

## Walking to Work with a Parrot on my Shoulder

*Shôn Ellerton, February 18, 2022*

*An otherwise uneventful morning turned interesting when this little chappie turned up.*



It was during a coolish and overcast early morning whilst walking to work in Adelaide, that I had an unusual encounter with one of Australia's most iconic birds, the rainbow lorikeet.

For those of us who live in Australia or those who have travelled and visited there, are all too aware how spoilt we are for our varied birdlife, some of which, are strikingly beautiful. Every morning, while waiting for the early morning train, there is a symphony of gregarious Australian magpies crying out their uniquely ringtone-like songs seemingly oblivious to human traffic traipsing to and fro along the train platform. In the surrounding trees are little yellow honeyeaters viciously defending their territory while large black ravens break the chorus with deafening caws which, uniquely to Australia, subside and fade to a low pitch as if they're disappointed.

Alighting the train at a little station called Mile End so I can have a brisk invigorating walk to work through the CBD's surrounding Parklands, I stumbled upon a resting rainbow lorikeet on the pavement. It looked rather listless to say the least and, thinking perhaps it fell asleep, I thought it might be a good idea to move it out of harm's way and put it in the tree. I approached the bird and tried to move it along, but it simply bit me with its beak. Not enough force to draw blood, but it was significant enough for me to grimace in pain. Not being one to give up, I just grabbed it in my hands and moved over to the tree. It kept trying to bite me, which is understandable. I got to the tree and opened my hand to let it go, but it wouldn't. It just sat there on my hand,

refusing to move, and out of sheer grumpiness, continued to bite me for a little longer but then it sort of gave up and just sat there contentedly.

Trying to find a better tree, I walked a bit further down the pavement with the bird in my hand but thought it best just to put it on my shoulder for the time being. Whilst doing so, the bird decided to mark its territory by letting loose a gooey torrent of guano on my left shirt sleeve. I was wearing a black shirt which contrasted nicely with the white deposit. Knowing that I probably did not do the right thing, because getting this bird off my shoulder or off from behind my head is going to prove rather difficult, I thought about what to do. Meanwhile, while swiftly walking in the direction of work in the middle of the business district, other passerbys were giving me amusing looks. A couple of young women walking past me were cooing, "Oh, that's just *sooo* cute!". A bearded construction worker clambering on his flatbed truck on the side of the road, pointed to me in alarm and started to say, "Did you know that there...?", to which I interjected, "yes, and I can't get rid of it!" I felt like Inspector Clouseau from an old Pink Panther movie.

Adding to the comic look, I had my headphones on, those big ones which cover the ears, which wasn't a bad thing because I sure wouldn't want to have my ears nibbled by this creature. What was I going to do with it? I was thinking. A neighbour who lives opposite me is a parrot expert and has two or three of them, all of which he found abandoned or injured in the wild. But this would have been impractical at this time. Maybe I'd find a kindly police officer who'd advise me what to do. That's a dumb idea. While all this was happening, I was on Facetime with my mother and I was asking her what I should do. I said that I was just passing by Chinatown, to which she made an amusing but unintentionally inappropriate quip advising me to certainly not leave the bird there!

Approaching a park just outside of work, I decided I would have to try my best to coax it from my shoulder and into the tree. I had no resistance or any defiant behaviour from the bird such as trying to evade my hand by dashing from shoulder to shoulder or giving me a nip or two. It was compliant like a ragdoll, but it was still alive, but only just. I gently laid it into a crook of a tree, and it sat there in a semi-dormant state, and, giving it a final goodbye stroke on its cheek, I left it there to meet its maker, whilst thinking of a well-known Monty Python sketch.

It's only one bird of many thousands and thousands that die but it was still a sad occasion. I like to think that I tried to do a good deed. You know the story when a bird first hatches, it follows the first living thing it sees? Perhaps, in this case, the last thing this bird saw was a being that tried to care for it. Who knows?

After a thorough decontamination with many scrubblings of soap and water, I spoke to my colleague at work about this who said there was a peculiar disease that was killing rainbow lorikeets, and sure enough, there was one I later researched. Back in July 2021, The Sydney Morning Herald [reported a mysterious disease](#) that renders these birds nearly immobile and unable to fly or eat, resulting in certain death. Thankfully, it hasn't been identified as being an infectious disease, but nobody has yet to explain how this has been happening.

Still, an interesting interlude for an otherwise uneventful day.