

## The Regent Of Australia

### The regent parrot

*By Joseph M. Forshaw*

At Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, in northwestern Victoria, a summer storm overnight has given a fresh, vibrant appearance to mallee woodland, and the birds are particularly active as sunrise bathes the countryside in golden hues. The eastern sky is clear, but to the west departing storm clouds provide a dark backdrop highlighting multi-stemmed eucalyptus trees in the early morning. It is late October, and I am with a small group of parrot enthusiasts visiting the foremost national park in Australia for parrots. Very soon, we hear distant calling of approaching regent parrots, or rock pebbles (*Polytelis anthopeplus*).

Within a few minutes a flock of adult males on their way to feeding areas alight atop a nearby dead tree, where their rich yellow plumage is highlighted magnificently by the early sunlight against the background of dark storm clouds. A member of our party who has done many years of field research on parrots in South America describes this sighting as one of his most exciting encounters with parrots, and it certainly remains a most memorable experience for me.

#### Two Subspecies Miles Apart

Regent parrots are among the most spectacular of Australian parrots, especially when seen in rapid flight above a river; a species that is far more impressive when encountered in the wild than when viewed in an aviary. There are two subspecies of the regent parrot: *P. a. monarchoides* and *P. a. anthopeplus*. The subspecies live in different parts of Australia. It is surprising that their differences are so slight because the eastern and western populations have been separated by alien habitat since onset of the last dry glacial epoch, a period estimated to be in excess of 25,000 years.

\*For the full article, pick up the July 2008 issue of BIRD TALK\*\*

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