

PREFACE

The seed for my Cape York adventures was planted by chance in 1989 on the opposite side of the world. As a young PhD student I was visiting Oxford University and had arranged to meet Professor Bill Hamilton, one of the 'gurus' of evolutionary biology. As I walked into his office he caught sight of the *Eclactus* parrot (*Eclactus roratus*) emblazoned on my t-shirt. He spoke very excitedly about the theoretical conundrums created by their strange 'reversed' colouration (bright red females, green males), and insisted repeatedly that someone simply had to do a field study on these remarkable birds. His excitement was contagious and I left his office feeling like I should rush off immediately to start the study. However, it was not until August 1997, under the auspices of an Australian Government Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship, that I first climbed the remarkable Smuggler's Tree at Iron Range National Park on Cape York Peninsula (see Prologue). It was nine years later, after climbing the 40 nest trees in my study area about 90 times each (a combined height over 10 times the size of Mount Everest), when I finally declared the *Eclactus* parrot project complete.

This book was brought about by another chance encounter, this time with Michael Cermak at Iron Range National Park in 2004. I discovered that Michael not only shared my fascination with the New Guinean influences on Cape York Peninsula, but was actively capturing much of it in his beautiful photographs. Although the book idea was born in that first meeting, it took another chance encounter in 2006 for us to make it into a reality.

Many people helped over the long years of the *Eclactus* parrot research and played major roles in our other projects in the Cape York rainforest. We could not have lived and operated at Iron Range without the support of some very generous people. Peter and Emma Huybers were exceedingly kind in letting us use King Park as our research base, and Kevin Cameron built our wonderful accommodation ('the humpy'). Brian Venables and Greg and Alice Daniels also provided accommodation to various members of our team. Our research would not have succeeded without the monumental contributions of Sarah Legge and Clare Blackman to the field work, and my PhD students Dave Wilson and Steve Murphy were magnificent in their approach and dedication to their projects on green pythons and palm cockatoos respectively. Many others contributed for shorter periods including Kelli Gowland, John Grant, Michelle Hall, George Heinsohn, Naomi Langmore, Anjeli Nathan, Libby Robin and Debbie Saunders. We always had fantastic support from the rangers at Iron Range National Park, especially Mick and Clare Blackman, Karl and Andrea Goetze, Damian Miley, Chris McMonagle, David Scheville and Sean Walsh. Wayne Butcher, Cliff and Dawn Frith, Daryn Storch and John Young all gave excellent advice in the early stages of the project.

Opposite: The fruit of a *Monstera* (*Rhaphidophora australasica*).