



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

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

Obituary

Bill Howlett

Central Coast Aviculturist

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By Graeme Phipps

Principal Curator, Taronga Zoo

It is with deep regret that I record the recent death of well known Central Coast Aviculturist Bill Howlett.

Many people knew Bill over many years and in later years he wasn't a very well fellow. Recently he was scheduled to have some heart surgery and unfortunately, at the reasonably early age of 71, Bill did not survive the surgical procedures.

It's a loss to aviculture because Bill's love of parrots, particularly the Antbed Parrots: Paradise, Golden-shouldered and Hooded, was well known. He regularly produced between 60 and 70 Hooded Parrots per year and heaven knows how many Golden-shouldered Parrots were produced.

Because of health reasons he went out of birds. However, he was prevailed upon to look after some birds for Garry Lee for 18 months or so during which period he bred perhaps 30 Golden-shouldered Parrots for Garry. This got him fired up again.

The week before his hospital procedure was scheduled Bill rang to talk to me about an idea that had been floating around in his mind for a while. In essence, it was to get back into Golden-shouldered Parrots, set up a studbook of twenty pairs, have all of them DNA checked so that their purity was beyond question, maintain an excellent studbook of the birds and hopefully have them available for re-introduction to the wild should anyone so wish. Bill wanted to make a worthwhile contribution to the preservation of life on earth.

There is one story I have to mention: Bill was fascinated, perhaps even obsessed, with the Paradise Parrot and some fifteen years ago, well before Paradise Parrots were re-discovered in central Queensland, Bill had birds which he swore on a stack of Bibles were pure Paradise Parrots. I looked at the specimens in his aviaries and gave an opinion that they were hybrids so he came down and checked skins labelled as Paradise Parrots in the Macleay Museum collection at the University of Sydney. There two pair were shot in the 1870s, 1880s. After studying them, Bill took the view that actually the museum had the hybrid ones and his were the pure ones!

I don't know if he ever bred from his "Paradise Parrots", but let's just say that he was a big hearted man and the thrill of the chase and the fun of aviculture was part of his makeup.

Farewell Bill. We don't know where you are but if it's in paradise then that will be by definition somewhere where Paradise Parrots are (and I guess the other Antbed Parrots as well). Our condolences are extended to wife Jean and family.

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