



ROSELLAS; AN AUSTRALIAN VIEWPOINT

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Aviculture of the Green Rosella

Platycercus caledonicus (Gmelin 1788)

Introduction

The Green Rosella is known as Tasmanian Rosella, Green Mountain Parrot, and Yellow-bellied Parrot.

Description

Adult Male

The adult male measures approximately 14 inches in length. The head, face, throat, breast, belly and under tail-coverts are yellow tinged with olive; they have a red frontal band; cheek patches are a deep blue; nape, back and wings are dark green with blackish-brown centers; rump olive-green, marked with dull orange near sides of the tail; underwing-coverts, secondaries and parts of the primaries are pale blue; central tail feathers bronze-green, lateral tail feathers blue edged with white. The bill is grayish-white; iris brown and the legs are gray.

The above description relates to birds of the more open forest country and fruit growing areas of Tasmania. Birds which inhabit the mountain ranges of the west coast, which are heavily timbered, are much duller green with little evidence of yellow on the breast, also their feathering gives the impression of being somewhat fluffy in appearance and this could possibly be brought about by the cold and heavy rainfall in this type of habitat.

Adult Female

The coloration of the adult female is similar to the male, the head is smaller and the upper mandible is narrower

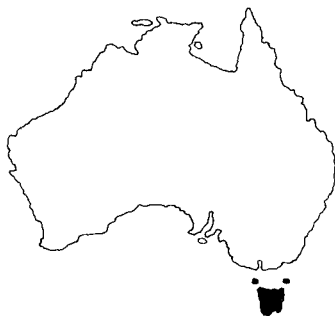
than that of the male. The presence or the absence of an underwing-stripe is not a true guide to sexing. The wing stripe referred to is a whitish band across the underside of each wing.

Immatures

In immatures the head and general underparts are dull olive-green, back and wings olive-brown with a little scalloped feathering showing on the back and nape; cheek patches are dull blue; frontal band dull red and the underwing-stripe is evident. Like many species of this genus the Green Rosella can vary in plumage coloration.

Distribution

The Green Rosella as its popular alternative common name, Tasmanian Rosella, indicates is restricted to Tasmania and several nearby islands of Bass Strait. (The island state of Tasmania is separated from the Australian mainland by Bass Strait.)



Distribution of the Green Rosella.

This rosella is quite common and is dispersed over most parts and not confined to any particular locality. My observations of this species have occurred in varying habitats from the high mountains, coastal scrubland, parks and gardens, open woodland orchards to farming areas. During the non-breeding season they tend to form small groups with numbers increasing after the breeding activities have come to a natural conclusion.

Although this species is the largest in its genus, its power of flight from one feeding ground to another is quite noticeable. It has a distinctive call, "kussik, kussik" which is uttered mostly when in flight.

Habitat

As already mentioned, the Green Rosella inhabits practically all of Tasmania. This varies in terrain from high mountains by Australian standards (the highest being Mount Ossa which attains a height of somewhat less than 5,100 feet) which, generally speaking, are well covered with dense forests descending through the undulating tree and shrub-covered hills of the lake country, to the open grazing and cereal growing country of the midlands, and scrub covered hills along the eastern coast. As these birds are primarily seed and fruit eaters they are usually to be found in any, or all, of these areas. The variety of seed would, of course, vary from one area to another depending on the grasses and shrubs available, the latter including such natives as acacias, casuarinas, and callistemons.

They also partake of many of the flowers and fruits of *eucalypts*, extracting both nectar and seeds from these and, in so doing, devour a percentage of small insects. Other grubs and leaf insects are also eaten in reasonable quantities.

In relation to *eucalypts* Tasmania is well endowed being host to such giants as the Mountain Ash *Eucalyptus regnans*, one of the world's tallest-growing trees which reaches heights of over 300 feet. I have observed pairs of Green Rosellas feeding high in this species of tree during one of our trips along the Huon Valley (an area noted for apple orchards). The Mountain Ash produce

their white flowers during late summer. Two other noteworthy species of *eucalypts* that assist in providing suitable food for the rosellas are:

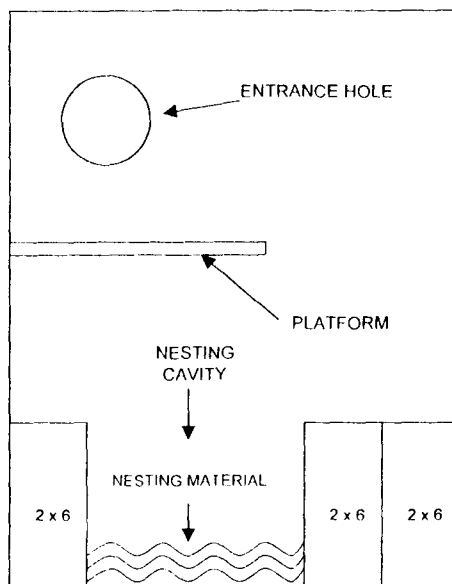
- Tasmanian Blue Gum *E. globulus*,
- Tasmanian Oak *E. obliqua*.

The Tasmanian Blue Gum (the State of Tasmania's floral emblem) is a beautiful tree which grows to a height of 150 feet (or more) along the southeast coast and is enhanced by large creamy flowers and large fruits from June to November. The Tasmanian Oak is a lumber-producing tree which supplies wood for the lumber industry known as "stringy bark." The latter species grows well in the mountain areas and also produces creamy-colored flowers which "blossom" during late summer.

Beside the *eucalypt* family other species of trees in which this rosella can sometimes be found include the Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* an excellent lumber tree, and the King William Pine *Atrotaxis selaginoides*, an apparently fairly rare pine which can be found up to around 3,000 feet above sea level in the rainforests of southwestern Tasmania. Such areas are also the home of the Huon Pine *Dacrydium franklinii*, a handsome cypress which also produces fine furniture timber. This pair of conifers, of course, produce cones providing seeds which the rosellas extract for food. The birds of the more heavily timbered country probably depend more on the latter types for food than their cousins of the more open country which produces a wider range of grass seeds.

The Green Rosella inhabits parks and gardens around the cities of Hobart and Launceston, and other places, and while feeding they are quite purposeful and relish native fruits and berries when available. Introduced berries, including hawthorn and other species of the *crataegus* family, are also a popular food source. They also show a distinct liking for cultivated fruits such as pears, and appear to be quite happy to reside in Australia's best apple-growing state, as this fruit seems to be acceptable to their palate. Green Rosellas also feed on the spores or seeds of the giant *Dicksonia antarctica* and the soft tree fern *Cyathea australis*, stripping the fronds back to their main ribs to extract the seeds.

Picture of box is for small Rosellas.
NOTE: for large birds use only one 2x6,
instead of three as shown in drawing.



The reduced nesting area/cavity allows the hen to sit tighter and hopefully produce a higher percentage of fertile eggs, and consequently, more hatched babies. The material used is 80% pine shavings and 20% sterile river sand. The sand helps retain humidity and dampness after the hen bathes. Both the shavings and sand are thoroughly mixed prior to being placed in the nest cavity.

Housing

As this rosella has a tendency to obesity when housed in small enclosures I recommend a suitable aviary with a flight area of no less than 12 feet in length, 4 feet in width and 8 feet high. In addition to this I suggest a shelter area 4 feet deep, 4 feet wide, and 8 feet high. The wire mesh that I recommend is galvanized 1x1 inch square, 16 gauge, or even thicker. The materials can consist of square tubing, galvanized steel sheets, or fibro sheeting. Although my aviaries don't have a rear covered corridor with entrance at the rear, I do, nevertheless, prefer this type of construction. A covered-in corridor (i.e. rear passageway) minimizes disturbance to the birds, seems to cause them less stress, and can also be utilized as a food preparation area.

Captive Breeding

It is advisable to house only one pair of rosellas to each aviary and, if possible, to avoid housing other

species of rosellas or ringnecks in adjoining aviaries. If an aviculturist wishes to house them next to each other (as some breeders do for comparison) then I strongly advise an additional netting partition between each aviary, approximately 2 inches apart, is included in the structure as this will prevent fighting of a vicious nature which otherwise could result in the loss of toes or more serious damage.

If possible supply two logs or nest-boxes in the aviary, both of which can be placed inside the shelter, but avoid hanging them too close to the roof unless this is well insulated.

In the mainland states Green Rosellas usually nest late in the breeding season (i.e. late spring into summer) which means that, if this happens, they are involved in nesting activities during what is an extremely hot time of the year. Their progeny seem to be prone to expiring during heatwaves while still in the nest.

Both nesting logs or nest-boxes are, in my opinion, best hung obliquely but not necessarily at the same angle. The nest (either log or box) ideally would be approximately 24 inches in length with an inside diameter of approximately 8 inches, one log to have the top end open and hung in a position with the entrance facing the back of the shelter, and the other log to have both ends closed with the top end hinged so that it can be used as an inspection door. An entrance hole needs to be about 4 inches from the top of the nest and large enough for the birds to enter. A suitable perch can be placed just below the entrance hole to permit easy access for the birds whenever they are entering or leaving the log. Three large handfuls of wood shavings can be placed in the bottom of the log or box as a medium for the clutch of eggs to be laid on.

Because double brooding may occur it's possible that both logs (or boxes) may be used in the breeding season, although quite often the second clutch is started just prior to the young of the first round fledging. Rosellas in their natural habitat in the wild generally only use the same nesting hollow, rearing both broods in succession. No doubt the reason for this occurrence is the lack of other suitable



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nesting chambers.

The male Green Rosella sits near the female, squaring his shoulders, with wings drooped, breast feathers fluffed, and wagging his spread tail from side to side. In addition a bowing action with the head is also evident. A "chattering call" usually accompanies this display. The male normally feeds the female between displays and she, in turn, also performs a similar display but to a lesser extent than the male.

Breeding reports referring to this species in South Australia, where I live, are fewer than with other members of the genus, this being due to the lack of available birds.

As mentioned, nesting commences later than with other members of the genus, early November to January, and for some weeks prior to egg laying the female may be observed spending considerable time in the nesting log or box. This behavior also occurs in the wild. I have noted that this can take place for up to three weeks before the female has commenced laying the four or five eggs that form the normal clutch. Incubation takes approximately 23 days.

After hatching, the young remain in the nest for about 36 days and when they fledge they differ from the parent birds in that all the yellow areas are olive green and the dark markings are not evident on their backs. Following the first complete molt they attain adult plumage which is at approximately 14 months. Although both parents continue to feed the youngsters for about 10 days after they fledge, this is mostly done by the female. Following this time they are usually independent even though the parents may continue to feed them.

In the aviary some aggression can be shown to the young males by the adult male but this depends on the individual bird and is an exception rather than the rule.

Feeding

In captivity Green Rosellas are like all the other members of the genus – they enjoy a varied diet. A stable dry seed mixture can consist of canary (plain), white millet, panicum, sunflower and a small amount of cracked maize. A variety of seeding grassheads

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and grass stems, plus silverbeet, spinach, apple, pear, grapes, and sliced carrot are all relished. These greens and fruits can be varied on a daily basis.

Once the female has started laying her clutch of eggs I suggest the diet be increased and varied with the addition of a mixture comprising hard field peas, wheat, milo, maize, and safflower seed soaked in water for 24 hours with an anti-bacterial solution added at the rate of half a teaspoonful to one pint of water. As the young grow it is wise to increase the amount of soaked seed to cope with the (obvious) larger dietary needs. Prior to feeding, the soaked seed must be thoroughly rinsed and drained. I suggest you feed only enough of the mixture that will be consumed during the day. The soaked seed is more easily digested by the young birds after regurgitation by their parents.

Fresh clean water should be available at all times in a container that is large enough for the birds to bathe in freely – as rosellas delight in such activity – which is most beneficial for their well-being.

Summary

Like all the Australian rosellas the Green Rosella is both an interesting and hardy parrot. I hope that aviculturists who keep this species make every effort to breed them and that others, too, will take an interest in this rosella.

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ROSELLAS; A U.S. VIEWPOINT

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The Green Rosella

Platycercus caledonicus

The Green Rosella, also known as the Tasmanian Rosella, and sometimes called the Mountain Rosella in Australia, is the largest of the *Platycercus* family. It is found in its natural habitat in Australia, mainly on the island of Tasmania, hence its name, and on occasions in the state of Victoria, which is across the Bass Straight Sea, separating mainland Australia from Tasmania.

The Green Rosella is the largest and rarest of the Rosellas. Its average size is approximately 13 inches (340mm),

including the tail. It's coloration is a lemon/yellow colored head and neck with a red/scarlet patch above the upper mandible, with the cheek patches being a deep blue. The back has green-black feathers, the wings are black with blue inner-flight feathers, outer coverts are bright blue, inner coverts are jet black. The tail is blue-green and the underside or belly is yellow, and sometime splashed with orange patches. These orange patches are more predominate in the hen and can extend upwards towards the breast area.



A pair of Green Rosellas. The sexes look almost identical but sometimes the hen will have a little bit of orange color on the abdomen edging up into the breast. Look at the bird on the left.

Photo courtesy Blue Wrigley