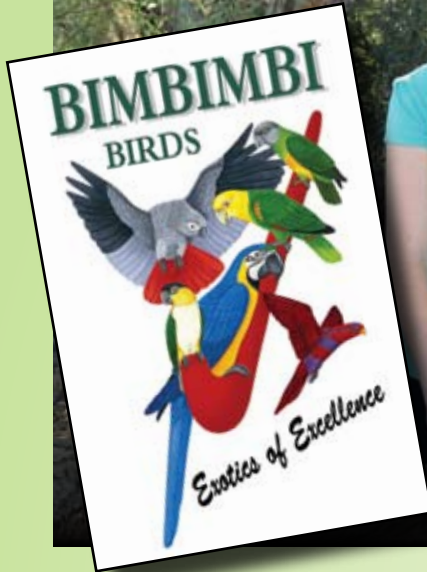


The Evolution of Bimbimbi Birds



From Left: Teagan, Glenys, Graham, Adelle and Linley Matthews

WORDS BY **MARY LOMAS** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GRAHAM MATTHEWS**

I first met Graham Matthews in June 2007 when I was looking to purchase a young Grey Parrot. When I went to pick up my newly adopted 'baby'—*Arthur*—I was fortunate enough to be able to take a quick tour through Graham's aviaries. Just one look at the establishment and you are transported to another world—it just has that WOW factor. It was sensory overload—I was absolutely amazed at the aviaries and the variety of birds. I also noticed that Graham and his family had their own pet Grey Parrot—*Arnold*—in the house.

What struck me as I was leaving was that Graham's oldest daughter had come out to say goodbye to *Arthur* with whom she and her sisters had spent a lot of time playing as he was growing up. I'm sure that this influence has played a role in the wonderful companion parrot I now have.

Graham and I kept in touch over time via email and phone and I discovered that we shared many of the same philosophies on breeding and parrot ownership. He became a mentor to me, willing to answer questions, debate issues or even just listen to what I had to say.

We met again at *Parrots 2008*—a fantastic event which I would urge anyone involved with parrots, either companion or breeding, to attend. Graham was a speaker and naturally I had to attend his lecture on 'Exotic Species Management in Australia'. That was when the full impact of the amazing work this man and his family have done to establish Bimbimbi Birds as a leader in the avicultural industry really hit home.

The Beginnings

Of course, Bimbimbi Birds didn't just happen overnight and I was curious to find out exactly where Graham had come from—what experiences he had encountered and how he had managed to develop such an incredible operation, with the amazing species he now owns. And, perhaps of even greater importance, where did he see the future of aviculture? What I discovered was a story that was based on passion, a bit of luck and a family that has worked together tirelessly to achieve great things in aviculture.

Graham's father kept birds and so he inevitably grew up with them. When Graham was 12 he and his family moved out of town onto a rural property. Starting with Budgerigars and Cockatiels, this collection quickly grew with rescued specimens from local land clearing sites—including Major Mitchell's Cockatoos, Galahs and Red-rumped Parrots, all housed in aviaries built from any second-hand materials available.

Graham would bike through the countryside with a mate and observe the behaviours of local birds in their natural environment to see what elements he could replicate at home. The knowledge he gained—for the benefit of different species—in an artificial environment is still relevant today.

Graham met Glenys during his mid-teens when his life revolved around his love for birds and his passion for modified cars. So began an amazing and supportive relationship—fortunately Glenys liked both as well—which continues today. Over the next few years other Australian species were added to the collection and the number of aviaries increased to around 40.

In the late 1970s Graham and Glenys married and purchased their own property where they moved two recently completed blocks of aviaries from Graham's parents' home, then set about building 24 brand new conventional style aviaries. This time there would be no use of second-hand materials as Graham began to pursue his philosophy, 'if you're going to do something, then do it right!'

I mentioned that Graham had experienced a bit of luck along the way and this was evident during the first breeding season after moving to the new property—when he managed to breed Yellow Turquoise Parrots from Normal looking parents. In fact he didn't even know such a mutation existed—what a stroke of good fortune! Over the next few seasons he established this beautiful bird, the proceeds enabling him to purchase other, lesser known species. These included Golden-shouldered Parrots, Varied Lorikeets and the black cockatoos. Graham was one of the first in South Australia to successfully breed Golden-shouldered Parrots in numbers and this could be directly attributed to those long rides out in the bush. His philosophy of trying to replicate how birds nest in the

wild was applied to breeding this species by designing nestboxes incorporating an entrance tunnel and inner nest chamber—much as you would imagine a wild nest site to function.

Success also came with other more difficult to breed Australian species and an increase in aviaries to around 120—including 42 suspended cages, specifically for lorikeets. A number of other bird species including finches, pigeons and waterfowl—both Australian and exotic—were also kept at Bimbimbi Birds.

The following chart outlines the Australian parrot and cockatoo families kept, the number of species from each and how many of these species were successfully bred.

Family	Species Kept	Species Bred
Black Cockatoos	3	3
Gang Gang Cockatoo	Yes	No
White Cockatoos	4	1
Lorikeets	7	7
King Parrot	Yes	Yes
Crimson-winged Parrot	Yes	Yes
Polytelis	3	3
Cockatiel	Yes	Yes
Budgerigar	Yes	Yes
Swift Parrot	Yes	No
Red-capped Parrot	Yes	Yes
Rosellas	7	3
Ringnecked Parrot	3	2
Psephotus	6	5
Neophema	5	5

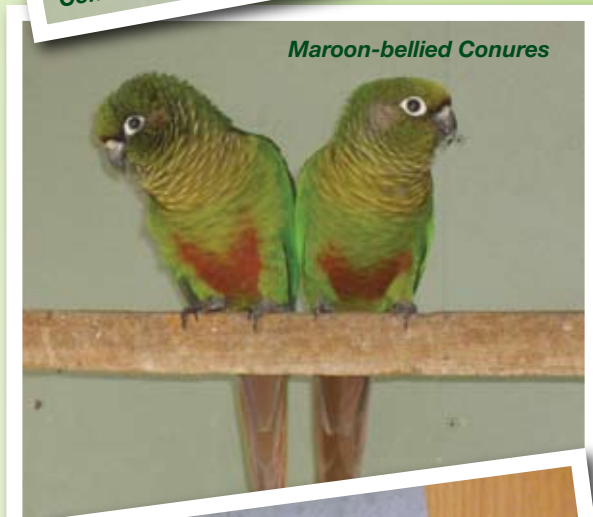
Exotic Species

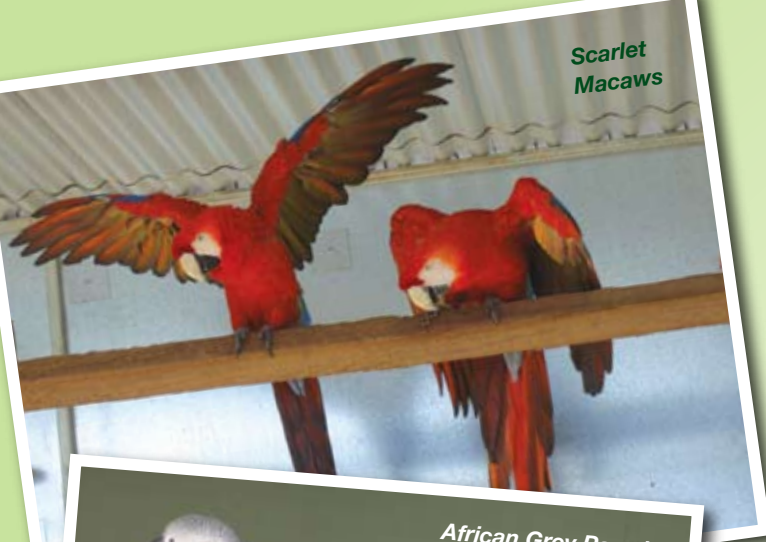
A visit to Jurong Bird Park in Singapore during the early 1980s opened Graham's eyes to just how many other bird species there are. No longer were they coloured plates in a bird book but living, breathing beauties. He started to include Asiatic and South American conure species in his collection—all of which he continues to breed today.

In the mid to late 1980s, Graham and the late David Judd investigated the legal importation of a number of species of parrots including macaws. A registration of interest was recorded with a syndicate subsequently formed—along with the first of numerous mortgages on his property. This period constituted Graham's first major dealings with government departments and bureaucracy—the result illustrating that you don't always get what you think you're paying for!

In late 1990 the first shipment of legally imported psittacines in over 40 years arrived in Australia. Unfortunately, however, not all the species that had been purchased and placed in quarantine were permitted—with only the three of the more common large macaw (s) species being approved to provide a much needed genetic boost.

In 1994 Graham was invited to be part of another syndicate and, fortunately, this time a number of additional species were approved—Amazons, lories, Hahn's Macaws and Black-headed Caiques. ➤





Scarlet
Macaws



African Grey Parrots



Red-bellied Parrots



Red-tailed
Black
Cockatoos



Black-headed
Caique

A Family Affair

Bimbimbi Birds became a registered business in 1993. Why the name Bimbimbi? It is an Aboriginal word meaning 'place of many birds'. Well, that it certainly is!

With the number of birds that Graham and Glenys keep, I asked how they were able to manage such a large operation without the help of any employed persons. Graham worked full-time until 1999, changing to part-time employment in 2000. Over the previous three breeding seasons—while attempting to balance full-time work with handrearing (many from the egg) and the ongoing work of building a growing collection—his health had suffered. Glenys also worked full-time. Both Graham's parents helped out on weekends, however his father sadly died in 1994—just a week before the first Blue and Gold Macaw hatched. His mother still helps with some of the lighter duties.

Graham also acknowledges the help he has received from members of the Riverland Birdkeepers Club on occasions when some of the extra heavy physical labour of building a few of the aviaries was a bit much for the girls.

One has to sit back and admire just how this extraordinary family got through with working full-time, raising three children under two years of age and with no paid assistance, while caring for, breeding and rearing a large number of parrots. Graham described to me how the house was during this time—incubators in the lounge room, brooders in the entry hall and handrearing being done in the kitchen.

Glenys has always been a major support for Graham both emotionally and physically, helping out with the hard manual work of Bimbimbi Birds—and between attending school and just being teenagers, the girls also help out when they can. This is and always has been a family-based establishment.

Some 20 years after Graham first started he began to dream of and design a new breeding complex—a purpose-built facility with rooms for incubation, handrearing and weaning—it was time for Glenys to have the house and especially her kitchen back! By the beginning of the 2004 breeding season this dream had been realised with a state-of-the-art breeding facility housing 93 suspended aviaries—just 4 metres from the new dedicated 'bird kitchen' and other birdrooms that had all been included in the extensions built onto the main house. The new breeding complex houses small to medium parrots. Another new addition is the large macaw complex—completed for the 2006 breeding season.

Graham's Advice

I asked Graham—who now has over 40 years' experience in aviculture—what advice he would give to a new breeder starting out.

His answers—

- When interested in a particular species, research and learn the basics required to successfully look after the species before buying it.
- Research accommodation and dietary requirements—the breeding cycle and nest site best suited for breeding.
- Study the species habits in the wild and apply these observations to the captive situation.
- Understand any requirements such as legal paperwork—permits, proof of origin and movement authorities pertaining to both native and exotic species.

Finding all this information is not as difficult as you might think:

- Join a local bird club, listen to other breeders, take a risk and communicate with strangers (I've done this myself and had a

wonderful conversation with a gentleman about Lineolated Parrots). Read as much as you can—however make sure that what you are reading comes from a reputable source. Ask for recommendations of books, magazines and DVDs. These references can be a big financial investment and you need to ensure that what you're buying isn't going to end up being used as a doorstop! The internet seems to be a growing source of information nowadays—or maybe not! It must be remembered that not all information on the internet is correct. Anyone can be an 'expert' without having to display their qualifications. Research the internet with caution—it certainly should never be relied upon as a sole source of information.

- Never be afraid to ask questions. Even those with a wealth of knowledge and experience started somewhere. They too asked the questions and researched to get where they are.
- Acknowledge your mistakes and learn from them—it's all part of the process of moving forward.
- Buy young birds wherever possible. This allows time for the birds to grow up together and bond. When buying breeding pairs do your homework and make sure that they are genuine bonded and unrelated birds. Some of the biggest mistakes are made with spontaneous purchases.
- Buy from a reputable breeder or dealer where possible. Word of mouth recommendations are a great way to find a suitable source. If you can buy direct from a breeder it gives you the chance to discuss with them how they have looked after the birds. This is a great opportunity to learn more. Bird dealers may also be a good source of stock—some breeders prefer to remain anonymous for a number of reasons including security, so they use dealers to dispose of their birds.
- Use common sense when buying from either source. Look at the hygiene of the premises and the condition of the birds—knowing how to recognise a sick bird can avert a potential disaster.

Mentors

Graham has been a wonderful mentor to me. He too had someone who provided him with guidance—someone to look up to. A gentleman named Bill Shepherd was a big influence. He kept mostly finches and *Neophemas* as well as a few of the larger Australian parrots. During school holidays Graham would spend time staying with relatives in Adelaide—well, in theory anyway, as most of his time was spent over at Mr Shepherd's place talking and learning! Mentorship has a great part to play in the future of aviculture. In order to ensure that aviculture in Australia is kept alive and is respected by future generations, those of us who have been mentored have a moral obligation to pass on this knowledge and experience.

An additional part of this is giving back to aviculture and the wider community. Graham has lectured at numerous seminars and meetings at a local, state and national level, has written many educational and informative articles and provided written contributions and photographs to the **ABK** 'A Guide to...' books. He is a life member and patron of the bird club in his local area, edits their quarterly club magazine and has given talks on aviculture, his collection and his experiences to local service clubs and on radio.

The Future

In keeping with the mission statement of Bimbimbi Birds—'Keeping Birds for Conservation and Future Generations'—the latest project on the drawing board is an aviary complex for finches whose status in captivity is critically low. As the status of many species are no longer kept some may be disappearing before our eyes and, unfortunately, >

Vosmaeri
Eclectus
Parrots

Red-fronted
Macaws

Young Blue and
Gold Macaw
being handreared
specifically as a
companion
bird

White-fronted
Amazon cock

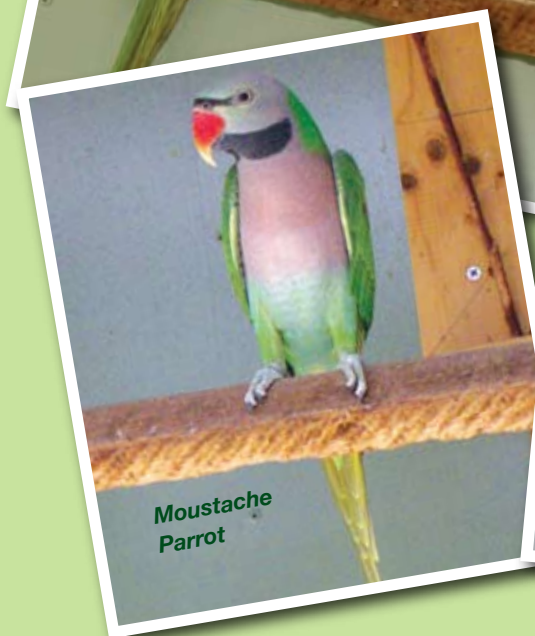
Senegal Parrot



A family of Queen of Bavaria's Conures



Hahn's Macaw



Moustache Parrot



Yellow-crowned Amazons



Meyer's Parrot

once gone there is very little likelihood of bringing them back again. This is relevant not only with those species held in captivity but also those found in the wild. Australia has already lost too many species of birds and Graham firmly believes that although many individuals and organisations will not accept it, aviculture will be the last stronghold of many species if the world continues on its current path of habitat destruction. It's a concern that the only way future generations might see these delightful birds is as taxidermy specimens in a museum collection, next to their already extinct relatives. Hopefully the efforts of people like Graham will prevent this nightmare from becoming a reality.

Conclusion

The teenager who started off with a few Budgerigars and Cockatiels has now become a leader in the industry. Graham stresses the importance of family being vital to his success. From his parents who supported what started out as a hobby, to his wonderful wife Glenys who has worked alongside him through 30 years of marriage and to his three daughters—Bimbimbi Birds is very much a family-based business.

Graham unselfishly shares his immense knowledge and gives freely of his time to any-one who seeks information. For the successful future of aviculture in Australia, people such as Graham Matthews are most vital.

