



# The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

## The Emerald Dove on Lord Howe Island

(ASNSW Meeting – June 2013)

Jennifer Brown interviewed by Graeme Phipps



Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*  
(image courtesy Jennv's [Husbandry Manual](#))

**Graeme Phipps** Tell us a bit about yourself Jenny, about your background as a keeper, etc.

Jenny Brown I started out as a keeper at [Symbio Wildlife Park](#) working there for a couple of years with their mammals, bird houses and reptiles.

For the last year I have been working up at [Cairns](#) working mainly with exotics. I was working up at Shambala. I don't know if anyone has actually heard of it but that was the zoo that recently closed and so we were working at shipping all the animals, mainly overseas, finding them all new homes.

More recently I am back in NSW working down at the [Shoalhaven Zoo](#) and mainly working with birds and natives, and a couple of exotics.

**Graeme Phipps** **Stitching together their lion programme. You are never very far from the big cats are you Jenny?**

Jenny Brown No, big cats have a special spot in my heart. So I am right into a proposal for Shoalhaven to acquire some lions and mainly cheetahs hopefully.

**Graeme Phipps** **How did it go with the destocking of Shambala? That would have to be one of the rarest and biggest challenges keepers ever have.**

Jenny Brown It went really well. Logistically it was a lot to take on. We were moving 23 lions, four tigers, some birds, six hippos (three common hippos and three pigmy hippos), a rhino and ostriches; and we did it all in two days.

**Graeme Phipps** **Wow!**

Jenny Brown Yes, well a little bit of planning was done. Actually getting the animals was pretty simple. There was a little bit of training beforehand with some of them, but it all went like clockwork on the day. I think in the end we only had to get the drugs in for two of the animals to make sure they got in the crate. But yes it all really worked out well and as I said, most of them have gone overseas now and some have stayed in the country; so we were sending them on to where they needed to go.

**Graeme Phipps** **Well congratulations on a huge logistical catcher handling transportation. I can't imagine that. A whole zoo! What was the hardest animal to catch?**

Jenny Brown The hardest animal was actually the common hippo. Because if a hippo is in the water and doesn't want to come out, there is not really very much that you can do to get it out. Animals like the rhino, whilst it's contained, even if it's in a large area, you can at least get them in a box with food, but if that hippo goes in the water there is not much you can do. It was definitely the hardest.

**Graeme Phipps** **No birds? You did mention ostriches?**

Jenny Brown Yes, we had a number of free-range as well. We had some Cape Barren geese, some peacocks, some black swans, and things like that. With the birds that had been reared for the last 10 years at the zoo, we had to catch them up, and that was a nightmare because they had never seen a net or a cage in their life before and that was tricky. In the end we used lion cages because the lion cages were big enough so that we could kind of tempt the birds with some food, they just followed the trail.

**Graeme Phipps** **Wow! What an experience.**

Jenny Brown Yes.

**Graeme Phipps** **Now Jenny, we need you for your mind tonight on the matter of your wonderful [husbandry manual on the Emerald Dove](#) that you got the prize for, for being the best husbandry manual of the year. We have two screens set up and what we have playing on the other screen for this interview is images from your husbandry manual.**



Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

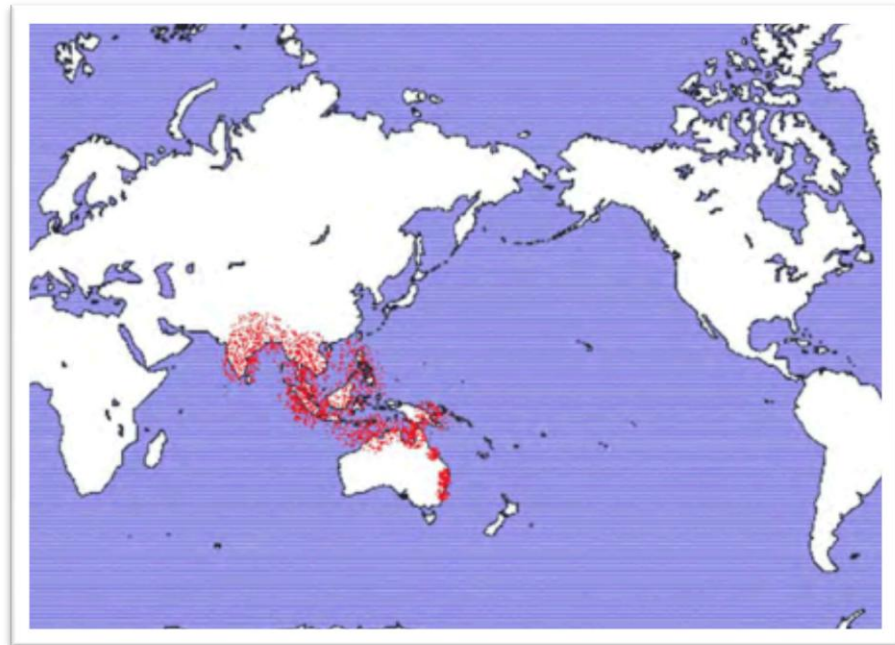
**Quite beautiful images actually Jenny, so congratulations to you.**

**Now I did brief you on the Lord Howe Island Project (what that was about) so how about just giving us a little bit of a summary of the manual. If you look at that distribution map we have up on the other screen, they are way outside of Australia right throughout southeast Asia. So how about giving us all a little snapshot of Emerald Doves, for example what are the key things that are involved in relation to these birds?**

Jenny Brown

Most people all ready know about the Emerald Dove. There are a few different names for it like the Green-winged Dove or the Green Dove, and there are a few other names for it. It has been kept as a pet or it's been kept in aviaries for centuries now.

The distribution map shows that it does range throughout southeast Asia and then from the top of Australia down the east coast. Even though it's got a large distribution it evolved into a lot of subspecies, three of which are found in Australia. The Emerald Doves that are found on Lord Howe Island is the same subspecies that is found down on the east coast of Australia from Cape Peninsula down to southern NSW.



Not a lot is actually known about this bird. Even though there are a lot of subspecies there has been no research done on the difference between these subspecies. There has been no research into the migratory pattern of these birds. Some people say they are a migratory species and other people say they are only believed to be a migratory species so it all depends on who you talk to. They are really a very misunderstood little bird I think.

Jenny Brown They are mainly a ground bird in that they do like to forage on the ground and they are quite a unique bird in that even though they have got that flighty, pigeon/dove personality, they would rather stay on the ground before they would fly away, so they can be quite easy to approach out in the wild if you can find them.

**Graeme Phipps I suppose it is a bit of dumb question, but Lord Howe Island is smack bang in the middle of the trench between Australia and New Zealand, so it is likely they got there by themselves I suppose?**

Jenny Brown Yes, the theory is that they started in Asian and they just kind of worked their way down as their distribution became established in Australian. There are no records to say that we introduced them to any of these islands.

**Graeme Phipps The situation on Lord Howe Island is that the island is going to be carpeted with rat bait, absolutely carpeted, a \$9m project. Gary Price from [Taronga Park Zoo](#) “Skyped” us last meeting on the details of all of that. It was very, very interesting indeed. Do you think that the Emerald Dove would be affected by all of that?**

Jenny Brown I think it is going to be affected. It is a curious little bird that spends the majority of its day foraging for seeds and fruits, and whatever else it can find on the ground. If there is rat bait on the ground it is probably going to get involved. I definitely think it is going to affect this bird negatively.

**Graeme Phipps The possibility is that they have only got logistics to deal with the Wood Hens and the Currawongs. If the avicultural community gets involved they can look at the other three species, the Emerald Dove, the Lord Howe Island Whistler and the Lord Howe Island Silvereye. When the rats are gone they are going to be able to reintroduce a whole of lot of birds that are now extinct including my lovely Kākāriki parrot, although they weren’t wiped out by rats, they were just shot.**

**What would you think would be suitable in relation to accommodation, i.e. three months’ worth of accommodation, say for Emerald Doves?**

**How would you go about that?**

Jenny Brown In relation to the housing, they are a ground dwelling dove so they would be happy if they could forage on the ground naturally. If they can forage on the ground they are going to be fine.

It would also need to be rat proofed.

However the issues that I can see happening is that the males are territorial and they are not really found in large groups out in the wild. Groups have been recorded of up to 12 birds but you are not usually going to find them in those numbers. They are usually in pairs or just individual birds, so you are really only going to be able to house a couple at a time in an aviary.

For something like 90 days/3 months at a time to house them, you really want an aviary about 2½ metres tall by a few metres long at least; and that is only going to be for a couple of birds. Also you will have to make sure that wherever you capture these birds from, it is recorded where they are found. You don’t want all these male’s territories to be mixed up. If you are going to catch these birds to try and save them and then you are going to release them, there are going to be problems if you are not releasing them in the right areas.

Jenny Brown In terms of the aviaries just soft mesh aviaries are basic enough and as long as they have enough substrate to feel comfortable on (that coverage on the ground), then you just need a couple of perches for them to roost on at the top of the aviary.

As long as they have got enough ground cover they will be fine.

**Graeme Phipps Well okay a series of small aviaries made with woven hail cloth, the type that stops stone fruit from being hammered by the hail.**

Jenny Brown Yes.

**Graeme Phipps Okay well that's great. That is a pretty good go forward Jenny.**

**So now I should ask the members if they have some questions for you. Is that alright if I ask for a couple of questions?**

Jenny Brown Yes sure.

Graeme Phipps Who's got a question for Jenny?

**Colin Morgan If the Emerald Doves are wiped out by the rat baiting on Lord Howe Island, or nearly, what are the prospects of repopulating the island from the mainland of Australia?**

Jenny Brown I supposed you could, but as I said, there are three of the 11 subspecies found in Australia and the subspecies on Lord Howe Island is found in southeast NSW and other places. However I think that it just comes down to the fact that not enough research has been done into this bird in the first place and it is very easy to say that it is the same subspecies. The Emerald Dove will be easy enough to replace but if you lose these birds, you don't know what you are losing in terms of genetics. The research hasn't been done.

**Graeme Phipps I've been to Lord Howe Island five times with the Woodhen (*Gallirallus sylvestris*) project before I was curator at Taronga Zoo and one of the things that struck me was that even though you can have the same species on the island, how they use the space is different to how they use it on the mainland. The Kingfishers for instance, they actually forage right out on the rock shelf when the tide is out and it is exposed. So all these Kingfishers are all out there because there is nothing else to compete, so they kind of extend. It could well be that the Emerald Dove has got a slightly different niche on the island, but maybe that doesn't matter all that much. So yes, that was a good question and a good answer.**

**Whose got a another question for Jenny, a question about Emerald Doves, or the animals at Shambala?**

**Member So how did you get the hippo?**

Jenny Brown Believe it or not, Valium.

**Graeme Phipps Valium?**

Jenny Brown Yes, to calm it down.

**Graeme Phipps** Well at least it was in good mood when it was flying to Indonesia? Bali wasn't it?

Jenny Brown Yes, well actually Indonesia's Quarantine. I think that animal was flying well and truly before it got on plane.

**Graeme Phipps** Well, Jenny do you have any questions or comments that you would like to add for the ASNSW?

Jenny Brown I just think this species is worth saving and investigating. They are a well distributed little bird in that everyone has them but nobody knows a lot about them in the wild and their pattern, and things like that. I definitely think that they are well worth putting some time and effort into.

**Graeme Phipps** Well said as a champion of the Emerald Dove!

**Jenny thanks for being our guest tonight we appreciate it very much.**

*Editor's Note: When Gary Fry presented on the avicultural aspects of the Lord Howe Island Rodent Eradication Program at our last meeting in May, the potential impacts on the Lord Howe Island Woodhen, and the Lord Howe Island Currawong were discussed. Three other species were mentioned as possibly being impacted; the Lord Howe Island Whistler, the Lord Howe Island Silvereye and the Emerald Dove. These could possibly benefit from involvement by the avicultural community, hence our reason for asking Jenny to comment as writer of the [Australasian Society of Zoo Keeping Husbandry Guidelines](#) for this species.*

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