



FEATURE ARTICLE...

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The Keeping and Breeding of Red-capped Parrots

Purpureicephalus spurius

I have been keeping Red-capped Parrots for more than 15 years and have been successful at breeding these highly strung parrots from Western Australia in a number of situations.

The first thing that captured my attention about these parrots were their colouration. They are like a kaleidoscope of colours put together by

an abstract painter. The feather's colouring both meld and clash depending on the light and change with the oncoming of the breeding season.

Identification

Sexing of these birds can be a little difficult to the untrained eye or when only a single bird is presented. A couple of rules that I use when visually sexing these birds are the green feathers around the eye. The intensity of feather colour often indicates that the bird is a hen. The female Red-capped Parrot also has a lot more green feathering around the vent and her tail. During the breeding season, both sexes intensify in colour with the male's chest and crown feathers becoming a deep violet purple and dark red respectively. I have also found that the male, like a lot of other Australian parrots, has a larger head. But if you're unsure that you have a genuine pair, take them to your Avian Vet for accurate sexing.

Avicultural Notes

I have tried different methods and diets to breed this species. I will convey some of the successful methods that I have used over the

years and allow you to choose or mix and match the methods and ideas to suit your situation, aviary space and pairs.

The first point I will make is that I have bred from both wild caught and aviary bred birds. In the case of wild caught stock, I have never witnessed any companionship between birds until the hen was sitting on a clutch of eggs. With the aviary bred birds, I have witnessed full courtship from display, feeding to nest box inspection and mating.

As these birds are so highly strung, I would recommend for a person venturing into this species to source the birds from aviculturists within their area. I have lost a number of new birds within the first month of housing them in my aviaries purely to stress related factors when sourced from afar and transported.

Housing

I house all my Red-capped Parrots in suspended aviaries. I have two styles of suspended aviaries, the first is 900mm wide by 900mm high by 3 metres long in a bank of 5 double wired cages with cladding over the back 1.5 metres and down the side, but not on the back. The second style is 900mm wide by 1200mm high, again 3 metres long with a 600mm by 600mm feeding station running across the front of the aviaries. These aviaries are clad



A BREEDER'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE!



on the roof and side the same as the others but is also clad across the back, fully enclosing them. The feeding station is clad on the roof and side. Shade cloth is suspended from wire over the top of all my aviaries. It is 450mm above at the back and slopes to the front of the aviary to be 200mm from the roof at the front edge of the shade cloth.



Photograph Wayne Doran

Automatic watering system over a large shallow water dish also suitable for bathing

All the aviaries are connected to an automatic watering system with 20mm black agricultural pipe run off mains pressure, with the watering bowls filled through copper pipe. I use a Holman Irrigation controller, Model Dial 468 that is a 6-station controller made in Australia with 5-year guarantee. This system allows me to manually water each bank of aviaries in the morning and the controller refreshes the water during the day. The birds are therefore never without fresh water for more than a half-day at a time. This system also allows me to run a separate line of sprinklers under the aviaries during summer to reduce the heat and increase humidity. The water bowls are either 1 litre or 1.75 litre stainless steel bowls. I have found over the years that Red-capped Parrots are bathers and big users of water when it is available to them.

Feeding

My feeding regime is quite simple. Each pair, for all year round maintenance, gets a half cup of Peachface Mix seed per day. I also give greens that I grow on my property. Prior to the breeding season, I feed each pair a variety of sprouted seed (one part Parrot Mix, one part *Human Consumption Grade* Mung Beans and one part Black Sunflower). They also get a cob of corn and any greens that are fruiting under the aviaries eg. mixed chilli, russian comfrey, basil, rocket, rosella and any native seed heads from the garden. They will also eat apple, silver beet, spinach, and beetroot when offered.

During the year, all my birds have the following mineral mixture available to them, cuttlefish bone, charcoal, shell grit and activated Zeolite (a mineral you can obtain through the PSOA Sales Table). These ingredients are mixed together in approximate even quantities and placed on a small terracotta tray in the aviary. I find that I am required to replenish this mixture every two weeks throughout the breeding season.

Breeding

I breed Red-capped Parrots in both nest boxes and natural logs. I have found the following box dimensions, 300mm by 300mm by 600mm deep with a 75mm diameter entrance and a spout entry best. With a natural log, I find they prefer it with a knob for a hole entry and the log longer than 600mm in length. The boxes and logs are placed at the back of the aviary and in such a way so as the opening faces to the side or the back for privacy. They can be positioned either vertically or on an angle depending on space. If you have a

screen in front of the box or log so they can hide, all the better. I find that boxes with dowel at the entrance or uncapped logs facing the front of the aviary did not promote the pair to go to nest and unsuccessful.

I use the following mixture for my nesting material, hardwood saw dust, pine shavings, Zeolite and copra in approximate equal portions and a shake of Skatta-7 (a product of Pharachem). I do not wet the nesting material but allow the birds access to water so that they can control the moisture levels inside the nesting chamber. The mixture is usually between 10-15cm deep.



Photograph Jamie Hunt

Red-capped Parrots - a kaleidoscope of colours!