

## PSITTACULA SIGHTINGS

by Lyrae Perry  
Winchester, CA

# The Elegant Alexandrines

*Psittacula eupatria*

The Alexandrine parakeet is a beautiful bird with a truly elegant appearance. The feathers look like they have been flawlessly painted on rather than grown. Alexandrines are about twice the size of Rose-ringed Parakeets, with larger heads and bills. While the overall body coloration and markings are similar to

Rose-ringed Parakeets, they are not generally confused. Both male and female Alexandrines have a maroon-red wing patch, or alar patch.

Male and female Alexandrines are dimorphic in adult plumage, but can often be sexed visually as chicks because even the young males have much larger heads and bills than the

females. This is not always a reliable method for sexing young Alexandrines because there are some differences between subspecies that can make positive identification difficult.

Adult plumage is usually attained at 27 months. There are many domestic birds that are molting into the adult plumage earlier than this however. The rose pink band on the hind neck and the black moustache-like lines are considerably wider on the adult Alexandrine males than on the Rose-ringed Parakeet males as well.

Forshaw lists five subspecies, but we have identified only three in the U.S. over the past 15 years. These three are *Psittacula eupatria eupatria*, *P. e. magnirostris* and *P. e. nipalensis*.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to identify subspecies without benefit of comparison.

In our efforts to pair our own birds properly, we were quite surprised to find that the voice is significantly different in each of the subspecies. The calls are comparable between the sexes. Males of different subspecies have approximately the same types of calls. Females have a group of vocalizations different from males, but similar to females of other subspecies. The birds are particularly responsive to calls of their own subspecies, and, given the opportunity, they choose mates accordingly.

Unfortunately, today there are many crosses and it's nearly impossible to identify subspecies. The problem of precise identification is a bit more



Looking For The Best  
Lory Diet?  
You Just Found It!

Lory Life Powder & Nectar



Breeders of Lorries & Softbills

Also offering: Cuttlebone, Spray Millet,  
Soak & Cook, Nest Boxes, Spirulina

KAYTEE'S  
**exact**  
EXACT NUTRITION • NO MESS

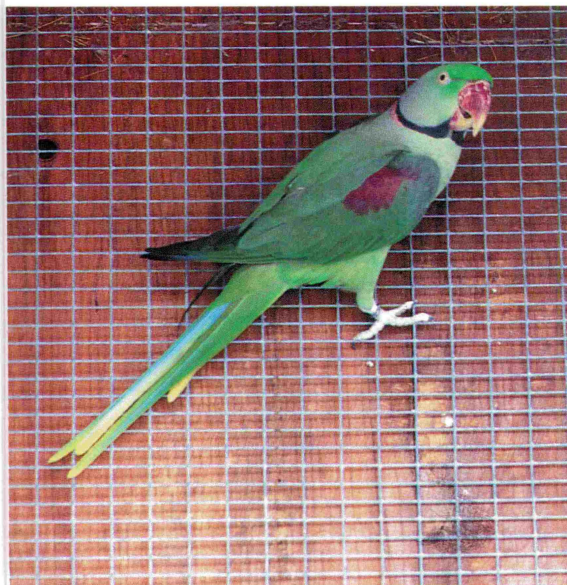
**CUTTLEBONE PLUS**

P.O. Box 305, Fallbrook, CA 92088  
(760) 591-4951  
Orders only: (800) 747-9878




A Pair of Alexandrines. Note that the female has wing bars also.



A large male Alexandrine Parakeet.

complex due to geographical (i.e. race) variations within the same subspecies. For example, the Alexandrines *P. e. eupatria* in the northern area of India are huge, with tails as long as that of a macaw. They are larger than the birds from other regions where *P. e. eupatria* is found. The measurements given for Alexandrines from the Andaman Islands, *P. e. magnirostris*, lead us to the conclusion that they are the largest of all the Alexandrines. However, I have talked to several breeders who are working with the various

Alexandrines, and they have confirmed that their northern *P. e. eupatria* are heavier bodied and have much longer tails than the *P. e. magnirostris*.

If there is any reticence on the part of a buyer to accept the smaller Alexandrines, it should be put aside. The smaller birds are not in any way inferior to the larger birds. The smaller birds are merely a different subspecies — not inbred runts. The smaller subspecies are beautifully colored and are just as hardy as any other Alexandrine. They are excellent breeders and tend to have slightly larger clutches.

Our Alexandrines are now housed in aviaries that measure 4 feet W x 8 feet H x 14 feet L. We have bred them in smaller aviaries measuring 4 x 6 x 8 feet, and in suspended cages.

Of the several cage sizes we've tried, the most successful cage measured 4 feet W x 4 feet H x 8 feet L. If space is a problem, the cages can be reduced in width, but it is important to give the birds as much flight space as possible to keep them in top breeding condition.

Nest boxes are hung on the opposite end of the cage or aviary from the food to encourage flying. The nestbox that has worked the best with Alexandrines has been the grandfather clock style. Alexandrines have a repu-

tation for chewing through the bottom of a nest box, particularly nests that are shorter than 36 inches deep. The birds aren't chewing to be destructive or trying to get out, they just want a deeper nest hole. Our boxes are made of wood plank, and measure approximately 12 x 12 inches and are 36 inches deep. We use a #3 ground wood fiber for nest material, and fill the boxes to a depth of about one foot.

Alexandrines breed from November to April in the wild. In southern California, we have found the birds pairing off in the fall, and the first eggs of the season are laid in January or February.

Alexandrine Parakeets lay from three to five eggs per clutch. A second clutch is usually laid if the first clutch chicks are pulled in for handfeeding when the oldest chick is 14 days old.

Handfeeding Alexandrines is quite a pleasant task. They are one of the easiest birds to handfeed and wean. The chicks are banded with a #10 or #12 exotic size closed band with an interior dimension of  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch (7.94 mm). Choose stainless steel or very heavy walled bands because Alexandrines will crush the thinner bands with their beaks, and possibly do damage to their legs.

Although not commonly available yet, there are a number of color mutations in the Alexandrine. Lutino, sex-linked cinnamon, blue, and some interesting birds that have a yellow body and green color on the head. It's not advisable to cross them with the Rose-ringed Parakeets to achieve new mutations. This only reduces the gene pool for both species.

Hybrid crosses aren't necessary either since Alexandrines have the same genetic potential and tendencies as Indian Ring-necked Parakeets to produce new color mutations. In time, Alexandrines will be available in all the color mutations we enjoy in the Indian Ring-necked Parakeets. ❖



**Absolutely Aussie**  
 A unique business that specializes in and features a full range of quality merchandise for bird owners, enthusiast and nature lovers.  
 285 Liberty Street, NE #210 • Salem, OR 97301  
 Call (503) 585-3395 • fax (503) 585-3574  
[www.absolutelyaussie.com](http://www.absolutelyaussie.com)