



Rose-breasted Cockatoos

Eolophis roseicapillus

By Jim C. Hawley Jr., EA • Queen Creek, Arizona

Rose-breasted cockatoos are among the most beautiful of all the parrots; looked after properly, treated with the best of care and fed the proper diets, they can result in the most prolific breeders that you might ever have in your aviaries. Handfed Rose-breasted cockatoos are not only good breeders, but they make delightful pets as well.

Captive Breeding

There are many opinions and ideas that people share from time to time claiming to be “The” one and only method of success for keeping and raising Rose-breasted cockatoos or Galahs, as they are known in their native Australia. One of my favorite was one opinion shared with me, when Joseph Forshaw was visiting our farm. He asked why I kept Galahs. (As most of you are aware, the Galah is an agricultural pest in Australia and is treated similar to the pigeon or the sparrow in the United States) so this was a legitimate question. Joe then told me that the best way to raise Galahs would be to just ignore them and they would breed like chickens. There is a lot of wisdom in what he shared as I have watched breeders with Rose-breasted cockatoos over the period of approximately 35 years.

The first and foremost deterrent to your Rose-breasted being prepared for the breeding season is paying too much attention to them. This

is translated in my opinion to over feeding. The Rose-breasted cockatoo has evolved into a very finely tuned feast or famine survivor. In their native habitat, they are accustomed to abundant times of food availability and devastating drought conditions at other times. Their metabolisms have developed the ability to store fat in reserve during abundant feed and to draw on these during famine. Of course this is accompanied with strenuous exercise throughout the year flying to and from food sources, nesting sights and courtship. Not to mention the rearing of young in-between all of this activity.

In captivity we have a tendency to feed fattening seed diets to our parrots and house them in low activity tolerant caging. Have you ever watched your Rosies in their cage? Which do they prefer, walking or flying? My experience has been to watch the Rosies and in their wisdom, conserving their energy preferring walking and short flights.

So here it comes; one more of “The” one and only methods of success opinions from the book of Hawley.

Many years ago Bernard Roer, my dear and remembered friend, suggested to me that I feed parakeet seed to all of the Rosies, approximately ¼ to ½ cup per pair thrown on the ground at the

bottom of each cage (adjusted according to how they eat). The reasoning behind his advice was to avoid overfeeding and promote exercise in simulating foraging for food. During the colder months, cockatiel seed is used in place of parakeet seed.

Beginning in November, a diet of sprouted seeds mixed with chopped vegetables, fruits, some pellets and a very small amount of whole cooked corn, (approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of mixture per pair) is thrown to the bottom of the cage and the addition of one peanut per bird is also fed in preparation for breeding season. This regime of feeding is followed until the end of July and starts all over again the following November.

One of our Christmas traditions is that if we want Christmas lights on the house, we have to have our nest boxes ready for the breeding season. The last few years we have not had any lights on the house, so now we shoot for the Christmas/New Years break to get our nest boxes repaired and ready and this seems to work a little better for us. This year we were in our cages at midnight hanging and repairing the nest boxes, (just kidding). But the truth is, it is now March and we haven't taken the Christmas lights off the house yet. I guess we still have some bugs to work out in our plan.

Regarding types of nest boxes; I have seen Rosies breed and rear young in almost any kind of box—if

it works, don't fix it! The best style for us has been the grandfather-clock style of box (11" X 12" X 30" to 36" deep) with an exterior inspection door. The box is an exterior mount and hangs on the outside of the cage in the safety aisle of the flight battery. We supply a start of medium to course wood shavings and the birds do the rest using the eucalyptus branches that we make available to them. Usually they remove all the wood shavings and we will replace the shavings as needed, but we think this whole process adds stimulus to their breeding. Rosies seem to enjoy chewing the eucalyptus branches and leaves. They are moderate chewers compared to other cockatoos.

Because we have a lot of room and space, we have constructed a battery of flights where we house an average of 14 pairs of Rose-breasted cockatoos. Each flight measures 9 feet tall by 4 feet wide by 25 feet long. We have a few pair of Rosies that have a tendency to get fat. So we have a unique procedure that is instituted each January; we call it the Richard Simmons, Fly to the Oldies time. Each day we go to the "fat" bird cages (not to be confused with fat cats) and forcefully the birds from one end of the cage to the other end. At first we start slowly, maybe one or two laps. Before you know it the Rosies are up to 7 to 10 laps a day and as time goes on the Rosies get thinner but smarter. Sometimes we really have to get aggressive and jump and swoosh our arms



A pair of Rose-breasted Cockatoos foraging for "goodies".



and wave a white flag to make them fly. When we are finished with the bird's workout we are so exhausted we go inside to have a cookie and milk break. The flying exercises are continued through January and sometimes February depending on the breeding activity we observe. During this time we also are adding eucalyptus branches with lots of fresh leaves to the cages (we have abundance of eucalyptus trees on our farm).

This last year, not because of our superior knowledge or effort, we had a very good breeding season. We have discovered the reason. It was in spite of ourselves and because of El Nino, La Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, (or was that Katrina?) We and our friends had to give credit or blame on something. Really, some years you can do everything absolutely right and you still don't have a good year and other years you don't do anything right and you have a great year. Go Figure. I'm a numbers guy. I like to do things with a plan and the family thinks its great, it keeps me busy and out of their hair.

Native Habitat

The Rose-breasted cockatoo inhabits most of Australia except for the Great Sandy, Gibson and Great Victoria Deserts plus some costal area both Northern and Southern. (Not that I have been there to look, I read this.) I hope to someday soon visit Australia and see this beautiful parrot in its natural habitat for myself.

Some very interesting observations were noted

in a study from Ian Rowley in 1990. He stated the Galah is increasing in number and range that it is a "vigorously expanding species thriving alongside humans as the continent continues to be developed". Joseph Forshaw notes the same and observes that "These increases in numbers and expansion of range have been attributed to changes in land use, especially clearing of forests, increased cultivation of grain crops, and provision of stock watering-places".

Forshaw also writes that "even though the Galah is one of the most abundant and familiar of the cockatoos in Australia, the delineation of subspecies and their range is poorly documented". Most people can agree that the eastern and western populations are well differentiated, the eastern having an especially deep pink to its rose-red breast while the western has a paler pink on the breast. You can read about the subspecies found in detail in his book.

Conclusion

Ian Rowley noted in observation of wild Galahs “give the impression of enjoying their lives to a much greater extent than most other animals. They appear to get real pleasure from the perfection of their flying, swerving in and out of trees with consummate skill quite superfluous to the mundane need of commuting. Swinging trapeze fashion from telephone lines, sliding down the guy-wires of aerials and indulging in near-ecstatic display during the ‘rain-dance’, are all unproductive but appear such fun”.

One last opinion from me, Rosies are greatly underestimated as pets! I believe they are like the Lorries, they are the clowns of the cockatoo world and love to be handled and they love to showoff while not demanding your constant undivided attention.

If you have not had an opportunity to get to know the Rose-breasted cockatoos yet, DO NOT MISS OUT. Enjoy life a little. Just remember the old saying, only believe some of what you see and only a fraction of what you read and hear.

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