

Your 15 Lory Questions Answered

Discover what sets lorries apart from other parrots.

By Dick Schroeder

1. What's the difference between a lory and a lorikeet?

The difference is pretty much the same as the difference between a parrot and a parakeet. The birds with the long, pointed tails are the "keets," and the ones with the shorter, square tails are the lorries. However, Australians call them all lorikeets. Courtesy Carol Hodges, Ontario, Canada
This rainbow lorikeet prepares to fly.

2. Which lorries make the best pet birds?

There may be as many correct answers as there are lory species. My personal favorites are the entire *Chalcopsitta* group, which includes yellow streaks, blacks, cardinals and *Duyvenbode's*. They aren't great talkers, but I believe they have the best dispositions. If talking matters, choose either a chattering or a black cap of the larger species, and a red or blue streak in the medium-sized species. To me, the best of the rainbows are the *Swainson's* and the *Edward's*.

3. I already have two other pet parrots, is it OK to add a lory to the flock dynamics?

This can be done but only under close supervision. Lorries can be extremely aggressive to other birds, even other lorries, so I wouldn't let them share a playpen and certainly not the same cage. With time, they may do just fine, but the larger species especially can easily kill another bird.

4. My female rainbow lory lays eggs a couple of times a year. I've been told not to take the eggs away from her. Why not?

Taking the eggs away will probably entice her to recycle and lay two more. Most birds only sit on eggs for a short while – maybe as long as two weeks, then soon tire of it. At that point, you can remove the eggs. Some hens do this twice a year. If she sleeps in a nest box, removing the nest box will help eliminate this habit as well.

5. How can I get my lory to take a bath?

Lories bathe in different ways. It seems to be an individual thing rather than a species-specific trait. Many love a shallow bowl of water that is large enough to climb into and roll around. This causes water to fly everywhere, so another choice is to put an inch or two of water in the kitchen sink and introduce the lory. It's much easier to wipe off the counter than the carpet. If the bird is frightened of the sink, place the shallow bowl on the counter top. Many lorries enjoy rubbing against the wet leaves or produce.

6. Is it OK to feed my lory flowers?

Most flowers are fine as long as you know their source. Many nurseries and flower growers use a systemic fertilizer in the soil that is drawn up into the plant, which could be quite toxic to a lory. I wouldn't feed my birds anything I didn't grow myself. Good flowers are hibiscus, eucalyptus, bottlebrush, meleluca, dandelion, roses and pansies. Just be certain of their source.

7. I'm hand-feeding my first lorries, and they stay very close together. Is this normal?

Nearly all baby birds huddle together for extra warmth. It also helps them to prop each other up. It's perfectly normal.

8. We are about to get our first bird, a rainbow lory. How large of a cage do we need?

Every bird should have the largest cage you have the space for or the money to buy. This is especially true for lorries, as they are quite active, seemingly never sitting still. Even a bird let out daily for some playtime appreciates a roomy cage to play in. Lorries are great climbers and have very strong feet, so provide a cage that is not only large lengthwise but one that is tall to allow for climbing about.

9. I was told never to feed honey to my lory. It is a natural product, so why is this a problem?

You shouldn't feed raw honey to your lory because it can contain spores of botulism. That's the same reason it should not be used in hummingbird feeders. Pasteurized honey, however, is fine.

10. When our red lory, Maui, is out of her cage, we watch her every moment. What household dangers should we look out for?

Take the usual precautions; no uncovered toilet seats if she can fly, and don't leave her alone with other pets or small

children. Lories have the natural habit of “tasting” everything with their tongue. Such simple things as hand lotion or makeup might be toxic to a lory. Be especially careful of topical medications, like those used on a cut or burn. These can be very dangerous if ingested by a lory.

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11. What are some methods lory owners use to contain the mess lories make?

Sometimes lories get a bad rap regarding mess. All birds are messy to one extent or another. There are just different kinds of mess. With a lory, there are no seed hulls blowing all over the place and not a lot of white dander on the dark furniture like you'd have with an African grey or cockatoo.

Lories have liquid or nearly liquid droppings. These are easily water soluble and much easier to get off the furniture than the sticky green stuff left by most parrots. Not all lories “squirt” out of their cage. Many spend a good deal of time sitting on a perch, like other parrots, and their droppings go down to the bottom of the cage.

The biggest problem is when the lory hangs on the sides of the cage. People have come up with lots of ingenious ways to deal with this. Many wrap three sides of the cage in something like a shower curtain, however lories can chew this material. A better way is to use clear acrylic panels that are removable, and hang them on the sides of the cage. The shower curtain, or similar item, can be placed on the floor beneath and around the cage to catch the drips. It just takes a bit of imagination, but lories are worth it. (If you think a lory is messy, try a toucan!)

12. What part of the world do most lories come from?

Lories are distributed throughout the islands of Indonesia, New Guinea, Polynesia and Australia. There are 53 species; some others have become extinct. Others may be extinct in their original range but still survive in other areas, having been introduced as escaped pets by natives. The biggest threat to the island species is deforestation and introduced predators like rats and cats.

13. How long can I expect my lory to live? Some people have said only three or four years. Is this true?

Most pet birds, be they lories or something else, die way too soon because of household accidents. Many are stepped on, rolled over on in an owner's bed or killed by the “he-won't-hurt-anything” cat. If properly cared for, and that means diet as well as an accident and a predator-free environment, a lory can easily exceed 20 years.

I have lories that old in my aviary that were captured in the wild years ago. Of course being wild caught means we have no real idea how old they actually are. I have had some of these same birds breed for me for 16 years.

Rosemary Low, in her book *Encyclopedia of Lories*, mentions several lory breeders who have had birds still producing fertile eggs well into their 20s. Feed them properly, watch where you step, and you will have many years of pleasure from your pet.

14. My Edward's lory sometimes gets on my sun conure's perch, and he loves to eat the sunflower seeds from his dish. Is this bad for him?

A few sunflower seeds every now and then will not hurt your lory. When I visited Australia quite a few years ago, I noticed that most all of the aviculturists offered small amounts of sunflower to their larger lory species as a regular part of their diet. Some of the smaller species, such as Goldie's and Iris, enjoy spray millet as a part of their diet. But on the whole, lories in the wild eat the green seeds from fruit, not the hard, dry seeds that are offered in a seed mix. My lories always go for the apple or pear seeds before anything except their nectar. They have eaten apple seeds for as long as I've kept lories with no ill affects. [Apple seeds are thought to be toxic to other parrot species. – Ed.]

15. The pet store where I bought my lory said lories need a box to sleep in at night. What size should I have for a blue-streaked lory?

If the lory is kept inside as a house pet, there is no reason to provide a nest box at all. In fact, if your bird is a female, the box might induce her to start laying eggs. This is not necessarily a bad thing but something I think you would rather not deal with. Some lories sleep under a wash cloth or even burrow under the paper on the cage floor. Most just sleep on the cage floor or on a perch.