

Hybrids

The Eastern Rosella has produced hybrids with a number of related species. However, I believe that this is not in the best interests of aviculture nor of the species involved. The hybrids are often fertile and second generation birds can be difficult to pick.

In the wild, however, a small natural hybrid zone exists between the Eastern and the Pale-headed Rosellas where their ranges meet.

Mutations

A number of mutations for this species have been recorded over the years. In Australia, there are lutino, cinnamon, red (also called "fiery" parakeet or rosella), and melanistic mutations being regularly bred. It appears that all are sex-linked recessive except for the melanistic trait, which is autosomal recessive. This means that hens may be split for the melanistic trait.

The Pet Bird

In my opinion, the Eastern Rosella is not an ideal pet bird. This bird is built for flight in open spaces. Whilst becoming tame when hand-reared, they are still easily startled and try to take flight quickly and strongly. This results in fluttering and crashing into a corner of the cage.

When tamed, Easterns can become too familiar. Losing their fear of humans, they can then become bossy little feathered imps with ear-nipping and other mischief not uncommon.

Nonetheless, the Eastern has a great gift for whistling and has been a common pet bird in Australia in the past. I would suggest, however, that most such pet birds — orphaned and/or hand-reared from the wild — were caged and looked at, not petted and handled as are the pet birds of today.

Conclusion

The Eastern Rosella is a hardy and beautiful bird largely underestimated and overlooked by many aviculturists. I find it a fascinating species full of character and boisterous charm. This is a bird worthy of any breeder's attention and most suitable for the novice breeder of Australian parrots.

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Further Reading:

Eastern Rosellas on the World Wide Web

A superficial browse through the internet uncovers some information on this species. However, most sites give only general field information. These sites include:

The Australian Rosella

<http://rosella.apana.org.au/bird-det.htm#Eastern>

Healesville Sanctuary, Victoria, Australia

<http://www.zoo.org.au/hs/hs113.htm>

Lexicon of Parrots

<http://www.amdt-verlag.com/>

The On-line Book of Parrots

Index of Parakeet Pictures

<http://www.ub.tu-clausthal.de/PAhtml/inde002g.html>

Footnote

Australian Aviculture is the monthly Journal published by the Avicultural Society of Australia, Inc. The Department of Natural Resources & Environment (DNRE) is the Victorian State Government wildlife authority. The *VAC Newsletter* is the monthly publication of the Victorian Avicultural Council (VAC), the state body representing aviculture to government and the state affiliate of the Avicultural Federation of Australia (AFA).



ROSELLAS; A U.S. VIEWPOINT

by Dale R. Thompson
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The Eastern Rosella in the U.S.

The parrots known as rosellas have been favorite avicultural subjects for many years. They are noted for their beautiful colors, conspicuous cheek patches, and the scalloping on their back feathers. There are eight species of rosellas, all inhabiting Australia; the Green (Yellow-bellied), the Crimson (Pennant's), Yellow, Adelaide, Eastern (Golden-mantled), Pale-headed (Blue or Mealy), Northern (Brown's), and the Stanley.

The Eastern is probably the best known of the rosellas. It is one of the most beautiful parrots in captivity. From its scarlet head and breast to blues, greens, and golden yellows on other parts of its body, it is vividly col-

orful. The adult male has more intense coloration than the female. Its upper mandible is usually larger and wider than that of the female and his white cheek patch is more distinctive and wider. Immature birds look much like the females but their colors are duller and where the adults are red, the immatures are often green.

Because of its great beauty, it has been collected for over a century and has been a free breeder for many generations. This is an excellent rosella to begin with as it will delight the new aviculturist with its beauty and graceful flight.

The Eastern Rosella is very hardy and, when acclimatized, can withstand rather cold winters. It originates in southwestern Australia which can get very cold.

Housing and Aggression

All rosellas, including the Eastern, should be placed in individual pairs for breeding. It is best to scatter rosellas throughout your aviary complex so they cannot see one another. Rosella males are very aggressive and will fight bitterly with any male next door. Toes or beaks are sometimes bitten off through the wire and, worse yet, a male may take out his rage and frustration on his own mate. Often infertile eggs result because the males are preoccupied with each other through the wire and do not attend to their mates.

To resolve this problem, pairs of other species should be placed between pairs of rosellas. Of course, it is wise to double wire aviaries to prevent toe chewing of newly fledged birds.

Rosellas are extremely good flyers

and it is best to give them space to exercise. The housing for rosellas varies greatly with breeders but I prefer long narrow flights. I have bred them in flights that measured only three feet wide but in lengths of six, eight, and twelve feet. A small portion of their flight should provide shelter from direct sun and the elements.

If rosellas are kept in flights where they can reach the floor, it is advisable to check with a good avian vet for methods to control round worms.

Feeding

Rosellas should be fed a variety of small seeds (parakeet, straight canary, and small millets) along with soft foods such as soaked rolled corn, vegetables, and whole wheat bread. They sometimes enjoy seeded broccoli, New Zealand spinach, and Swiss chard.

They should be given fresh water daily and a larger bowl for bathing. They often submerge themselves in water up to the neck. During incubation, the females bathe as needed to keep humidity high in the nest.

Breeding

The Eastern Rosella usually breeds in the spring months of March, April, and May but a few may double clutch or nest in the early summer months.

I prefer to use a vertical nest box 12 in. x 12 in. square and from 24 to 36 in. deep. I use half inch plywood as the birds will chew up anything flimsier. If two nest boxes are placed in the aviary at opposite sides of the sheltered area, the pair has a choice. They often use the additional box when starting a second clutch.

Eggs are laid every other day and a clutch usually consists of 4-8 eggs. The female usually begins an 18 day incubation by the second or third egg which means the babies do not hatch all at the same time. There will usually be babies of differing ages in the nest. The hatchlings have a fuzzy white down.

Rosellas are generally very good feeders with the male feeding the female who, in turn, feeds the babies. This lasts about two weeks at which time the male will begin to enter the box to help feed the babies.

The young fledge at around five to

six weeks of age and the parents continue to feed them on the perch until they are weaned.

Foster Parents

Of all the rosellas, I have used the Eastern most as foster parents. They will rear not only other rosellas but other species such as Barraband's, Rock Pebbblars, and Australian King Parrots.

Handfeeding for Pets — or Not ?

Since there is an abundance of Eastern Rosellas in the U.S., it became a prime candidate for handfeeding. Rosellas are similar to Indian Ring-necked Parakeets in that they are not readily tamed. Even with handfeeding, if left alone, the birds revert back to their wild state quite quickly. There are exceptions and these are generally females. Handfed males at 18 months or older can quickly turn mean and bite. It has to do with their sexual maturity. Some hens and individual males do stay tame through their adult lives, but not many.

The main problem with handfeeding rosellas occur when handfed hens are placed into a breeding situation. Sometimes handfed females are sold or given back to the pet store or wholesaler and then they go to a breeder. It seems to always be females that are desired by breeders as they are most often lost to egg binding or mate trauma. Hence these handfed hens are often put with a mature male that has been parent reared. Often the pair is first put together in early spring in hopes of getting youngsters in that breeding season.

But so often disaster befalls the breeder. The handfed female has not been socialized with other rosellas, let alone a male that is hot to reproduce. She does not understand or receive correctly the signals from the male and many times the male will chase her incessantly. She is unaware that she must go to the nest and lay eggs. Female Eastern Rosellas that are not parent reared do not make good breeders for the most part.

Partially parent reared rosellas or rosellas that are socialized immediately with other rosellas become much better breeders than those that are

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handraised for the pet trade. It is very common to see a handfed female without an upper mandible or one that has a partial beak. This is the result of a breeding male that traumatized her because she would not go into the box and nest.

Is That Really a Golden-mantle?

The great majority of the Eastern Rosellas in American aviculture are a product of European importations over the years. Very few of the Golden-mantled subspecies, *P. e. ceciliae*, were ever imported and even these were diluted with the Eastern because there were too few Golden-mantles to go around. There are many Eastern Rosellas, however, that have a colorful scalloped back that are called Golden-mantles but these individuals are a combination of both subspecies.

Even so, the Eastern Rosella is the most popular rosella in the U.S. and it is by far the most successfully reproduced. Even when Eastern Rosellas dropped to the U.S. \$100 mark, breeders still worked with them because of their beauty. Now, in the late 1990s, there has been a resurgence of interest in the rosellas and many new hobbyists are getting into them.

In the U.S., the Eastern Rosella is on the Approved List of the Wild Bird Conservation Act (WBCA) of 1992. It therefore can be imported from European countries. All of the rosellas with the exception of the Yellow and the Green are on this List. But only a few Easterns have been imported into the U.S. after 1993 because it was cost prohibitive. The Eastern receives such a small price from domestic reproduction that it does not benefit to import this species.

Mutations

The mutations of the Eastern Rosella, though, are worth importing into the U.S. Two of the favorite mutations are the Fiery and the Lutino. In early 1998 a combination of these two colors — a Fiery-Lutino will be imported. Even though the Eastern Rosella is a beautiful bird, this Fiery-Lutino is a stunning bird. This mutation combination lightens up all the red coloration and retains the scalloping on the back. Of course the intense yellow

and white (which replaces the blue) adds to the effect.

There are several mutations of the Eastern Rosella that are available to American aviculturists. As far as I know they have all been developed in European collections. Some were available before the WBCA came into effect while others became available only recently.

The most common of the Eastern Rosella mutations is the dilute variety which is autosomal recessive in its inheritance. This mutation is variable in the amount of melanin that is present. The standard green feathers appear yellow with a lime tinge which I personally think is its best asset. This mutation should be line bred to attain some of the best new colors. In Europe this mutation is often called a Pastel or Yellow.

The Cinnamon mutation is a sex-linked and recessive mutation. This variety changes the melanin black to a melanin brown especially on the mantle. This color can range from brown to fawn. In Europe it is known as an Isabel.

The autosomal dominant Pied Eastern Rosella causes the melanin to become faint in patches often showing a yellow or white background. This patchwork often shows up in the face and cheeks of this mutation. It is not an ideal mutation when it starts to eliminate the red on the Eastern Rosella which is its most outstanding color.

The Fiery mutation is probably the oldest mutation known to occur in the wild. Indeed, even John Gould thought this was a distinct species (he called it *Platycercus ignitus*) in the 1800s. In Europe it is known as a Ruby and is a sex-linked recessive mutation. This mutation has red coloration covering all of the bird's underparts and its central tail feathers are red-pink while the blue and white colors on the lateral tail feathers are retained.

The Lutino mutation has been in Europe for many years. I saw this bird in 1981 but it was difficult to reproduce. When produced, it was often a weak strain. Through outcrossing it is now becoming more common. It is reported that there are both sex-linked recessive and autosomal recessive

forms and if this is true one must be careful that the two are not mixed.

The stunning Lutino mutation has occurred in the wild in Australia, but because the bird is so bright it soon becomes a meal to a bird-of-prey. The lutino effect gives the bird a total lack of melanin producing yellow, cream and white in place of the bird's normal colors of green, blacks and blues.

A mutation not available yet is the melanistic form which is predominantly black. This is because the melanin has been increased in this mutation. This mutation has been developed by Raymond and Joelle Marshall of New South Wales in Australia.

One of the latest mutations occurring in the Eastern Rosella is the blue form in which the red and yellow base colors are missing and are replaced with white. The blacks and blues are obviously retained in this mutation.

There are several combinations of these mutations and one of the most beautiful is the Rubino — a combination of the Fiery (or Ruby) and the Lutino.

Conclusion

We must try to acknowledge that the Eastern Rosella is not a very good pet bird but is an excellent aviary bird. Birds do not have to sit on your hand to be enjoyed. A small aviary in one's backyard or patio can be built for rosellas and one will never get tired of observing their beauty in color and flight. But one of their greatest attributes is their wonderful call that can be heard in the early morning or late afternoon. But during the breeding season, this wonderful call is very common and it can brighten anyone's day. ➤



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