spreo superbus*, Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata*, Black-headed Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*, Bali Starling *Leucopsar rothschildi*, Mountain Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron inopinatum*, Collared Hill Partridge *Arborophila gingica*, Pheasant Pigeon *Otidiphaps nobilis*, Wonga Pigeon *Leucosarcia melanoleuca*, Bare-faced *Columbina cyanopis* and Black-winged Ground Dove *Metriopelia melanoptera* and Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyr*, plus several common species.

On production of a current issue of the *Avicultural Magazine*, members of the Avicultural Society will be admitted for the concessionary price of £3, on Beale Park Day, Sunday July 3rd.

THE SOCIETY'S VISIT TO BUSBRIDGE LAKES

by Philip Schofield

Last year the Avicultural Society's Spring Meeting was held at Busbridge Lakes, near Godalming, Surrey. Owned by Fleur Douetil, it is home to one of the more all-embracing waterfowl collections, holding lots of unexpected forms as well as all the usual ones. Most of the waterfowl are on three lakes, which flow into each other, each within its own enclosure.

A number of the 'difficult' Long-tailed Duck were in evidence on the elongated 'canal' lake by the house, together with a magnificent pair of Common Scoter which replace a deceased pair of the even more unusual Velvet Scoter that formerly thrived there. It is hoped that the Common Scoter will eventually breed, something the Velvet Scoter never quite managed. Long-tailed Ducks were also in evidence amongst the Eider and other species. A number of Goosanders, bred there the previous year, were still available to prospective purchasers. Current year-bred young birds on view included Black Swans, Egyptian Geese and Australian Shelduck. Black-necked Swans were incubating. In recent years, increasing numbers of waterfowl bred at Busbridge Lakes have been parent-reared, and this has now become the norm. Staff try to have one egg of each clutch in an incubator. When this starts to chip, the parent duck is confined to her nest until the brood has hatched. Mother and young are then removed to a rearing pen, where they are joined by the incubator-hatched young one. With species where the male assumes a parental role, he is placed in the rearing pen as well. These outdoor pens have running water and are partly roofed, with a heat lamp available under the covered end.

Among the more unusual waterfowl and few mutations on view were blonde Lesser Brazilian Teal. Brazilian Teal always seem to be a 'poor relation' to the more glamorous Ringed Teal in collections, and are never kept in anything like the same numbers. There have been times when the Lesser Brazilian Teal has lost out numerically to the more robust Greater Brazilian Teal, an aviculturally less desirable bird because it is more belligerent with other species.

Among the Mallard-type ducks, two subspecies of the Yellowbill, the Abyssinian as well as the more usual southern African form, were in evidence. The distinctions between subspecies are subtle and can be confusing. The Yellowbills I have are pure South African, as far as I can ascertain.

While it is not collection policy, in line with current UK legislation, to have exotic species free-flying, local feral Mandarin Ducks were much in evidence and a delight to see weaving in and out amongst the trees, as they came in to land on the water. Apparently they cause problems by laying

large clutches of eggs in the boxes intended for Goldeneye. Mallard, not being such compulsive hole-nesters, do not create this particular difficulty. A population of large Pike inhabiting the 'wild' lake pose a different problem in waterfowl propagation. Any ducklings whose parents evade the rearing pen system, and instead take them onto the open water, are liable to be snapped up by these ever-hungry fish.

Dusky and Richardson's Canada Geese were on view. The latter, small and pale, has never been as numerous in collections as the more popular, small and dark Cackling Canada Goose, and it was nice to see them given a place in the collection. From a very shaky position a few years ago, numbers of the medium-sized Dusky seem to have been rebuilt, but it still deserves to be more widely kept. The skies may be full of naturalised Atlantic Canada Geese, but this is no reason not to have the other subspecies in our collections. At Busbridge Lakes there is also a small group of Orinoco Geese. Numbers of this charming little shelgoose in UK collections fluctuate wildly according to breeding success (it is often prolific) and winter weather (it is not entirely cold hardy).

A large aviary housed what I heard decribed as "a constellation of Cockatiels". Every conceivable colour variety was represented and the impression was that the reason for them being there was to add variety to the collection; something different to look at for those bored with ducks. Groups of Archangel and Fantail Pigeons added further variety.

While not as comprehensive as the waterfowl collection, there is on display a good series of pheasants in attractively planted aviaries. I noted the following pheasants: Golden, Lady Amherst's, Reeves', Mikado, Silver, Swinhoe's, Nepal Kalji, Edwards', Grey Peacock and Sonnerat's Junglefowl. An apparently pure Red Junglefowl cock was running loose with some bantams, as were Blue Peafowl. A few years ago, such a group of relatively common aviary pheasants would have included Hume's and Elliot's. While showing us round, Fleur Douetil commented on the current difficulty of finding either species.

Pairs of Demoiselle and East African Crowned Cranes were loose in the waterfowl enclosure nearest the house. The former had bred, and we saw two young from the previous year, awaiting transfer to a new home.

Busbridge Lakes, which is 1½ miles from Godalming off the B2130 on the Hambledon Road, is open to the public on a limited number of days each year. Details can be accessed on the well laid out website - www.busbridgelakes.co.uk - which gives a good idea of two prominent non-avicultural aspects that I have not mentioned above, the mature plantings of often rare specimen trees and shrubs, which compliment follies, ornamental bridges and an ice house cut deep into a hillside. Further information is also available from Mrs Douetil, Busbridge Lakes Waterfowl & Gardens, Hambledon Road, Godalming, Surrey GU8 4AY. Tel/Fax:01483 421955.

BOOK REVIEW

BIRDS OF WESTERN AFRICA

Field Guide to the Birds of Western Africa by Nik Borrow and Ron Demey is described by its publisher Christopher Helm as a new field guide which uses the plates from the same publisher's *Birds of Western Africa*. Several of these have been reworked and improved according to the blurb on the back cover, while 10 are said on p.6 to be entirely new and a significant number have been amended. *Birds of Western Africa*, published in 2001, is a 800 plus page hardback, while the present title, the subject of this review, is a 512 page paperback which was published towards the end of last year.

Illustrated and briefly described are all species, some 1,304 including some potential species, recorded from western Africa, as well as some that have been claimed but whose occurrence still requires proof. There are six new species for western Africa, the Great Blue Heron, Ring-necked Duck, Sociable Lapwing, Greater Yellowlegs, Moussier's Redstart and Yellow-browed Warbler, not in the 2001 hardback, while the Nyanza Swift, Variable Indigobird and Eurasian Rock Bunting are missing from the present title, as they are no longer considered to occur there.

Western Africa, as defined for the purposes of this guide, comprises the 23 countries south of the Sahara, from Mauritania in the north-west, to Chad and the Central African Republic in the east, and Congo-Brazzaville in the south-east (but not the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaïre), as well as the Cape Verde and Gulf of Guinea islands. It is a huge chunk of Africa, which of course also includes bird-rich countries such as Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon.

The species accounts are often very brief and are confined to identification, habitat and, unless the species is mainly silent or its voice is unimportant for identification purposes, there is a description of its call and song if it has one, at the end of which are the CD and track number on which they can be heard on Chappuis' 15 CD *African Bird Sounds* series.

Nowhere in the present volume does it seem to say whether Nik Borrow or Ron Demey, or both, painted the plates. To discover that all 148 colour plates were painted by Nik Borrow, I had to go to Mark Andrews' review of *Birds of Western Africa* in the *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* Vol.10, No.1, pp.38-39, March 2003. The plates, each of which are on the page facing the relevant text, are of a consistently high standard throughout.

I like the convenience of having the distribution map for each species on the same page as the relevant text and the colour plate on the facing page. However, such maps are often woefully small and to have done so in this guide would have been impracticable. I have to concede that having them

grouped together on the following or previous page as they are, means the maps are larger and therefore give a more accurate indication of the distribution of each species.

Although intended primarily for birdwatchers visiting the region and those resident there, *Field Guide to the Birds of Western Africa* will certainly be useful to aviculturists wishing to reach for a handy guide for identifying species from western Africa, many of which at present continue to be available to aviculturists. I would loved to have had this guide back in 1959 and 1960, when I stopped-off at Mauritania, Senegal and Guinea and then spent several months in Sierra Leone. Bannerman's two-volume *The Birds of West and Equatorial Africa* (Oliver & Boyd, 1953) was far too bulky to carry about in the bush, besides which, although it was packed with information, very few of the birds were illustrated in colour, if at all, unlike the present guide which is both a convenient size to carry about and has every bird illustrated in colour.

Field Guide to the Birds of Western Africa by Nik Borrow and Ron Demey, *Helm Field Guides*, is published by Christopher Helm, an imprint of A & C Black Publishers Ltd., London. A paperback, it has 512 pages, 148 colour plates and 1,250 distribution maps. UK price £29.99.

Malcolm Ellis

DVD REVIEW

BIRDKEEPING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAY THE FINCHES OF AFRICA

Most of the video/DVD titles available seem to be aimed either at the pet bird market (those keeping talking parrots etc.) or have been produced on a tight budget and as a consequence have lower production values. This DVD, filmed by Eelco Meyjes and scripted and researched by Fred Barnicoat and Eelco Meyjes, rises above such shortcomings providing as it does useful, accurate information for the aviculturist combined with superb filming of the birds in a captive environment.

The DVD covers 70 species including waxbills, mannikins, whydahs, weavers, sparrows, serins and others. It provides information on their housing, breeding, feeding etc. together with a useful key and distribution maps, all accompanied by top quality film work which often includes females and eclipse plumages where appropriate. The parasitic species (whydahs and indigobirds or combassous) are introduced alongside their host species which is useful if breeding is to be attempted. The majority of species depicted are available outside South Africa and some of the ideas included have certainly got me thinking of ways to apply them in my own aviaries.

There is always a fear with productions from a particular location that much will not be relevant in other parts of the world, however, there is very little here that cannot be applied or adapted to UK aviculture, or, presumably aviculture in the rest of the world, although here in the UK we cannot match the wonderful South African climate and particularly the availability of termites as livefood. The only problem I found was the lack of scientific names which would be useful when the names used on the DVD are different to those used here.

Birdkeeping the South African Way, Part 2, The Finches of Africa, has a running time of 58 minutes, is multizone format and is also available on video. The DVD is priced £18 (US\$34) and the video £15 (US\$28). The video is available only in PAL format. Prices are inclusive of p & p. Part 1 of the series is available only on video and gives an introduction to aviculture in South Africa with footage of aviaries and private collections. Part 3, which is in production, will cover non-native finches in South African aviculture. All purchases can be made by means of a postal order sent to Birds of a Feather, PO Box 782403, Sandton 2146, South Africa or alternatively can be purchased online by visiting the website: www.birdkeeping-the-sa-way.co.za

Paul Boulden

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NEWS & VIEWS

LITTLE KNOWN AFRICAN BARBET

The latest *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* Vol.12, No.1, March 2005, included (pp.50-52) a profile by Claire Spottiswoode, Peter Leonard and Michael Mills of the Chaplin's Barbet *Lybius chaplini*, a little known African bird and the only bird species truly endemic to Zambia. To have described it as "black-and-white", was not entirely accurate, for it is bright red on the sides of the forehead back to and below the eyes, the wings look to be dark brown rather than black and the secondaries are edged with yellow. It measures 18cm-19cm (approx.7in-7½in) in length and looks to be closely related to the White-headed species *L. leucocephalus*. It is almost always found in open savannah with a scattering of trees. It is especially likely to be found where the Sycamore Fig *Ficus sycomorus* is plentiful. This barbet was first described in 1920 and was named after Sir Drummond Chaplin who was the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) at the time. Chaplin's Barbet is considered Near Threatened by BirdLife International.

SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY IN CAMBODIA

Last year BirdLife International and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) announced the discovery of a significant number of the highly threatened Slender-billed *Gyps tenuirostris* and White-backed Vultures *G. bengalensis* in Indochina. More than 120 birds were counted in Sien Pang District, north-eastern Cambodia, the largest gathering recorded in Indochina during the past 15 years.

Most significant was the sighting of at least 28 Slender-billed Vultures, the rarest of the Asian vultures. This was one of the highest numbers recorded anywhere in the species' range during recent years, and at least four times greater than the previous largest single count in Indochina.

Fortunately diclofenac appears to be rarely used in Cambodia, the greatest threats appear to be from a lack of available food, persecution through hunting, capture for the pet trade and for their perceived medicinal value.

A working group has been formed by BirdLife International, WCS, WWF, and the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Royal Government of Cambodia, with the aim of coordinating conservation activities and developing specific action and management strategies to protect vultures across northern Cambodia. BirdLife International and WCS believe that the immediate priorities are to ban the distribution and sale in Cambodia of veterinary medicines that contain diclofenac, the establishment of a monitoring programme to determine vulture population sizes and trends, and the protection and monitoring of breeding sites.

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NEW ARRIVALS AT WADDES DON

For much of last year the Aviary at Waddesdon Manor, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, was hidden by scaffolding as a major restoration project took place. It is now resplendent in blue and gold, the gilding in homage to German Rococo pavilions that inspired its design.

New additions to the collection for 2005 include Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella*, Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus*, Orange-headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina*, Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush *Garrulax mitratus*, Omei Shan Liocichla *Liocichla omeiensis*, Amethyst Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*, Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*, Luzon Bleeding Heart Dove *Gallicolumba luzonica* and Crested Wood Partridge *Rollulus roulroul*.

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INCREASED INTEREST IN THE KEEPING OF SEABIRDS

Last year a pair of Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* incubated an egg and raised a chick at Rotterdam Zoo in the Netherlands. The zoo received 20 Common Guillemots and two Atlantic Puffins *Fratercula arctica* from a German breeder. A further four Common Guillemots arrived from Madrid Zoo. The Pacific Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla pollicaris* also bred at Rotterdam Zoo, as did the King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonica*. The zoo also received 10 Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*, 10 Redshank *Tringa totanus* and three Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* from Rheine Zoo, just over the border in Germany.

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GOLDEN KEA DISCOVERED

A so-called "Golden Kea" has been discovered living in the wild in Fiordland, South Island, New Zealand. It is not of course a new species but a rare colour form of the normal Kea *Nestor notabilis*. The plumage of the bird appears to be mainly yellow or slightly orangish-yellow, that is darker somewhat brownish or more orangish on the forehead and face, the ear-coverts are slightly greyish and there is orangish or reddish 'lacing' on the hindneck and to a lesser extent on the back and wing-coverts; the secondaries, except for the two innermost feathers, are a dull slightly greyish yellow and the primaries look to be mainly dull greyish-white. The cere looks quite light, the bill appears dark horn coloured and the toes look pinkish or light horn coloured.

The last time such a bird is said to have been reported was in 1896, and on that occasion it was shot and stuffed. The well-being of this bird is being treated as paramount and its whereabouts remains a secret that is known to only a few people, amongst whom are staff of the Department of Conservation.

The above information came from a cutting from a New Zealand newspaper, which included a large colour photo of the bird and was sent by Prof. J. R. (Bob) Hodges, a previous Hon. Editor of the *Avicultural Magazine* (1991-1993). Bob was in New Zealand again during February, March and April last year but unfortunately found little time for birdwatching. However he did spend one splendid day at Mount Bruce watching many Kaka *N. meridionalis*, some of which had been bred in aviaries there and liberated, coming into the centre for food. Bob also had an enjoyable afternoon in the Botanical Garden at Palmerston North inspecting several Blue Ducks *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos* which had been bred there as part of a conservation project.

PARROTS AND PENGUINS

There were some notable breeding successes at Chester Zoo in 2004. Princess Parakeets *Polytelis alexandrae* bred there for the first time, Humboldt Penguins *Spheniscus humboldti* bred again and other notable successes included the breeding of the Blue-eyed Cockatoo *Cacatua ophthalmica*, Greater Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis vasa* and Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana*. The Keas *Nestor notabilis* laid eggs that hatched but unfortunately the chicks failed to survive. Sadly this was also the case with one of the zoo's pairs of Hyacinth Macaws. Staff feel sure that both pairs will become successful parents in the future.

In *Zoo Life*, Spring 2005, Issue 21, p.5, Team Leader Andrew Woolham, a son of Frank Woolham, a former Hon. Editor of the *Avicultural Magazine* (1994-1995), also reported that the zoo's recently completed - Magnificent Macaws enclosure - now houses a spectacular mix of parrot species including Blue-throated Macaw *Ara glaucogularis*, Golden Conure *Guaruba guarouba*, Red-tailed Amazon *Amazona brasiliensis*, Blue-throated Conure *Pyrrhura cruentata* and Golden-capped Conure *Aratinga auricapilla*.

Following the demolition of the old parrot conservation centre, the construction of the new off-show breeding centre is well advanced and staff are looking forward to moving in the birds and participating in the future conservation of threatened species such as the Red-vented Cockatoo *C. haematuropygia* and Blue-throated Macaw.

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LOSS OF LAST KNOWN POO-ULI

The last known Poo-uli *Melamprosops phaeosoma*, a member of the Hawaiian Honeycreeper family, died November 26th 2004, barely 30 years after the species was discovered by college students in 1973. The bird, a male, that was missing one eye, died in captivity. Because he was growing old and was apparently doomed to a life without a mate, biologists and conservationists decided to capture him, in the hope that one or two other individuals then known to remain might also be captured, thus giving the species a chance to breed, and survive, in captivity. Sadly, however, despite arduous searching no others were found and it is probable that the Poo-uli is now extinct.



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