



BLACK-CAPPED **LORIES**

Text and Photographs
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Lorius l. lory
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Brief History of Species in Australia

Prior to the importation of a number of pairs of Black-capped Lories in 1995, many Australian aviculturists had been deprived of the joy of keeping one of the most beautiful and lively of all the lories. There were a number of birds in private collections around the country, but they were not reproducing all that well and were in real need of a genetic boost, therefore the arrival of these new blood lines was timely. Unfortunately even though they left the UK as sexed pairs, on arrival in Australia they were resexed and many pairs found to be two cocks. There was already an excess of cocks in Australia. Also the birds were not all paired true to subspecies and in fact I believe some were even hybrids.

Description

In Australia we now have three subspecies of the Black-capped Lory. There are considerable numbers of the nominate race *Lorius lory lory*, almost as many *Lorius lory erythrothorax*, a few *Lorius lory salvadorii* and unfortunately a few hybrids. The number of hybrids may increase further in years to come, as I believe there are still some pairs in various aviaries that are not true to subspecies and still being allowed to breed.

Without going into a long detailed description of each (there are a number of excellent lory books available that provide these), I'll provide a simplified version as follows.

Black-capped Lory

L. l. lory

The Black-capped Lory is the largest of the subspecies available in Australia measuring 29-31cm. The breast colour is blue, a blue neckband joins the mantle with the breast and the underwing covert colour is red.

Red-breasted Lory

L. l. erythrothorax

This subspecies is smaller than the nominate race measuring 28-30cm. The breast colour is red, with no neckband and the underwing colour is also red.

Salvadori Lory

L. l. salvadorii

L. l. salvadorii is approximately the same size as *L. l. erythrothorax* and very similar in appearance, with a red breast and no neckband, however the underwing colour is dark blue to black.

Personally, I believe that as the interest in lories is increasing it is perhaps time we begin to refer to these subspecies by their true descriptive name ie. Black-capped, Red-breasted and Salvadori Lory.

Hybrids

Hybrids are generally between *L. l. lory* and *L. l. erythrothorax* and appear as neither strongly marked indicating the dominance of one or the other. The neckband is generally more weakly joined with the mantle and the connection between the neckband and the chest is not clear, being weak and broken in

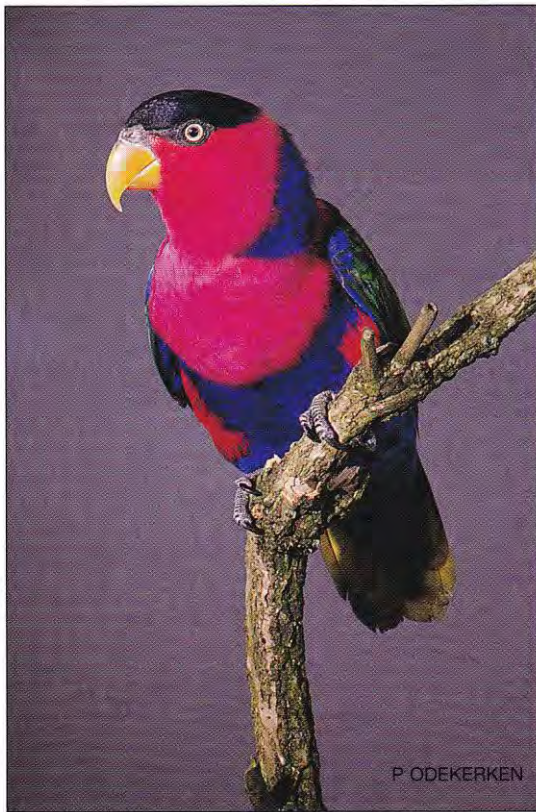


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Above: Red-breasted Lory - note red underwing.
Below: Salvadori Lory - similar to above but blue-black underwing.



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Lorius l. jobiensis - note rose breast and blue-black underwing.

appearance. The underwing coverts maintain the red colouration.

The *L. l. lory* and *L. l. salvadorii* hybrid is similar to the *L. l. lory*/*L. l. erythrothorax* mentioned previously, with the underwing coverts a blending of red and blue colours.

The *L. l. erythrothorax* and *L. l. salvadorii* hybrid is barely distinguishable apart from the underwing covert colour being a red and blue blend.

Habitat and Distribution

Occurring naturally in New Guinea, including some of the western Papuan Islands and various islands in Geelvink Bay, Irian Jaya the Black-capped Lory is generally a bird of lowland forests and uncommon above 1000 metres. It is reasonably common throughout most of its range, which is the whole of the outer perimeter coastal regions below 1000 metres and the islands outlined. The Black-capped Lory frequents the western area of New Guinea. *L. l. jobiensis* (another subspecies) is found primarily on Japan Island and the remaining subspecies are spread through the southern, eastern and northern reaches of its range.

Housing

Having acquired my pairs in 1995 (all birds ex the UK), I spent the next 12 months ensuring the pairs were true to subspecies and in fact true pairs, being fortunate to end up with pairs of both Black-capped and Red-breasted.

These were housed in a complex of suspended aviaries with other exotic lories and settled in really well, adapting to our daily feeding and maintenance routine without a problem. The aviaries suspended 1.2 metres above a concrete floor measured 3 metres long x 90cm wide x 90cm high, with half mesh and half iron on the sides. I

believe this to be a minimum sized aviary to house this species, as they are quite large and enjoy their food and therefore any smaller size could result in them becoming a little overweight. On the other hand an aviary too large may also be detrimental to their health as they are quite heavy and being fast fliers they don't have a great ability to stop or turn quickly.

Conventional aviaries are of course also suitable. I would recommend 3.6 metres long x 1.2 metres wide x 2.1 metres high would be ideal, but think of the copious amounts of 'liquid waste' (excrement) these quite large birds pass. The floor would become soiled and/or sour very quickly and therefore some means of keeping this regularly cleaned would be necessary.

Double wire between aviaries is a necessary

Young Red-breasted Lory at approximately six months of age. Note the blue mantle most of the way around the neck to almost form a collar and the beak colour change from dark brown-black to orange.

precaution as some of the lories have a tendency to be aggressive towards their neighbours. Birds with toenails and/or toes missing always stand out. I've found lories need to interact, so housing them side by side is fine, but ensure they're not the same species to avoid those great productive relationships from waning and one of the neighbours becoming involved in an affair.

Diet

Black-capped Lories have a more than healthy appetite and generally eat all the food you supply them be it wet mix, dry mix or fruit and vegetables. One should therefore be extremely careful not to overfeed, because if you do the result will be obesity and often non productive pairs.

It is up to the individual what wet and dry mixes are fed these days, as the home brews are generally just as nutritious as the commercially available brands. Really it's more a matter of budget and the availability of the ingredients.

The fruit and vegetables provided may also be limited by budgetary constraints as there are not many that these insatiable eaters will not try. Food from tropical to Mediterranean varieties are all consumed with great gusto.





Young Black-capped Lory at approximately six months of age. Note the blue on the belly is almost all the way up the breast to the complete blue collar. The beak is also changing colour.

Husbandry

The method of feeding really depends on the type of aviary and type of feeders you select. Of paramount importance is hygiene and whether it be rotating feeders, 'D' cups or earthenware bowls it is necessary to remove the feeders daily for a good washing. Rotating feeders with stainless steel bowls are used in my aviaries. Dry mix is available at all times with fruit and vegetables being fed in the morning and wet mix in the afternoon.

Clean water is a necessity and some form of automatic watering system would be an advantage as these birds really love to bathe (or get totally saturated), and as with all lorries enjoy putting their dry mix in the water.

Wet mix is sticky

which unfortunately means the wire, rotating feeder and immediate vicinity of the feeding site becomes somewhat messy. This should be attended to at least once a week by simply soaking all the relevant areas with water, then giving a quick scrub with a hard brush and rinsing off.

As mentioned previously, the floors, be they concrete or earthen, will also need attention at least once a week. I simply soak the floor with water, sweep up any solids, then hose off down the drain.

These birds not only use their nestboxes for breeding, but they also sleep in them and not being particularly well toilet trained the boxes become somewhat unhygienic. It is therefore

necessary to keep an eye on the internal condition of nestboxes and when they become soiled, change the substrate and wipe the walls.

Now if you're a serious breeder, why would you suggest toys for a complex full of exotic lorries? Simply, because they love to play with them which does not appear to affect their productivity. Lorries are always active and Black-capped Lorries are no exception, so the addition of toys provides further activity for them and I'm sure is of some therapeutic value.

Sexing

After the incorrect sexing of the birds from the UK all were resexed in Australia using DNA sexing from blood, as feather



At right from top to bottom:

1. Although there is a size difference between the birds in the two major subspecies, the difference in egg size is only marginal. Note the slightly dirty eggs which is normal for lorries.
2. Comparison with ten cent coin (six days old).
3. At 18 days of age growing well with first down beginning to disappear and pin-feathers clearly visible.
4. At 28 days of age pin-feathers are sprouting at a rapid rate, particularly on the wings and head. Note the much thicker secondary down.
5. At 35 days of age and well on the way to feathering.
6. At 60 days of age this fledgling is seen in the weaning shed with Dusky Lory chick. They are now only on two feeds a day and just starting to feed themselves.



A breeding pair of Red-breasted Lorries with cock just beginning motions of display, stretching up to full height.

DNA sexing was not available at that time. Today for any young produced, sexing is performed by simply removing a couple of feathers from each bird, recording the identification, be it closed ring and/or microchip, posting to a relevant laboratory for analysis and waiting for the results.

Visual identification of cock and hen is extremely difficult, although I have found there is a slight difference in body size and the size and shape of the head. The cock is slightly larger and his head is wider and flatter whereas the hen's head is narrower and more rounded.

Breeding

It is not difficult to determine when a pair is looking at going to nest as the cock becomes somewhat more vocal than normal and if you're able to observe the pair unseen his display antics are quite amusing. He will hop around the floor with wings outstretched and eyes dilated calling to the hen. Then he will fly to the perch, landing beside the hen and while standing firmly both feet on the perch, will stretch upwards to his absolute extreme with tail fanned out and wings flapping vigorously, dilating his eyes and calling. The hen then beckons him to stop, but I've never waited around to see what comes next.

Two types of nestbox have been used successfully by both

the subspecies in my collection. The standard vertical type box measures 50cm deep x 20cm square with a 75mm entrance hole, while the rather more complicated L-shaped box (see *Australian Birdkeeper* Volume 13 – Issue 3, Page 154) measures 40cm long x 40cm deep x 20cm square with a 75mm entrance hole. The vertical box has the normal landing perch

located just below the entrance hole, while the L-shaped box features an entrance platform measuring 100mm wide x 75mm deep. A substrate of equal parts clean, untreated pine shavings (from a cabinetmaker), clean red gum splinters (from a saw mill) and washed river sand (from a concrete manufacturer) is placed in the nestbox while damp, then compacted.

It is often very difficult to tell when a hen has begun to incubate, as Black-capped Lorries don't seem to show as easily as other species when they're carrying an egg and about to lay. The slightest noise at the complex door and the hen is off her eggs, therefore showing no signs of actually sitting. It pays to periodically inspect the nestboxes to see just what's going on. I've also found the cock usually becomes more reactive/protective/aggressive at this

time, but it may not be all three responses, it could be just one or two as they all behave differently. In my aviaries, young have been produced from both hen incubated and artificially incubated eggs. I found the hen did an excellent job when left to do her own thing, although the chicks were removed at about three weeks of age for handrearing. Those chicks produced from the incubated eggs were no more complicated to rear than other species reared from the egg and have resulted in birds equal to or better than their parents.

Pets

While the demand is still high for breeding pairs it is unlikely that many birds will be sold as individuals for the pet trade, however when that time comes I believe there will be considerable interest. I base this opinion on readings from overseas literature where these birds are highly regarded as pets and from my personal observations of a single Black-capped cock while waiting for his hen to acquire a bit of age before they're introduced to each other. Without any extra attention this bird will now hop onto and sit on my finger, while he mumbles a few words and gives me a kiss on the cheek.

Conclusion

As with most lorries, the Black-capped Lory and subspecies are generally very hardy, provided



A breeding pair of Black-capped Lorries with vertical nestbox. Note the distinct blue breast with collar joining the mantle.

their diet is adequate and the husbandry and maintenance standards are not compromised.

In Australia, and in fact all over the world, I believe we have an obligation to ensure the subspecies are not hybridised, especially now that we are more knowledgeable of their differences. If you currently own Black-capped Lories you owe it to yourself to identify exactly what subspecies you have and if you can't, seek assistance from someone who can.

If you have incorrect pairings swap them around as they generally will accept new partners. If you have a hybrid then pair it as near as possible with the true subspecies. The resulting progeny should then be closer in appearance.

Those who are looking to purchase Black-capped Lories should firstly establish which subspecies they want, then locate a reputable breeder and discuss the availability and pending purchase.

I personally can't choose between the Black-capped Lory



A breeding pair of Red-breasted Lories on the back perch of a suspended aviary. Note the rotating feeder, water bowl and nestbox mounted on the inside of the back wall.

and the Red-breasted Lory as they are both beautiful, lively and full of character, but then I'm a 'Lory Nut'.

References

Joseph M. Forshaw, *Parrots of the World*.

Jos Hubers and Trevor Buckell, *The Black Capped Lory*.

Rosemary Low, *Encyclopedia of the Lories*

Lori Journaal Internationaal / Vol 1995 nr.4.

Recommended reading: *A Guide to Lories and Lorikeets* by Peter Odekerken, published by ABK Publications. (See Free Mail Order Card.)

