

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Parrots by David Alderton (1992). Whittet Books Limited: London. 128 pp. Obtainable from the publishers, 18 Anley Road, London W14. ISBN 0 905483 91 X. Price £8.95.

Parrots is primarily a book about the natural history of a distinctive group of birds, rather than about the care and welfare of individual pets. David Alderton describes their origins, characteristic features and lifestyles, before moving on to look at the threats facing parrots today - notably the impact of the flourishing trade in live birds.

The book begins by examining geological records, genetics and distribution of species to determine the origins and ancestry of the parrot family. Chapter 2 goes on to define what is actually meant by the term 'parrot', giving a fairly detailed account of the distinctive attributes of these birds whilst highlighting the diversity of the group as a whole.

The behaviour of parrots is described throughout their life cycle, and comparisons are made with the behaviour of captive birds; it is pointed out that much of our knowledge of parrot behaviour comes from captive studies rather than field-work, and this should be of great interest to parrot owners who wish to better understand their birds.

The second half of the book deals with the vulnerable status of wild populations of parrots. David Alderton comments that although international trade needs to be controlled, classifying species as 'endangered' can enhance their desirability and render them more susceptible to illegal smuggling. The author is clearly in favour of the continued trade in wild birds. It is proposed that in the case of Australia where there is a total ban on the export of wild birds, many species would be better off being traded than shot or poisoned as agricultural pests. While this may be debatable, he then describes where the work of aviculturalists is contributing to the conservation of the species in the wild. A cynic might perhaps suggest that they are salving their consciences for the numbers they have taken from the wild over the past decades?

This book is very readable and informative, and contains a lot of detailed description. It should appeal to anyone who keeps parrots, as well as those purely interested in natural history. Although advocating a continued, if controlled, trade in wild birds, David Alderton points out in the preface that parrots need proper care and adequate housing if they are to be kept as domestic pets. He advises that pet birds should be bought from reputable breeders, and only then after careful consideration. This commendable message increases the value of the book.

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