
Notes From the Field



News From the Indonesian Parrot Project

July 2011

Summer is upon us and as you fire up the BBQ take a moment to peruse our latest issue. We have a great new article from our Director, an update from Kembali Bebas, a poll to learn about YOU and a contest!

Watch for our next issue of Notes From the Field in August.

What's New!

- [News From Kembali Bebas](#)
- [Australia, Land of Parrots: Oh, Really?](#)
- [Look closer](#)
- [Tell Us About Yourself!](#)
- [Enter our Contest!](#)

Stewart Metz, Director, Indonesian Parrot Project

News From Kembali Bebas



With great pleasure we announce the soft releases of birds for 2010 from Kembali Bebas including OUR FIRST unprecedented release in West Papua!

January 19, 2010 - One Lucky Cassowary

March, 2010 - 8 Eclectus Parrots and 4 Purple Naped Lories

August, 2010 - 2 King Parrots

October, 2010 - 5 Seram Cockatoos

December, 2010 - 15 Black-capped Lories in West Papua

Australia, Land of Parrots: Oh, Really?



CHALLENGING the DOGMA

by Stewart Metz, Director, Indonesian Parrot Project

PART ONE: AUSTRALIA

For years, Australia has been given the unchallenged title of "Land of Parrots" ['terra psittacorum'] But has the truthfulness of this moniker been objectively examined ? The Land of Parrots could refer to the country having the greatest number of parrot genera and species (and possibly, subspecies)-we will discuss this approach later on. However, for the sake of this article, the "Land of Parrots" must meet two or ideally three of the following criteria:

1. could refer to the country having the greatest number of parrot genera and species (and possibly, subspecies)-we will discuss this approach later on. However, for the sake of this article, the "Land of Parrots" must meet two or ideally three of the following criteria:

2. have been the first country discovered by outsiders and likewise, whose endemic parrots were first encountered by outsiders (from the West or the East). This fact should be substantiated in extant journals of explorers, works of art and/or other writings;

3. have received the earliest designation "Land of Parrots", or a similar designation. (Parenthetically, with regard to #2, this fact also implies that the country involved probably was the first in which outsiders witnessed the trapping, killing, and/or selling of wild parrots, followed by taking these birds back to their homeland as pets---a legal wild bird trade then, but the starting point for the illegal wild bird trade of today.)

So: let's examine the evidence. But first, let me provide a tantalizing bit of information. The first artistic representation of which I am aware, which depicts an Australo-Asian type cockatoo, is what seems to be an afterthought in Mantegna's "Madonna of the Victory" in 1496 as depicted above. The white arrow points to the parrot, which is more obvious in the greatly-cropped image below:

Look closer



AUSTRALIA - ONE LAND OF PARROTS

Australia certainly does have a remarkable panoply of psittacines; on that basis alone, it merits the use of the phrase "A" (or, "One") Land of Parrots. The Land of Parrots, putatively in Australia, was named quite early by explorers from Europe. The terms "*Terra psittacorum*" (or '*Regio psittacorum*' = Kingdom of Parrots) appears in over 30 early maps (eg, by Mercator and Ortelius) dating back to the 16th-17th C. Some explorers described very large birds, some up to "three cubits" (about five feet) tall! Since Australia is also referred to as "Terra Australis" (the Southern land), these southern regions were assumed by some cartographers to represent the modern Australia. Some of these references [maps from 1516 through 1574] identify Brazil and/or Venezuela as the " Papagalli Reio" .However, these sightings refer solely to the New World and its parrots -- widely accepted to be the first large parrots (macaws) seen by Europeans in the New World. And the very large birds in 'Terra Australis' are now speculated to actually be penguins in Antarctica .

The earliest proposed date for a European to land in what today is Australia , belongs to the Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon, who landed on the Cape York Peninsula in 1606 , but without reporting any sightings of parrots. The first known written record of an outsider seeing living Austral-Asian cockatoos, and also claiming to reach "Australia" , in the same year (1606) , was Don Diego del Prado y Tovar, the cartographer for an expedition (originally captained by the Portuguese Pedro Fernandez De Quirós and later by Torres) to try to reach the Southern Land of Australia. After a failed attempt to discover the 'Southern Land', the expedition had sailed towards the Solomon Islands and then landed on a large island which they took to be part of the southern continent. There they established colony which they named "*La Australia del Espiritu Santo*" (The Southern Land of the Holy Spirit). However this was actually in the New Hebrides, which is now called 'Vanuatu'.

Although I cannot identify each of the bays and islands where they landed in this region of the world (many of the names presumably having changed over time), it is very likely that the sightings of parrots and cockatoos which they reported, actually occurred in the Louisiade Archipelago, which lies about 175 miles off the coast of New Guinea, east of Milne Bay which lies in the farthest SE point on Papua New Guinea. This area is still known today to be home to both Sulphur-crested and Palm cockatoos, *Eclectus*, and many loriinae. Therefore, landfall in Australia plus the sighting of Australian parrots did not occur together in 1606. One expedition saw cockatoos but not in Australia, whereas the other landed in Australia , but did not report seeing parrots (possibly because Cape York, where Palm cockatoos and *Eclectus* thrive, is so inaccessible).

So, which, if any, countries other than Australia merit consideration as valid candidates for the title of the "Land of Parrots."? Indonesia, of course, would have to be a logical consideration--- it certainly has a panoply of cockatoos and other parrots -- but how early would the ships of outsiders be able to reach the highly coveted Indonesian Spice Islands (Moluccas) ? And did they really care about parrots when searching for mace, nutmeg, and cloves! As indicated above, the Quiros Expedition reached Papua New Guinea and its parrots in 1606-and even this feat was preceded by Saavedra's landing in 1527-both occurring well before the discovery of Australia. Quiros' expedition also passed

near to the Solomon Islands-but did they land, and if so, did they see Ducorps' cockatoos or other parrots? Both India and China have always had large numbers of endemic parrots and there is evidence that both countries had pet cockatoos centuries prior to the discovery of Australia. What about the Philippines, blessed by the Red-vented cockatoo and many parrots ? The destination of the Quiros/Torres Expedition was to return via Manila, and both Magellan and Saavedra landed in the Philippines in 1521 and 1528, respectively. (OR) should we conclude that , after examining all the facts, Australia really is the Land of Parrots ?

In the next issue of Notes of the Field, we will present some kinda neat pictures, our "Closing Arguments", and "the Jury" will provide its answer.

STAY TUNED!

Tell Us About Yourself!



An ongoing fun survey by Bonnie Zimmermann shown above at Kembali Bebas caring for a young Seram cockatoo chick that was confiscated from Chinese traffickers.

We would love to get to know you better and share that information with our other members. So to get the ball rolling we have put together a short poll to find out more about you. All your answers are

completely anonymous.

You find find six questions at the link provided below -- just answer and send and we'll start learning more about each other.

Here's about me have had parrots in my life since 1987 ... manage a flock of 19 birds ranging from smallest (pionus) to largest (two macaws). My youngest parrot is about 15 years old and oldest well into late 40's and early 50's. Been caring for some of these birds for over 24

years.

So tell me about you!

Enter our Contest!



WHAT COUNTRY DO YOU
THINK IS THE TRUE LAND
OF PARROTS?

Email your answer to our
Director, Stewart Metz at
parrotdoc@gmail.com and
you just might win a plush
parrot as shown above!

- Tell Us About Yourself!