
"Our Zoo News"

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NEW ARRIVALS.

Several visitors have enquired what we are erecting at the back of the lion enclosure, where much activity has been in progress during the past week. The answer is aviaries! We have just acquired some rare and very beautiful birds, mostly parrakeets, and we are very anxious to get these aviaries completed so that the birds will settle down and start raising families.

Amongst this new collection of birds are three pairs of Princess of Wales Parrakeets. We are extremely fortunate in obtaining these specimens which are very rare in captivity. These birds are beautifully marked in very delicate colourings. The crown of the head is pale lilac blue; the chin, throat and fore-neck are rose-pink, and the breast and underparts mother-of-pearl. The hind-neck and mantle are pale olive-green and there is a large patch of pale yellowish-green on the wings, while the outer quills are bluish-green with narrow yellow edgings. The rump is also lilac blue; the middle tail feathers are

long and golden-green in colour and the lateral tail feathers are blue-grey on the outer webs and deep rose-pink on part of the inner webs. These birds are found in Northern and Central Australia, but they wander around and do not stay in any particular locality.

Two other specimens are a pair of Barraband's Parrakeets. The general plumage of the male is brilliant green, its flight feathers are bluish-green and it has a long pointed tail which is green on the upper surface and black underneath. Its forehead is orange-yellow and its cheeks and throat buttercup-yellow. It has a scarlet crescent across the foreneck immediately below the yellow. The female is less vividly marked than the male. The habitat of these birds is New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

To my mind the most attractive of all these new birds are a pair of Barnard's Parrakeets of magnificent blue and green colourings which blend with a beauty which no artist could hope to recapture. The

throat, neck, breast, abdomen, rump and forepart of the crown are pale blue-green. The chin is pale blue, and there is a dark red band across the front of the head. At the back of the head is a dark bluish-green patch. These birds have a rich dark greenish-blue mantle and pale blue-green wings with cobalt-blue colouring on the underside. On their lower breast they have a large patch of yellow. Their flight feathers are black with blue outer webs. Their central tail feathers are green, becoming darker and more blue in colour at the tip and their outer tail feathers are various shades of blue and pale blue. These birds are found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, and in those places are known by the fascinating name of "Bulla-Bulla" Parrakeets.

The Crimson-Winged Parrakeets of which we have a pair are very vividly marked and can be easily recognised as their name implies, for the cock has a large patch of rich crimson in his wings. His head and neck are brilliant apple green, and his breast, abdomen and lower rump slightly paler green. The upper part of his rump is deep ultramarine blue and he has a black mantle. His tail is of medium length and rather square in shape, and the upper surface of this is dark green as are the outer webs of the flight feathers. The hen bird somewhat resembles the cock but her plumage is paler and duller, and she has no black mantle or large red patch on her wings. Crimson-Winged Parrakeets are found in New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Australia.

Amongst this new collection we have just one pair of birds which are not of the Parrakeet family, and these are a pair of Leadbeater's Cockatoos. Of all the new arrivals, I find these the most fascinating. They are beautiful and they know it! I have spent quite a lot of time watching these two birds gaze at each other in what I at first thought was adoration, but now realize was admiration, for these birds are exceedingly vain and spend a great deal of their time showing off to one another. They are like a beautiful woman sitting before a mirror, only instead of in a mirror, they see in each other, their own reflected beauty.

The back, wings and tail of the Leadbeater's Cockatoo are snowy white, and the sides of the face, hind-neck, chin, breast, sides of body and underparts of wings are salmon pink. The base of the forehead is dull rose-red, and the bird's long crest is red at the base, then yellow, then red and then white, and they can spread this magnificent crest until it forms a perfect semi-circle. The male has black eyes and the female hazel. In striking contrast to its beauty this bird has an exceedingly unpleasant voice, and when angry its screech is really hideous. The natural habitat of these Cockatoos is New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, South-West and North-West Australia.

Three Pennant's Parrakeets are included in this collection. Their general plumage is crimson. The feathers of the mantle are black with broad crimson edges. Their cheeks have violet patches and their wings are also violet with a blackish patch near the shoulder. Their flight feathers are black with dark blue outer webs, and their central tail feathers dark violet-blue with outer tail feathers of paler blue. These birds are distributed in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

Two more attractive birds with rather unusual markings are a pair of Mealy Rosella Parrakeets. The crown of their head is pale yellow deepening towards the base of the neck. The feathers of the middle part of the upper mantle are golden yellow with blackish markings, becoming paler and tinged with bluish-green lower down. The wings are various shades of violet, blue and blue-green. The central tail feathers are dark blue and the lateral ones paler blue. The cheeks and throat are whitish and the breast, rump and under-parts pale blue. The female resembles the male but has a smaller head and is a little less vividly marked. These birds are also found in New South Wales and Queensland.

Another charming pair of Parrakeets are two Rock Peplars. These are mainly pale green in colour with a slight olive-green tinge on the head, rump, sides of face, throat and under surface. The crown and hind-neck are a darker olive-green, the

mantle is oil-green and the wings dark blue and green with red and yellow markings. The tail is long and pointed and dark blue-black on the upper surface in the case of the male, and bronze-green above and broadly margined with pink on the under surface in the case of the female. The colouring of the tail is a guide for distinguishing the sex of the adult birds.

Rock Peplars are found in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and South West Australia.

The last pair of birds in our new collection are Lutino Ring-necked Parrakeets. A Lutino is a bird which because of its lack of blue colouring, is a beautiful golden yellow, rather like a canary in colour. Our cock Ring-neck is just like this, and he has dark red eyes and red bill, and around his neck a pale pink ring. Our hen bird is Lutino-bred, but green in colour, and we understand that this pair breed Lutino young. These Parrakeets belong to India and Ceylon.

All these birds are well worth seeing and studying, for each type has a beauty of its own. You will have noticed that with the exception of the Lutino Ringnecks, all these birds are found in Australia. As it is very unlikely that the majority of our readers will ever visit Australia, we suggest that the next best thing is to come and see the birds at Chester Zoo.

ANOTHER ZOO FRIENDSHIP.

Animals strike up some peculiar and amusing friendships, and the stupid human race might do well to take an example from them. All who are familiar with Chester Zoo will remember little "Peter", the Sealyham Terrier, who became so friendly with "Mowgli", the Lion. Many of you will have seen them playing happily together and so perhaps you will not think it so strange after all that a little white rabbit and one of the Zoo's queerest and oldest inhabitants, a Straw-necked Ibis, should have become the best of friends. It all happened a few months ago, when someone brought a tiny white ball of fluff along to the Zoo and asked if we would give it a home—it was a baby rabbit.

It was such a tiny rabbit that we did not know what we were going to do with it, but it was placed in a large open-air enclosure near the entrance gate where the Zoo Peacocks and Guinea Fowl have their home. At first no one noticed the youngster, he was far too small, but he soon scooped himself out a burrow where he spent most of the cheerless Winter days. Because he was so tiny the Zoo Staff used to make a fuss of him, and soon Brer Rabbit became quite tame and would eagerly watch for our arrival hoping to be petted and of course to be given something to eat. The Winter dragged on and the little rabbit grew rapidly and became bolder.

Mothers and their children coming in the Zoo noticed the little rabbit, and imagine their surprise when the supposedly timid creature hopped across the enclosure and sat up by the fence on his hind legs, apparently very interested in his visitors. I have spent many an amusing ten minutes watching toddlers shrieking with delight at the rabbit's approach, seeing their little faces light up as they gingerly push their little hands through the wire-mesh to stroke his soft white coat, his long silky ears, and almost reverently touch his little pink wrinkled nose, and Brer Rabbit never moves, he just sits up as if he were entitled to it all.

However, the frost came and the ground became shrunken hard and dry; there were very few visitors and the little rabbit kept to his burrow and looked very lonely. In another part of the Zoo someone else, who had seen at least ten or twelve English Winters, decided that he was not as young as he used to be and began to look very woebegone. It was our Australian Straw-necked Ibis. Each morning he stood amongst the rushes which looked like glistening spears above his head, and looked wearily at what had once been his cool clear pool, now covered with a thick coat of ice. The Keeper noticed the Ibis's plight and moved him to a warmer side of the Zoo away from the water. He was placed in the large enclosure near the gate, as everyone thought that he would not be lonely there with the other birds, and of course it was also the enclosure where Brer Rabbit lived.

Before going any further, perhaps we had better say a little more about that strange bird. The "Ibis" was the sacred bird of Ancient Egypt, and the very name conjures up for most people, the pictures of the Great Egyptian Empire, the mighty pompous Pharaohs, the beautiful Cleopatra, the River of Life the Nile, the Priests and all the glory, adventure and mystery of a lost world, and with the decay of the Egyptian Empire, the Ibis vanished with its protectors the Pharaohs, and the only trace of it now to be found in Egypt is its mummified remains in the tombs and temples of its masters. However, other members of the Ibis family are to-day to be found scattered across Africa, Asia, India, America and Australia. Our specimen came from Australia and is known as the Straw-necked Ibis.

This rare mysterious bird who seems to date back to a civilization which existed long before our own, is quite a large bird with long slender legs, and it has a sort of humped back covered with black purplish feathers, and its tail has long wispy feathers giving a plume effect. The strangest thing of all about this bird is its neck and head. It has a long whitish neck with yellowish straw-like tufts of feathers down the front, and its little round black head is absolutely bald. The Ibis hasn't a hair on its head! The beak, or bill, is very long, slender, and almost cylindrical in shape, and is used for probing in the shallow river beds for various insects.

Now to return to Brer Rabbit. One day we were quite amused to see the little white rabbit running in circles round the Ibis, and a little later it was noticed that the Ibis was very busy carrying twigs about; we watched him and discovered that he always took them to a corner where the rabbit had his burrow. The Ibis was making a little nest next door to Brer Rabbit. That was not all; whenever the Ibis got tired and hopped up on to a fallen tree

trunk for a snooze, Brer Rabbit could be seen perched up beside him. The two became firm friends and the rabbit was always willing to share his food with the Ibis. Sometimes, however, the Keeper places some food in a bucket of water for the Ibis, so that he can use his long bill to get it out, like he used to in his pool. This is something the rabbit cannot understand, and though he stands up on his hind legs to investigate while his friend is busy probing round the bucket, his little nose only just reaches the rim of the bucket.

Visitors have a lot to thank the little white rabbit for, because now whenever he goes to the fence to see them, the Ibis goes too, and so long as he stays close to the fence the Ibis will stay as well. Visitors thus have a good chance of studying this mysterious, usually timid bird, who was generally missed by all but the few who knew something about his habits, as he has always kept well in the background. When you see him don't be surprised to find him poking his long thin beak through the wire for a tit-bit. Offer him only a tiny piece of food, he can't manage anything bulky, and you will find that he will take it just as gently from between your fingers as his companion the rabbit. He is very gentle and if you do give him a dainty morsel, you will be rewarded by seeing him throw it up in the air and making a perfect catch. He never misses and it is fascinating to see the piece of cake drop down his long thin bill into his tiny throat. He always croaks his "Thank-you" in a queer croaking hoarse cry.

These two are a very strange pair but are great favourites with the children, and we hope that the boys and girls will get as much pleasure out of watching them together as the Zoo Staff have during the Winter.

J. MOFFATT.