



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

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

The Western Rosella Man

(ASNSW Meeting “Winging it” segment – June 2014)

Skype call to Ben Pearce in Western Australia

Introduction

Ben Pearce has kept birds for around 50 years but only keeps a few these days as he spends a lot of time in the bush studying Western Rosellas and other parrots. He does a bit of photography and supplies photos to magazines in Australia and overseas. He has supplied photos to the West Australian Museum, Birdlife Australia and West Australian Bird Notes. It's only a hobby. His passion is Western Rosellas and he would love to see them get the long overdue protection they deserve. His [Facebook page](#) is open to everybody. It is dedicated to the protection of Western Rosellas.



It is well known that in the 1970s/1980s there used to be a very significant legal trade in finches that came from the northwest and the problem with that was that even though it was a legal trade, no one was out there monitoring them, they just caught them. Then we found out later that finches like the Gouldian finch couldn't really sustain that kind of impact on them in the wild.

It will be interesting to hear from one of our avicultural brothers and hear what he has to say about the current plight of the Western Rosellas.

Skype Interview

Graeme Phipps

Thank you for agreeing to the Skype interview Ben. I have briefed our members about your background and certainly you are in our DNA! So let's talk about how you first became concerned about Stanley Rosellas (the Western Rosellas).

Ben Pearce

About 12 years ago we had about 100 aviaries and then we started cutting down as I wanted to spend more time studying the Western Rosellas in the wild.

Graeme Phipps

There are two different types of Rosellas aren't there?

Ben Pearce

Yes. We have the Green-backed or coastal Western and then we have the inland rosella which in aviculture we call the Red-backs, or I just call them Inland Westerns.

We started studying them in the wild 12 years ago and I was already saying then that I wished we had starting studying them earlier because they were in so many other areas only 10 years ago. We have lost so many Westerns in so many areas just in the last 10 years. The decline is frightening at just how fast we are losing them.

Graeme Phipps

So in the last 10 years you have noticed a measurable and clear decline in their numbers in the wild and at the same time you are saying that there is this pest control matter – they are shooting them?

Ben Pearce

No, they can no longer be shot. In 1998 there was a lot of work that we did, and a lot of other people as well, and they were taken off the pest species list, so they are no longer shot now. They can only be trapped and they are not trapping many simply because they have become so low in numbers.

They have declined at a disturbing rate and I have really noticed it over the last 20 years. Over the last 10 years we have been writing to Government to ask them to stop the trapping. But still the trapping goes on and the decline continues at a frightening rate.

Only 10 years ago we had them visiting my backyard regularly. They are not there anymore or in other Perth areas. Places like Hyden, famous for Wave Rock; Westerns have disappeared in the last 10 years. They were everywhere and now they are gone. I can name so many areas where the locals I have spoken to have said it has happened over the last 10 years. So we are campaigning the Government to stop commercially trapping Western Rosellas and once we educate the Government to treat them with the respect they deserve and give them further protection, we are hoping the public as well as companies will start to respect them. Then we may be able to slow this massive decline that is happening.

Graeme Phipps

Now Ben that is happening with the Western Rosella, would you have noticed anything similar happening with say the Red-capped parrots, the Port Lincolns, the White-tailed Black Cockatoos or even other species? Are you noticing that it's not just the Stanley Rosella that is copping it in the neck?

Ben Pearce

The Red-capped Parrot is a declared pest of agriculture and they can be shot without a permit, farmers can shoot as many as they like throughout the whole southwest. They are a very, very cunning parrot so they have stood up pretty well. The Australian ringnecks are in the hundreds of thousands. Our environmental department trapped 60,000 in one Shire and they couldn't notice the difference because they are in such big numbers. But the little Western Rosella, he is a different case altogether. He is a very gentle parrot, and this made them an easy parrot to shoot and this has really knocked them around.

The White-tailed Black, even though they have spent a lot of money trying to save them they are still a declared pest of agriculture and you can still apply for permits and have them shot. But the little Western Rosella is not a declared pest and they don't do any damage.

I don't interfere in pest management. If a bird is on the pest list I don't interfere because farmers have got a right to earn a living and I don't know enough about it. But the little Western, he is a beautiful little parrot, and we are losing them at a very fast rate. We can still see plenty in the southwest but in so many areas they are disappearing.

That is why we are trying very hard to bring in some protection for them. So what I am asking everybody to do is not to buy trapped Western Rosellas. Over the last 10 years of writing to the Government it hasn't done any good. We are getting nowhere. So what we are trying to do is to stop people from buying them and then we will put the [Department of Parks and Wildlife](#) out of business simply because no one wants the birds if they have been trapped.

Graeme Phipps

They have got very good avicultural populations of Western Rosellas anyway haven't they? I mean they wouldn't want any from the wild would they?

Ben Pearce

All of my support has come from the bird groups. The bird groups and breeders as well as the clubs have been fabulous. If we can stop the sale of these trapped birds and hopefully people stop buying them, then we are forcing them out of business. They are not trapping many because they are nearly gone in the trapping areas. We now breed all the Westerns we need.

Graeme Phipps

You are worried about their patchy decline everywhere; is anyone looking into this situation that you know of?

Ben Pearce

[Birdlife Western Australia](#) are working very hard on it and they have been shocked at how many inland Westerns are left. What I have been screaming about now for the past 10 years they are just waking up to over the past few years. Where they have been trapping in the south west they are now almost gone and very few can be caught. They are not allowed to trap the inland birds at all. All the shops here have stopped taking trapped birds except for one shop in Perth that I know of and that is [Bird World](#). If we can stop the sale of trapped birds we will stop it.

Graeme Phipps

I take it then that if there is only one shop the only other market is to the eastern states; because you can't export them?

Ben Pearce

The trappers won't export them; they have got to go into a Western Australian shop. I am very reluctant to cause the shops any trouble because they are not the ones causing the problem; it is Government that is regulating and allowing the trapping. The shops play an important part in our hobby. The shops do a good job; they supply us with all our gear. I am very reluctant to put any condemnation on the bird shops. However, if you buy any Western Rosellas from Bird World in Western Australia you can bet they have been trapped. You can still buy your Red-caps and Twenty Eights because they are still a declared pest. They are going to destroy them anyway so at least you are giving them a home.

Graeme Phipps

Now Ben, I am going to ask the members if they have any questions they would like to ask you. Would you like to take a couple of questions?

Ben Pearce

More than happy to, I would love to have them.

Questions

Paul Henry

I was in Western Australia in March and I drove from Perth down the coast to Albany and then across to Busselton and then back up to Perth again. I saw lots of parrots. I saw Ringnecks and Black Cockatoos, I saw red-caps, but I didn't see Western Rosellas. Is that their normal range around there? I mean if you were going back 10 years would you have seen them in that range?

Ben Pearce

Yes, you were pretty unlucky because that is their stronghold. When you leave Perth and head down towards the coast and then across to Mount Barker and through to Albany there is very good populations of Western Rosellas in those towns. You drove right through their stronghold and then further south, so you were pretty unlucky not to see them.

I have a great passion for Western Rosellas and I interview people. I spoke to someone right in the middle of their stronghold at Mount Barker recently and when I was there five years ago he had 50 on the lawn, now there are five. So there is a massive decline even in their stronghold. Where you went you should have seen plenty. That is right in the middle of their range and so you can see why we are working to stop the trapping

Paul Henry

No, I never saw one.

Ben Pearce

That is exactly why I am campaigning so hard to try and stop the trapping. Also it would be good for aviculture because we are under a lot of pressure with our hobby. If we can present as and be conservation minded it will put us in good stead as breeders because it is not us trapping them, it is the Government that insists on the continued trapping.

Janet Macpherson

Hello Ben. What happens if the shops and everyone stops buying trapped Western Rosellas from Parks and Wildlife? What was the purpose for trapping them in the first place? Is it because they are getting into the fruits and orchards and whatever the farmer's problems are with them? If they stop selling them will they then still trap them and kill them?

Ben Pearce

That is a good question. They are not a pest species. They have done several studies that have shown that they do very little damage to the fruit and Parks and Wildlife know that it has got to stop very soon. They realise that; we are just trying to speed it up. They know they are in trouble, they know they are disappearing.

The curator of the Western Australian Museum has supported me, Bird Life Australia are supporting me, Birdlife Western Australia are supporting me. Everyone knows they are in trouble. It is just a matter of getting Parks and Wildlife to see the benefits of conservation regarding this species. It is very hard to let go of a money making industry.

It is like the Gouldian Finch, they were trapping them by the hundreds of thousands and in the end they were only trapping a thousand in the last year. They trapped them to the point of extinction; the Western Australian Government was making money. It is all about making money. It is very hard to pass it over when they are getting all that money from permits and licenses. That is the only reason trapping of Rosellas is continuing.

There are only two trappers left and when they retire it will stop anyway but I don't want to wait that long, I have seen a massive decline in the last 10 years and if they don't retire for another 10 years you just don't know how many will be left after that time.

Conclusion

Graeme Phipps

Ben I think you have a strong case and you did prick our consciences with the Gouldian comments because we were very concerned with the legal 1970/80s trapping that we used to get from the northwest, many thousands of finches each year, and they weren't sustainable. We thought people were monitoring the situation and they were not. You are definitely quite right, in aviculture we don't want to be part of the problem because we care about birds and for birds, so you can expect that there will be support for your point of view from the Society and I am wondering about which way we go on it to give the best effect. Obviously letters to the Western Australian Government itself expressing displeasure, etc. etc. might be of assistance. We might also present something through the ABA as well?

Ben Pearce

That would be fabulous. I am indebted to you for Western Rosellas because so many species are becoming rare and whilst Western Rosellas aren't there yet we are acting early so that they don't become rare. If anyone wants to contact Parks and Wildlife and comment they can go to my Facebook page "[The Western Rosella Man](#)". There is a link there where you can enter your comments, good or bad.

Graeme thanked Ben for agreeing to be interviewed on Skype (something very new for Ben) and to get a bit of an idea how members at the meeting were feeling he asked who was in favour of the Society being involved in some way to support Ben's position. Members strongly agreed that we should support Ben and Graeme thanked him once again for the work he was doing. Graeme encouraged Ben to keep on being the champion of the species that he is.

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