Bruce Boehrer, writing in a recent issue of *Gastronomica* (“The Parrot Eaters,” Summer 2004), sought to answer the question of why parrot has disappeared from the world table. The substantial part of his argument is as follows:

Prior to 1492 there existed a tradition of classical psittacophagy (parrot eating), interrupted by the relative scarcity of parrots in the Middle Ages, that could have revived once the Americas began to yield a regular supply of these birds for the European market. But by the 1600s it is clear, instead, that Westerners tended to think of parrots as pets and as zoological marvels and annoyances, but seldom as dinner. …Europe in the Age of Exploration developed a new context for psittacophagy, in which eating parrot is associated not with classical luxury, but with American barbarism.

What caught my attention particularly were what seemed at face value two wild claims for the place of parrot on the tables of past and present Australian Aborigines and nineteenth-century Australian pioneers. Pursuing his theme of the relationship between psittacophagy and anthropophagy, Boehrer says:

This parallelism becomes visible in the fact that psittacophagy takes on forms that recall the traditional anthropological distinction between “survival cannibalism” and “ritual cannibalism.” Of survival and ritual psittacophagy, the former is more common, appearing frequently in non-Western societies faced with limited sources of animal protein. Among these the tribes of pre-Colombian America offer an important case….But the peoples of West Africa and T’ang China also ate parrots, as did—and do—the aborigines of Australia. (pp.47-48)

Neither claim in relation to Australia is referenced in an article that is otherwise rigorous in this regard. This was sufficient to ruffle my gastronomic feathers. But what really got my Australian cultural dander up higher than the sulfur crest of the eponymous cockatoo was the implication that both Aboriginal and migrant-settler Australians had continued with a barbaric practice that the rest of Western civilization, according to Boehrer’s thesis, had transcended at least two hundred years prior to white settlement of Australia.

I embarked on a search for the missing potential references to psittacophagy among my compatriots—to lift the crust, as it were, and see whether there were at any time pieces of polly in the meat pie, the centerpiece of Australian cuisine past and present, and if there were, why this is no longer so. Turning to recent books that have explored transgressive food, I looked in both Calvin Schwabe’s *Unmentionable Cuisine* and Jerry Hopkins’s *Extreme Cuisine.* Nothing in the former, but on page 179 in Hopkins, there is an entry directly quoting Alan Davidson on psittacophagy and Australians. So I turned next to the Magus himself, where in his magnum opus, *The Oxford Companion to Food,* I found the following:

[Parrots] have been eaten, for example, in Papua New Guinea, and also in past times in Australia and New Zealand. One can find traces of dishes such as parrot pie in early Australasian cookbooks. (p.576)

I gave a small sigh of relief; at least Davidson had broadened the potential transgressors to include other of my Oceania fellows, and misery—or, in my case, putative moral degeneracy by association—loves company.

Either of these could have been sources for Boehrer. But where did Davidson get his information? His tome is frustrating in that notes like this are themselves not referenced in the text, and you have to scan his bibliography for a likely source. My efforts produced Australian food writer Richard Beckett’s *Convicted Tastes,* where I came across this:

One turns now to the parrot family. Given the bush culinary abuse that has been heaped on at least two members of that tribe—notably
the galah and the sulphur-crested cockatoo—one is also surprised to note that recipes for them survived into the 20th century.3

It was at this point that I had to concede Australian psittacophagy, for Beckett’s evidence is a recipe for parrot pie from Mrs. Margaret J. Pearson, author of Cookery Recipes for the People, which was popular enough to have gone into a third edition by 1894.1

8 parroquets, 4 eggs (boiled 10 mins, until hard and then put into cold water), Teaspoon of lemon juice, ½ lb bacon or ham, Little good gravy or stock, 1 lb of fillet of beef cut into thin slices, Rough puff paste.

Cut the birds into two, and rub well with butter, place the slices of beef in a pie dish and place on them birds and slices of ham, cut in neat pieces the hard boiled eggs and add, then pour in a cup of well-seasoned stock: cover over with rough puff paste, decorate with cut leaves etc., from the paste, stick the legs and feet well cleaned and blanched in the centre.3

Still, one parrot pie does not a nation of psittacophagists make. Is there evidence beyond Mrs. Pearson? Mrs. Lance (Mina) Rawson, author of The Antipodean Cookery Book and the Kitchen Companion (1895), gives the following recipe:

To cook parrots—

Ingredients: One dozen parrots, 1 ounce butter, and 1 ounce flour, 1 pint milk, seasoning of pepper, salt and nutmeg, 1 tablespoonful of chopped parsley, a little stock. Mode: Mix the butter and the flour smoothly in a stewpan over a moderate fire. Gradually add the milk and seasoning. Stir the sauce till it boils, then pour in as much stock as will make it sufficient for the birds. Put in the parrots, well-picked and cleaned, and let them stew, closely covered until they are tender. Add a little extra milk or stock if it boils away much. About five minutes before serving sprinkle in the chopped parsley. Serve very hot, with the sauce poured round the birds.5

The 1892 edition of Mrs. Beeton’s Cookery Book has a section on Australian cookery, which includes a recipe for parrot pie.6 So, I had now uncovered three references to parrot pie in cookery books that would all have been available to the Australian housekeeper of the late nineteenth century. But does the repetition of a dish in three contemporaneous sources necessarily mean that the dish can be described as standard?

I sought the opinion of other learned food writers in Australia to see what they had to say on the place of psittacophagy as standard fare at the pioneer and colonial table. Michael Symonds, author of One Continuous Picnic, responded thus:

Somewhere I retain an exercise book in which I kept a record between 1877 and 1882 of any interesting Australian recipe. It might have something in there about parrots. But I suspect not much, because I don’t seem to have carried anything like that through to One Continuous Picnic. Someone mentioned an unnamed “fruit bird.” My feeling is that parrot pie was certainly not a “standard” colonial dish. You know those jokes about galahs—boil with a boot, throw away bird and eat the boot. Particular fruit birds might work, though, presumably.7

Does the presence of recipes for parrot pie in popular cookery books and the common disparagement of the worth of cooking a galah lend weight to Boehrer’s contention that where parrots occur in the indigenous Aboriginal and pioneer diet they are there as a matter of survival? Boehrer advances no evidence that Aboriginal Australians (always capitalized, by the way, in current literature to acknowledge their place as peoples with nations) ate parrots because of limited sources of animal protein, or that they continue to do so for this reason. What even the most cursory look at material on the diet of past and present Aboriginal peoples shows, on the contrary, is that they were able to eat a wide range of animal protein in all parts of the continent. Brian Murton, writing of indigenous food systems of Australian Aborigines in the Cambridge World History of Food, states that “considerable variation also existed in the types of flesh eaten.”8 He notes that “birds constituted an important source of food, although in very dry areas they were probably only substantial food items following the infrequent heavy rains.” Among the birds mentioned are emu, “plentiful and available throughout the year, but… difficult to catch,” on the plains of the north, east, and southwest; ducks, black swans, and other waterfowl, which were “abundant in swamps and lagoons and along the rivers” of the southeast; wild turkeys, an “excellent source,” on the open plains; and smaller birds, which “could be hit with stones relatively easily.”9 What, no parrots? Well, as it happens, they did also eat parrot. Walter Woodbury, British settler, wrote to his mother in June 1853:

We have had a tribe of the native Blacks camped near us for the last week so that we have an excellent opportunity of seeing how they live….Their principle food is the opossum which they find out by knocking on the trees and where they find a hollow sound they cut
open the tree and so catch the opossum. They also kill turkeys, pigeons and parrots with the boomerang which they are very expert at throwing. When they are very hungry and can get nothing else they will pick up the spiders, beetles, cockroaches and ants and eat them. \(^{10}\)

Here is a presumably enlightened Christian settler, two hundred years after Boehrer’s suggested cutoff date for the European acceptability of eating parrot, reporting on psittacophagy among these newer world indigenes, with nary the hint of condemnation.

There is evidence of psittacophagy also in the languages of Aboriginal peoples today. In Arrernte, the language of the peoples of Central Australia, the term *kere thipe* is used to describe birds eaten by them. Among the birds so described are the Major Mitchell cockatoo, the pink cockatoo, the ringneck parrot, the Port Lincoln Parrot, the budgerigar, the galah, the black cockatoo, and the red-tailed black cockatoo. But is this evidence of turning to parrot because of a scarcity of other sources of animal protein? The Arrernte also class as *kere thipe* the crested pigeon, the wild turkey, the bustard, the rock pigeon, the plumed pigeon, and the spinifex pigeon. Their diet further includes freshwater cray and other small water creatures, sand goanna, Gould’s goanna, sand monitor, bearded dragon, carney, carpet snake, dragon lizard, red kangaroo, bandicoot, possum, euro, rock wallaby, and anteater porcupine—hardly a scarcity of animal protein! \(^{11}\)

There is another counter to the scarcity argument in recent discussion of Aboriginal peoples’ practice of “fire-stick farming.” Johnson and colleagues in the Northern Territory and Gibson in Western Australia have considered the reasons for the extinction in the last thirty to forty years of what are designated as middle-sized native mammals, those weighing between five hundred grams and five kilos, such as desert bandicoots. Their contention is that, at least in part, the survival of these mammals well into the middle of the twentieth century was due to the Aboriginal practice of selectively burning off small patches of habitat to create a balance between old unburned areas, which could provide shelter for the mammals, and newly cleared patches that would produce new leaves and shoots as food for the mammals. \(^{12}\)

If this argument holds, it is an interesting challenge to Boehrer’s implicit view of Aboriginal peoples as opportunistic feeders who are open to the vagaries of population change in their primary food sources and so turn to other sources, like parrots, at these times. Instead, we have a picture of people actively ensuring the continuation of the availability of their food sources to stave off scarcity.

It seems to me that Aboriginal Australians eat parrot because they’re there and because they want to. They and we are, after all, omnivores. Paul Rozin argues that as omnivores we are subject to two contradictory urges, neophilia (curiosity about new foods and aversion to monotony) and neophobia (culinary conservatism, the avoidance of danger by avoiding the unknown or new). \(^{13}\) Avoidance of monotony seems a simpler and more likely stimulus to psittacophagy here than survival, and I can’t see the Arrernte eating so many kinds of parrot unless its taste was pleasant also. The lack of taste, or the unpleasantness of taste, may be why they don’t eat other birds in the area—crow, magpie, Willie wagtail, eagle, or mopoke owl. It seems to me about time that anthropologists allowed for the possibility that all sorts of food choices may have everything to do with taste and nothing to do with nutrition, survival, purity, or danger.

But did omnivorous white settlers and pioneers (a vague term for which Boehrer unhelpfully does not suggest a dating) resolve Rozin’s contradiction by turning to parrot in the face of a scarcity of familiar animal protein sources? The first and subsequent fleets to arrive in Sydney from England brought with them sheep, cattle, and pigs, necessary to establish herds and flocks. \(^{14}\) Still, they weren’t without familiar sources of animal protein. A marine writing home in 1790, two years after the landing of the first fleet, mentions hunting fish, including the giant two-hundred-kilo stingrays that swam in the harbor (they were eventually hunted to extinction). \(^{15}\) There were also green turtles, a delicacy warranting advertising in the colony’s first newspaper, the Sydney Gazette. \(^{16}\) Yet these early settlers also took the other omnivore option and were soon hunting animals beyond the familiar, including the wide diversity of marsupials in this new land, such as rock wallabies (extinct by 1860) and bandicoots. \(^{17}\) Some reports on the consumption of kangaroo suggest they were eaten for reasons of taste and for their sheer abundance. \(^{18}\)

Settlers also ate parrot. Here is Sarah Brunskill writing to her mother in 1839 from Sydney:

*Parrots, cockatoos, lauries and magpies abound, kangaroo is very scarce, I have not seen any, but those who have tasted it pronounce it delicious. Parrot pie is very good, very like pigeon.* \(^{19}\)

Is this now evidence of turning to parrot in times of scarcity? The context suggests otherwise. As Robin Haines states:

Contrary to the popular imagination, nineteenth century voyages to Australia offered an abundant diet, and were an unprecedented triumph in terms of saving life….Many immigrants originated in the poorer agricultural regions of the United Kingdom where proximity to food sources did not guarantee access to a healthy diet….Thus the sense of...
liberation generated by letters describing free, and lawful access to
game and the availability of cheap fertile land, were meant not only
to give good, sound advice, but to affirm the immigrants’ newly acquired
independence and social mobility 12000 miles from home.20

There is one other place to look for pioneer psittacophagy, and
that is in the diaries of early explorers. Ludwig Leichhardt
recorded eating cockatoo on several occasions on his 1844
expedition, including once as “Christmas dinner of suet
pudding and stewed parrot.” There is no suggestion of distaste
or moral ambiguity when he notes this—it’s just available
food. At one point he pokes around in the stomach of a parrot
and finds some grain, which he tastes and notes is perhaps
suitable for cropping.21 But he also notes meals of wallaby
(once accompanied by a cockatoo soup), pigeon, wild
duck, kangaroo, and emu. I don’t think we can talk about
Leichhardt turning to parrot for survival in the face of a
scarcity of other options.

By the time that Mrs. Pearson, Mina Rawson, and Mrs.
Beeton were writing, reports on the colonies in Australia
painted a picture of plenty. Historian Geoffrey Blainey writes:

In 1890 the average Australian—including man, woman and toothless
baby—ate a third of a kilo of meat a day. In Queensland, where official
statistics were less reliable, the average person at half a kilo of meat a
day. In the country as a whole the typical family of four required, in
the course of one year, the killing of one large bullock and eight small
sheep for its own supply of meat. The average Australian ate twice as
much meat as the average person in England and the United States,
four times as much meat as the average German and French diner,
and—if the Italian statistics are reliable—twelve times as much meat
as the average Italian. Here were the great meat eaters of the world.22

Blainey puts forward three reasons for the preponderance of
meat on the menu: the grasslands of Australia could feed
large herds and flocks; cattle and sheep could be herded to
inland towns, while other food had to be carted in at a
heavy cost; meat was cheap, as there was no export market
for surplus meat.23 It is thus clear that by the time of the
appearance of parrot pie in Australian cookery books (if not
in the repertoire of the Australian housekeeper) there was
certainly no necessity for anyone to be eating parrot. So
what is the bird doing there?

In his review of Australian cookery books, Colin Bannerman
raises a cautionary note on the publication of recipes.

Publication of a recipe is not evidence that a dish was commonly made;
was it published in response to popular demand or as an item of novelty
or passing interest, which may or may not be taken up by readers?...
the pie when it’s cooked. The average lower-class housekeeper of the turn of the century would not regularly spend time plucking a dozen parrots just to bake them up with a lot of other meats. But a middle- or upper-class hostess who wants to impress might get her cook or maid to do the plucking and snipping, while perhaps finishing those little feet herself.

It was not only at the domestic table that the colonists sought to show their sophistication. A report from the Illustrated Sydney News of 1854 on the Café Restaurant Français describes the café as “this attractive temple dedicated to the genius of French cookery.” It continues:

Our English readers will doubtless imagine, when they hear of a restaurant being established in Sydney, that the most recherché plates will consist of kangaroo steaks or parrot pie…until the opening of this very excellent restaurant, we are quite of the opinion that Sydney was immersed in the thickest darkness in culinary matters….those who have a taste for something better than too-recently killed mutton or sodden beef, may here gratify their palates.27

Parrot pie here is not described as barbaric or the food of the desperate but—however ironically—as potentially recherché in the eyes of English readers, offering some indication of an attempt at sophistication, as opposed to the more expected sodden beef.

Finally, there is all that other meat. What better way to announce your wealth, or aspiration to it, than to present a dish that uses three or four different kinds of meat? What, then, shall we make of Mrs. Rawson’s recipe, where parrot is the sole meat? Her recipe To Cook Parrots comes between To Pickle Ham and Bacon and Peach Snowballs. Mrs. Rawson urges her contemporaries to eat widely not out of their diet with meats that were, at the very least, less time-consuming to catch and prepare.

Recipes for parrot pie do appear at times in cookery books in Australia still, but as curios. For example, here is one from Mrs. W. Jacques of Bengworden in the “Special—Early Recipes” section of Is Emu on the Menu? (1965).

Dress parrots allowing at least 2 to each person. Place in saucepan barely cover with water and simmer gently for about 4 hours. This time is necessary as some parrots are a great age and tough. When tender turn into pie dish. Season with salt and pepper and a pinch of nutmeg. Cover with pastry and cook 30–40 minutes in moderate oven.32

When the book’s editor reproduced the recipe, she was cautious enough to include a warning: “Note: Emus, Parrots and Kangaroos are protected under Wild Life Conservation Laws today.”33 Which brings me to the most significant reason for the absence of parrot from Australian menus: the growth since the 1860s of legislation protecting fauna in Australia. In the period 1860–1866 each of the colonies in

Australians continued to have one of the highest rates of meat consumption in the world throughout the early part of the twentieth century. Even during the Depression of the 1930s or during droughts, when meat from cattle and sheep was scarcer, there was rabbit, imported into Australia in 1859. Cookery books popular during the Depression and into the 1950s have many recipes for rabbit and pigeon but none for parrot. The consumption of rabbit meat declined, however, after World War II as a result of increasing wealth and the spread of the disease myxomatosis among the rabbit population.29

Also, by the early twentieth century, the available methods of preserving meat had broadened, so that meat could be kept for long periods to compensate for any short-term scarcity. Sizar Elliot, a Sydney grocer, first succeeded in canning meat in Australia in 1846, and in 1880 the first successful shipment of refrigerated beef, mutton, and butter reached England from Australia.30 By the turn of the century, ice chests for the suburban kitchen were available.31 For those who couldn’t afford an ice chest there was the Coolgardie safe, a simple form of meat safe that any home carpenter could build, where evaporating water provided the cooling. So, perhaps one reason that parrot left the menu was because Mrs. Rawson’s housewives were increasingly able to vary their diet with meats that were, at the very least, less time-consuming to catch and prepare.

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Australia at that time enacted such legislation. The New South Wales Act of 1866 is typical in its main focus on the protection of imported game—pheasants, partridges, grouse, hares, and deer—with the protection of a small number of native birds a secondary consideration. None of the latter are parrots; wild ducks, emu, brolgas, wild turkeys, black swans, wild geese, bronze-winged pigeons, and quail are protected during their breeding season, and the taking of their eggs is also prohibited. It would seem, then, that at this stage although parrot was eaten it was not standard enough fare to warrant protection as game.

Subsequent acts and amendments continued to protect native birds on this basis. However, in the debates to establish the NSW Birds Protection Act 1881, a new vector was introduced, that of protecting native birds from exploitation for the exotic feathers market. Interestingly, the black swan was not one of those given absolute protection, on the basis that it was in some parts of the colony “a necessary article of food to persons in poor circumstances and it would be wrong to deprive them of this article of diet.” Parrots remained unprotected.

It was under the Birds and Animals Protection Act 1918 that the significant shift occurred.

The bill had been prepared by the newly-formed (1909) Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia....[The act] considerably broadened the principle of the earlier legislation that all birds and animals were unprotected unless specifically protected. In the new act, all birds and animals were protected except those which were considered noxious and were mentioned in the schedules. These initially included, in the case of birds (Schedule 1) the cormorant (five species), crow, galah, white cockatoos, rosella, rainbow lorikeet, and wedge-tailed eagle, among others....

This act moved wildlife protection generally away from its basis in purely economic considerations and into the realm of emerging interest in the scientific and aesthetic value of wildlife. At the same time, there was a balancing act to protect native fauna while exempting from this protection the fauna that agriculturalists considered destructive pests. As a result, Schedule 1 of the act listed a number of birds that remained unprotected, including the sulfur-crested cockatoo, the galah, the rosella, the blue-bellied lorikeet, and the red-rumped grass parrot.

The final protection of native birds in New South Wales came with the passing of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1967, amended in 1974. This act continued the practice of exempting fauna that were considered pests; Schedule 11 of the act includes sulfur-crested cockatoos, galah, crimson rosella, and eastern rosella. That nonetheless we don’t eat rosella is, I think, due firstly to a generalization of the legislation in people’s mind. I had to chase up the specific schedule to correct my understanding that all parrots were protected, and I would bet that most Australians would be in the same position. Also, Australians increasingly believe in the importance of maintaining all native species as part of an ever more delicately balanced ecosystem.

All in all, Boehrer’s theory looks shaky when applied to Australia. Aboriginal peoples ate parrot, and continue to eat parrot, and to be protected by law in this behavior, despite over 230 years of missionary endeavor, which ought to have communicated to them, and to Australian legislators, the moral prohibition that Boehrer suggests arose as long as five hundred years ago. Pioneers and later colonists also ate parrot with no apparent qualms, and the evidence is persuasive that at least cookery-book writers of the late nineteenth century included recipes for parrot pie as an enticement for the emerging middle-class housekeeper who wanted to demonstrate their aspirations if not her position. The absence of parrot from the repertoire of Australian chefs and home cooks today is explainable by the prohibition against killing native fauna, which arises not out of any link to a past association with cannibalism but from scientific discourses on the necessity to preserve biodiversity as well as from aesthetic/philosophic discourses on nature.

Finally, it is disappointing that Boehrer makes no comment on the continuation or otherwise of psittacophagy among the West Africans; neither does he say whether there are still indigenous African peoples who are psittacophagists in the present day. It makes for an unfortunately American/Eurocentric view of an intriguing cul de sac in gastronomy.

—Paul van Reyk, Sydney

**Notes**

4. Beckett, Convicted Tastes, 54. Beckett suggests that the “parroquets” in question may have been Australian rosellas (Platycercus sp.).
7. Michael Symonds, in personal e-mail to Paul van Reyk, 1 September 2004.
8. Brian Murton, “The History and Culture of Food and Drink in Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania. V.E.3 Australia and New Zealand,” in Kenneth F. Kiple and...
Bruce Boehrer responds:

Paul van Reyk chastises me for not devoting more time to the history of psittacophagy in Australia, and for this lapse he accuses me of Eurocentrism. Since I’m a scholar of the English Renaissance, writing mostly about sixteenth-century European attitudes toward eating parrot, this is rather like accusing lasagna of being pastacentric. I guess on some level it’s true, and I suppose someone somewhere might not want lasagna to be that way, but really, doesn’t this say more about the food critic than it does about the cooking?

Ignoring the main thrust of my article, van Reyk focuses upon two passing remarks in a single paragraph: (1) that the aboriginal peoples of Australia “did—and do—” eat parrot; and (2) that parrot pie was “a standard pioneer dish in the Australian outback.” A lengthy paper chase ensues, and van Reyk deserves praise for its thoroughness. As for his conclusions, they are (1) that aboriginal Australians “did…eat parrot”; and (2) that parrot pie appears in at least “three different cookery books…available to the Australian housekeeper of the late nineteenth century,” including one that was “popular enough to have gone into a third edition by 1894.”

But wait: isn’t that essentially what I said in my article? Maybe so, van Reyk continues, but I must have said it for the wrong reasons. According to van Reyk, I mention Australian parrot eating in a censorious spirit, stigmatizing “both Aboriginal and migrant settler Australians…with a barbaric practice that the rest of Western civilization…had transcended.” Yet my article opens by contrasting the psittacophagy of ancient Rome with the parrot-meat avoidance of ancient India, and it goes on to point out that American settlers of the nineteenth century ate parrot right along with their Australian counterparts. So if I’m trashing Australia, I must be subjecting classical Europe and my own native country to the same unfair share of abuse, no?
In fact, to think of civility and barbarism as separate categories is to miss the point completely. The two concepts are always interdependent and context specific, offering few or no clear distinctions. Therein lies the wisdom of Walter Benjamin’s remark that “every document of civilization is also a document of barbarism”—a remark to which I allude at the end of my essay. But apparently van Reyk missed this reference—perhaps because, like other such passing comments, I don’t deem it essential to my argument and therefore don’t waste time and space pointing it out in a footnote.

Still, van Reyk snarls over my every syllable like a Yorkie worrying a chew toy. He doesn’t like my failure to capitalize the word “aborigine.” (With the smugness of a virtuoso niggler, he informs me that “Aboriginal…is always capitalized…in current literature.”) He doesn’t like it that I describe parrot pie as a “standard” outback dish, and—despite his own evidence to support its availability in period cookbooks— he solicits an e-mail from a third party to further his quarrel with the adjective. He doesn’t like it that I describe parrot pie as having “long since vanished from…Australian cooking.” (But I thought he was angry with me for claiming that Australians do eat parrots! Is he now pillorying me for the opposite opinion? Oh dear: with a judge like this, I guess I’m done for.) To put me in my place, he notes that recipes for parrot pie “do appear at times in cookery books in Australia still” (by the way, my research has uncovered them on Web sites as well). But even van Reyk admits that these recipes are merely “curios.”

Van Reyk waxes particularly indignant that I should describe Australian parrot eating as an accommodation to scarce supplies of animal protein, and, to be sure, scarcity is often a relative matter. He ignores the obvious point of my remark—that for Australians, Africans, and early American settlers as well, parrot was a readily available indigenous food rather than an exotic luxury item—and chooses instead to construe it as an ethnic slur. (By the way, I’m puzzled as to why van Reyk should describe parrot as an “exotic ingredient” in the recipes of the Australian Margaret Pearson; you can pick fights like this forever, if you have nothing better to do.) In his alternative view, parrot eating declined in Australia because “housewives were increasingly able to vary their diet” with other meats. So, to summarize, van Reyk doesn’t like the argument that Australians ate parrot because they didn’t have other things to eat, but then he claims that they stopped eating parrot when they did have other things to eat. Taking quite astonishing liberties with a couple of phrases, van Reyk attributes to me an “implicit view of Aboriginal peoples as opportunistic feeders who are open to the vagaries of population change in their primary food sources and so turn to other sources.” In response, I can only extol the fecundity of van Reyk’s own imagination, which is clearly in need of no dietary supplement.

In sum, van Reyk produces a wealth of valuable information regarding the practice of parrot eating in Australia. It’s a shame that in doing so he feels the need to attack me for things I haven’t said in an article that complements his findings rather than contradicting them.