



Western Galah cock.

Photo by John McGrath

My Lifetime of Experiences With **GALAHS** in Both Field and Aviary

Eolophus roseicapillus

by John McGrath, Yass, NSW, Australia
Copyright retained by author.

Introduction

What are you breeding bloody Galahs for? Was a question asked one day by a former Zebra Finch breeding work-mate! My immediate gut reaction was who is having a go at who here, but I guess that would be the reaction to most people about to read this article.

Read on and I will endeavor to impart my acquired knowledge on a cockatoo that is not only monospecific but one that I find very interesting — a bird that most Australians see everyday of their lives and take so much for granted, yet is a bird very much prized in most overseas countries as an aviary inhabitant. Yet here in its own country it can be despised as a pest bird and accordingly exterminated by various means including shooting and poisoning. Both methods of control result in fields littered with corpses.

Pets

Although the Galah is not prized in its own country, I feel it makes one of the best pet cockatoos going. I have often had people ask me if I had a young Major Mitchell's Cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeateri* suitable as a pet. Most people believe that because a particular cockatoo is "pretty" to look at that it will have all the necessary attributes of a good pet. Invariably I attempt to talk the person out of taking on a Mitchell's as a pet as, often, the Major does *not* make a confiding, good talking pet. Plus, once their breeding hormones kick in they will turn very spiteful to the owner. Hand-reared Mitchell's I have kept can be a real handful. When you attempt to breed them, they are extra savage and usually come straight at your face. As they have been hand-reared, they show no fear of their human keeper.

Hand-raised Galahs, on the other hand, can be aggressive, but do not seem to be generally as bad as the

Majors, although I have one particular breeding cock that hit me from behind once and took the beanie clean off my head. But if you want a Galah as a pet, he can learn to imitate human speech, usually very fluently, and will learn to whistle. Galahs are always ready for a scratch around the head with their little face feathers fanned out to greet you. There are exceptions in both species, I will have to admit.

Back when I was only a kid I had a Galah that had a clipped wing. He was a real mate (buddy) for a kid, I suppose you could say. He used to do a lot with me, a talking, whistling, very easily handled bird that loved to ride around on my head and shoulders. From that perch he would lean down to have his head scratched. In addition to these attributes he was a free roaming bird, but he had a cage with the door open where he slept at night and he could find food. He often even went for horse back ride with me when I got the milking cows and their calves in 'of an afternoon. I also remember he was in trouble on more than one occasion for pruning my mother's flowers. This Galah was a real little character.

At one particular time the whole family had gone off to town. On arriving home I was unable to find the Galah. I eventually found him floating face down in a half-filled 44 gallon drum of water that we had been using as a reservoir during concreting. He must have climbed up the outside and lost his balance on the lip of the open topped drum or had attempted to reach the water for a drink. I was fairly grief stricken at the time. It was a sad day and obviously this was a preventable tragedy, had the drum been covered or emptied.

I am always reminded of his sunflower-smelling breath whenever I smell the same on another parrot. Even today I have several Galahs that will greet me on my aviary rounds with fanned out faces, ready for that head scratch that they have become accustomed to.

The Unique Galah

I guess most people know very little about the life cycle of Galahs or for that matter even care. Have you ever

stopped and taken a good look at Galahs?

How many people realize that the Galah is unique amongst our Australian cockatoos and apparently shares one of its features with only one of the Indonesian cockatoos. Some of you will say "Oh Yeah! They are pink and grey." And that's absolutely true. But there's more.

How many of you realize that the Galah species itself consists of several different subspecies, with noticeable variations in color, distribution, plumage type including crest type, eye ring color, as well as body size, and that the same bird is now being developed in several mutations in Australian aviaries.

Galah hybrids I have seen were crosses with Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Western Galah X Western Long-billed Corella, plus I once had a hen Little Corella X Galah (this bird had the reddish iris of a Galah hen). I have seen other captive examples of this latter hybrid, plus several of the other Galahs hybrids mentioned, as well as having seen the Little Corella X Galah hybrid cockatoo free flying as I will described later.

I had a friend with just a few pet birds in a backyard aviary who unintentionally produced Galah X Sulphur-crested Cockatoo hybrids. He had a 30 plus year old Sulphur hen that was a family hand-me-down pet. He had this pet for a great number of years then, at some stage, someone gave him a road victim cock Galah with a damaged wing. Thinking they may make good buddies, they were housed together. The urge to reproduce for this pair was so great that they burrowed into the earthen floor under a garbage bin that their seed tray was mounted on to lay their first clutch — and they went on to produce several such broods. The chicks produced by this pair are very beautiful hybrids, the pink of the Galah parent is replaced by a brilliant yellow/orange color and the crest is close to the same color but is similar in shape to that of the the Galah. The back of these hybrids can vary from pied grey/white to a dilute grey. The chicks are covered in an orange down as opposed to the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo's lemon yellow and the color

that the Galah chick possesses. These hybrids are intermediate in size between the two parent species. There have been many examples of this particular type of hybrid produced across the country. Although I do not condone hybridization generally, I do not really have a problem with crossing of two of our more common cockatoos, as long as it is controlled.

Examples of some of the other Galah hybrids have been observed in the wild as well. I know from personal observation that inter-species hybridization does occur in nature!

Subspecies as I Know Them,

There are three generally accepted Galah subspecies. The nominate Eastern subspecies *Eolophus roseicapillus roseicapillus* is the bird I am most familiar with which inhabits most of the east side of mainland Australia.

The Galah from south west up to mid-west of Australia, *E. r. assimilis*, as its name implies, is "similar," and to the casual observer it really *is* similar.

Then there is the smallest of the subspecies, the bird that inhabits the tropical north and northwest, *E. r. kubli*. I have kept all three of these subspecies, having bred two. I lost both birds of a pair of *kubli* from differing causes before having the opportunity to breed from them and am now

having trouble locating replacements.

Obviously, where these defined subspecies overlap there would be an inter-subspecies hybrid population.

There are two other possible subspecies. I have seen "South Australian Galahs" advertised. Other than that, I know little else of them. Maybe there is a geographically isolated population that differs from the norm in that vast state — maybe not. Maybe these S.A. Galahs are just from that state or a naturally occurring phase between the eastern and the western birds.

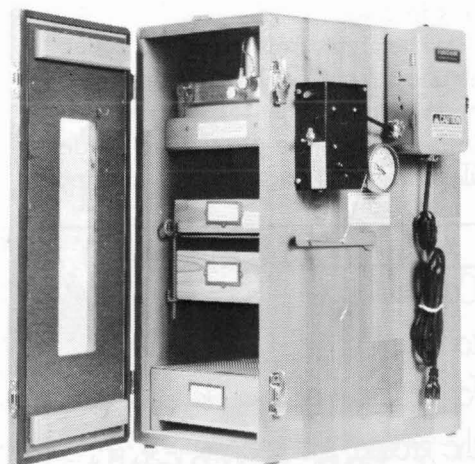
Then, speaking with a well respected Western Australia aviculturist and amateur ornithologist, I was informed of a little-known subspecies that inhabits the Kimberley region, a bird that is reputed to be similar to the eastern states birds (*E. r. roseicapillus*) including a red eye ring. If anyone knows more of these birds I would be glad to hear from them.

Description

All mature Galah cocks possess a dark rusty brown iris and the hens a reddish orange iris. A very visible difference can be seen when comparing the two sexes side by side. The iris of an immature bird is usually brown and differs during the time taken to acquire their adult color. All Galahs have a crest that curve-sweeps to the rear.

The Egg and Us

FIND OUT WHY HUMIDAIRE EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN THE CHOICE OF ZOOS, PRESERVES AND PROFESSIONAL BREEDERS WORLDWIDE FOR OVER SIX DECADES. WRITE, CALL OR FAX FOR YOUR FREE CATALOG!



HUMIDAIRE
INCUBATOR COMPANY

P.O. BOX 9, NEW MADISON, OH 45346 U.S.A.
TELEPHONE [U.S.A.] Toll-Free (800) 410-6925
WORLDWIDE (937) 996-3001 • FAX (937) 996-3633
E-MAIL hatch@bright.net



Photo courtesy Stan Sindel

Northern Galah.

Eastern Galahs *E. r. roseicapillus*

The sexes differ as above, the basic grey back and wings can vary in shading on an individual basis, from almost a deep charcoal to a very light fog grey. For an example, Galahs I have seen in the Pilliga scrub region of NSW are a very light colored form. The rump is more of a mist grey in color. This becomes very evident if you are in a position to view the bird from behind as it takes flight or comes in to land with the "rudder" down. Tail feathers usually match the grey of the back in color.

As the grey varies so can the pink of the chest, from a dull washed out color to, in some birds I have seen, an almost vivid red-pink. The under wings are pink and the pink can flow

around the butt of the folded wing. The flight feathers are grey, the color of the chest region flows up to a cut off point on the head that is exactly the horizontal centre of the eye, if a straight edge of some type is placed through the Eastern Galah's eye this line is easy to see. I also find this feature very discernible in the field. Then above that there is a paler pink cap region ("*capillus*," no doubt used to describe this feature). When raised, the crest has a higher portion at the front and this drops away to shorter feathers to the rear. The eye ring in *E. r. roseicapillus* is red and can vary in color intensity and size between sexes and individuals. Below the eye ring there is a lighter whitish mascara section no doubt to aid with sunlight deflection, for the same reason cricket players "don" artificial mascara each summer. Bill is horn colored, feet are grey.

Captive weights I have recorded: Mature cocks and mature hens are around 280 to 300 grams.

Western Galahs *E. r. Assimilis*

I find from observation of my aviary birds, distinctive differences in the Western Galahs from the Eastern birds, but firstly the *assimilis* I keep and the *roseicapillus* are of a similar weights. Unfortunately I am only able to base my data on captive birds.

They share the same basic color pattern with their Eastern cousins. The overall color of the Western bird is a more pastel grey, with the rump the same as above but in my aviaries I have recorded birds with pink feathers on the rump, and I find the pink is more intense but with a misty grey interspersed throughout that pink. The feet and bill are the same as the Eastern birds. The crest is a much fuller than the that of the Eastern, with the crest being more intense pink in color. When erect, the crest displays feathers that are virtually the same length throughout its entirety, with only a very gradual rear taper, giving the bird a very full head appearance when excited. This "larger head" makes these birds generally appear larger, the pink of the "cap" tends to cascade down the back of the neck without that defined cut off point, they still have the mascara under the eye but

the eye ring is a very distinct blue-grey color, sometimes with a red vein-like affect and can become very large and granulated in appearance especially in mature cock birds.

Immatures of at least *assimilis* and *roseicapillus* are a little smaller but in general the pink colored portions of their body plumage are infused with a rich grey. This can give some young Galahs an almost totally grey appearance if they are seen in a shadow. They lose their immature color as they molt into adult plumage at about 12 months of age.

Captive weights I have recorded: mature cocks range 290 to 390 grams, mature hens range 230 to 290 grams, immature birds range 240 to 300 grams both sexes.

Northern Galah *E. r. kubli*

In keeping with most tropical subspecies it is markedly smaller than its southern cousins. My easiest way of describing it to you would be a petite Galah similar in size to an Eastern King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis*. The *kubli* subspecies is probably generally lighter in shading than the southern birds and has a smaller more erect crest and a distinctive red horizontally ovate eye ring. I am informed (by someone who keeps and breeds this subspecies) that the eye ring loses the intensity of color in captivity.


Natural History and Wild Observations

I will only present my personal observations and local knowledge of the nominate subspecies.

The Galah now inhabits most of the main Australian continent which was not always the case. European man has helped the Galah colonize in to the eastern and south western portions by several means. By making available more permanent water supplies in the form of stock watering troughs, and land clearance seems to have aided the spread of the Galah. The Galah originally inhabited the sparsely treed interior of the continent. Land clearance has made them feel more at home and the cleared ground has given them large feeding areas.

New methods of growing crops have provided the Galahs with a much

Congratulations
to the AFA
for getting it off
the ground, and keeping
it in the air—for 25 years



Gordon Hayes
75 years experienced aviculturist
San Pedro, California

readier and more easily procurable food source. Whether it be from the cultivated crop or the "weed crop" which occupies some fields during the off season, the birds are thriving. Galahs, from mans' point of view, are destructive to the ripening crop. From the birds' point they are only taking advantage of an easy food source. It is this point, though, that can cause conflict between man and bird although, in this case, the bird seems to have won the war. They are thriving as man still tries to decrease their numbers in some areas.

Actually, if at any time the persecuting property owners were to observe the Galah when the bird is not directly attacking their crop, they would see that Galahs eat a lot of seed from pasture weed pest species. Earlier this year in the early part of spring I was helping a neighbor with some fencing, and every afternoon not far from where we were working a mixed flock of Galahs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, and another small flock of feral Little Corellas, came to feed on the seeds of Saffron Thistle, surely by the bird's consuming seed of such a pasture-invasive weed it must pick up a few "Brownie Points." That is, it must become the landholders ally in helping reduce the amount of seed spread by such pest weed species.

I have read that the Galah appeared on the southern tablelands of New

South Wales (of which the Yass district is a part) around the late 1930s. Being interested, I verbally checked this with my late father whose reply was, "That would be about right."

Another interesting piece of information was passed on to me by my friend Victor (since deceased) during a dinner conversation. Victor informed me that as a youth he had been asked to collect some young Galahs as pets. The Galahs were new to the Yass district at the time, and no doubt a bit of a novelty, and as far as Vic knew, he had collected the chicks from the first nest in this district. After Vic passed away it became apparent to me that his collecting of these chicks was at about the same period I refer to above.

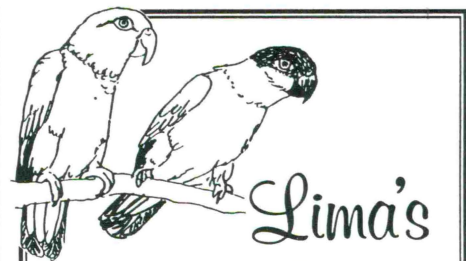
I believe he knew every cockatoo nest in this area. To my way of thinking we should capitalize on whatever verbal knowledge is passed down to us by our elders.

Since that period 60 years ago, the Galah has spread south through the Australian Capital Territory and Monaro region, and east across the Southern Highlands, now being a familiar bird seen feeding on median strips in the suburbs of both Canberra and Sydney. I have seen Galahs on beach fronts in the far southeast of the state of NSW.

Galahs appear to have been either deliberately released in parts of Tasmania or have become established in certain areas from aviary escapees.

Several years ago whilst on a family visit to Tasmania I saw several flocks, the most memorable being around a wildlife park on the east coast near Bicheno. This flock not only contained Galahs but Little Corellas, as well as their wild flying hybrids. I have actually seen one of the same hybrid cockatoos here with a local Galah flock some summers past. The flocks I saw in Tassie were not of the magnitude that we have become familiar with on the mainland and therefore are less conspicuous. I saw only small geographically scattered flocks on the island during our visit.

I believe in relating wild bird observation to the birds we keep in captivity — wild observations have a lot of benefit to any aviculturist. We should try and transfer things learned while



Lima's Exotic Birds

exclusively

Caiques

babies from
many blood lines

M.A.P. certified
LimaExotic@aol.com

Ralph Lima
(818) 703-1112

P.O.Box 6496
Woodland Hills CA 91365

Magnolia Bird Farm

We
Buy
Birds
•
We
Sell
Birds



Complete Bird Supplies

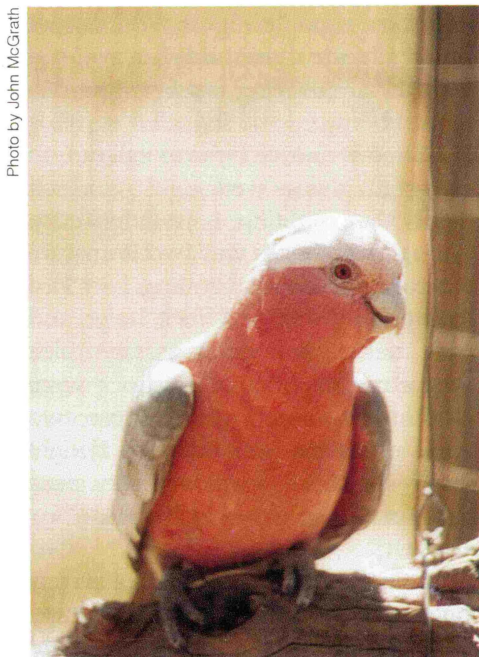
8990 Cerritos Ave.
Anaheim, CA 92804
(714) 527-3387

(closed for vacation, first 2 weeks of July)

12200 Magnolia Ave.
Riverside, CA 92503
(909) 278-0878

(closed for vacation, first 2 weeks of August)

OPEN 9 TO 5 DAILY
Closed Sun., Mon. & holidays



Eastern Galah hen.

Photo by John McGrath

observing wild birds to the keeping of their captive cousins.

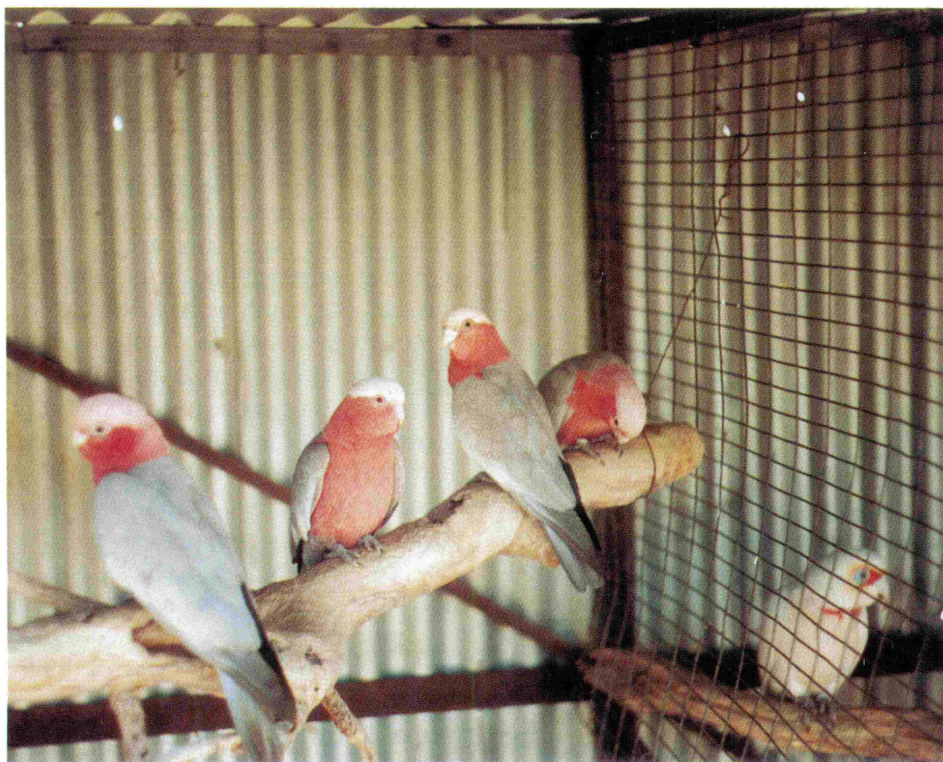
During a Summer of the mid 1960s there was a large flock of Galahs about our property and adjoining properties, concentrated no doubt by the drought conditions of that era and by the local grazers handfeeding oats to livestock, providing a good food source for the birds. This flock numbered hundreds of individuals if not thousands and the main two feeding grounds were in a field of ours at the front of our property close to the road and about a mile away in the neighbors old crop field.

Of particular interest in this flock were two individual birds. One appeared to the distanced eye to have pure white replacing the grey upper coloration, (appeared as if a Little Corella was feeding with the flock). The other bird was just the reverse, the pink under body was replaced with pure white with normal upper grey (the white under body really became evident in flight). I've never seen the latter coloration again.

Yes, you guessed it. I thought I was good enough to trap these two individuals. Wrong. Odds were against me due to the size of the flock, plus too much food about even though I baited the trap with oats. I do remember catching several young Galahs and even a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, but neither was my interest they only being a nuisance. The two eluded capture long enough for the season to break and conditions to return to normal. This large flock dispersed and the two mutant variants were gone from my life forever.

In the early 1980s I was employed on the railway and as the train moved slowly over a section of rail, a flock of Galahs were feeding not far from the track. There were two white birds feeding with them. Corellas? No, two birds as I had seen almost 20 years previously, Galahs with white backs. I later did some checking with some other interested birdos and found that the pair had been about the area for some-time. They also eventually disappeared.

Every time I see a large flock in flight it reminds me of the flock from all those years ago, to see them wheeling through the air with precision and in unison screeching and oscillating



Comparing Galahs, left to right: Western cock, Eastern hen, Eastern cock, Western hen, and next door, a Corella cock.

pink grey pink grey from back to front—even today I am awe struck!

As conspicuous as a large flock can be in flight, put the same grey-backed flock on the ground feeding and they camouflage so well that you can walk almost on top of them (unless of course they happen to be in a combined flock with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, then one warning screech from the Sulphur sentinel sends the whole flock skywards) yet alone they can be silent and invisible except for the squealing squabble fight over a "I found it first" food morsel or the continual leapfrogging flight from rear to front of flock as the flock progress forward in an ever increasing crescent formation, to cover more ground in search of food.

A couple of other thoughts: How many of us have witnessed Galahs enjoying an afternoon summer rainstorm or shower, hanging by either bill or feet or a combination of both, with wings out stretched, at times completely upside down whilst absorbing the moisture and preening themselves, taking complete advantage of the free shower and at the same time squealing with delight. The stage for this scene can vary from a bare branch to the upper wire on a fence. Antennas of

various types fit the bill well for such a display. The birds also utilize overhead telephone and power lines and if the latter lines are too close together they can suffer death as they spin around one wire and accidentally make contact with the other, "boof" a small cloud of smoke and they are history — and often as not someone is without power.

I have also been witness on several occasions to Galahs flying at high speed on moonlit nights. You cannot physically see these birds but you can tell they are moving fast from the distance between their calls. I have known my captive birds to call out on moonlit nights as well.

Another sighting I was fortunate enough to witness was two immature (uncolored) birds rolling, locked together via bill and foot, over and over near some grain storage silos where the majority of the flock were feeding on spilled grain. These two were squealing with obvious delight and I was able to approach very close to them as they were oblivious to any danger.

Acting on these observations, I now provide my cockatoos with therapy chains, a length of chain attached securely and suspended from the

aviary roof. This chain is an item that the majority of my cockatoos spend a considerable amount of time swinging on in playtime. (If you contemplate installing such a chain, make sure the chain links are not open ended and that the links are not big enough for a bird to get its foot through. Be sure to check that the birds do not become entangled as has happened to one particular bird in my collection). My Galahs enjoy these chains.

Captive Housing and Feeding

My breeding birds are housed in flights that are 18 feet long by 3 feet wide by 7 feet high, and these flights form part of a bank of cockatoo flights. I prefer solid metal partitioned walls for pair privacy between each flight and I supply a natural branch perch at either end of the flight. The whole of the front section is door and covered in mesh. It is on this door that I hang a folded U shaped mesh tray to feed the birds greens in, that is, their flowering and seeding weeds, vegetables, etc. Next to the greens tray I hang a cup for their sprouted seed. The back six feet is shelter in which the nest log is mounted and the hard seed is supplied in an upside down garbage can lid, which is mounted three to four feet off the floor.

Water is supplied in either an enamel dish or a ceramic mixing bowl, both of which usually hold in excess of 10 liters (about 10 quarts), which aids in stopping some of my larger cockatoo species overturning their water, although certain individual cockatoos will persist until they up end even these large bowls. I have a water tap in the safety flight that fronts all the cockatoo flights. Under this tap I scrub out, clean, and refill the bowls.

I feed most of my cockatoos a basic hard seed diet of sunflower, oats and, at times, seeds like millets and plain canary. I also supply the birds with various greens depending on availability and season. Often what a gardener sees as just weeds will be a very tasty morsel to a parrot but, if I can get them, I prefer milk thistle, capeweed, dandelion, and plants like wheat, oats, etc., when in seed. My Galahs enjoy pumpkin skin and seeds, both items most people would discard as rubbish.

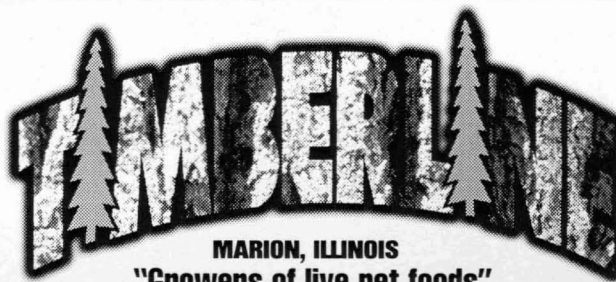
They will eat the carrot tops we often throw out as well, in fact there are not many vegetables that Galahs won't eat.

Throughout the winter months my cockatoos are given either a half or whole paddie melon per pair every few days. The melon from a cultivated field pest species usually are about 100 mm in diameter. The birds eat flesh and seed alike.

Sprouted seed, like sunflower, wheat, mung beans, safflower seed, pigeon peas, lupins, are all relished, particularly when feeding chicks. I

usually build the sprouts up as the breeding season approaches. Just prior to chicks hatching and during the time they have chicks in the nest they get sprouts twice a day and as the nestlings grow I increase the amount from a small handful to enough to fill a 600ml cup (about a pint) at each feeding.

The Galah will eat fruit like apple, and they don't reject a chicken thigh bone (either cooked or raw) very often either. When chicks are in the nest, or as an extra calcium/protein morsel



MARION, ILLINOIS
"Growers of live pet foods"

Nutritionally Complete Selection of Live Pet Foods *for Birds*

• **STANDARD MEALWORMS** Mini, Sm., Md., Lg.



• **GIANT MEALWORMS**

• **SUPERWORMS** Sm., Md., Lg.



• **WAX WORMS**

• **CRICKETS** 10 standard sizes. Custom sizes available



• **OTHER WORMS & ACCESSORIES**

Enjoy the highest quality live pet foods from Timberline's state-of-the-art growing facilities. Featuring unmatched customer service with Timberline's extended business hours. And only Timberline offers Superworms in three sizes to accommodate all your needs.

GUARANTEED LIVE DELIVERY

Extended Customer Service Hours!

800-423-2248 • Fax (618) 997-4692 • www.timberlinefisheries.com



There is an area on this tree where a Galah has chewed off the bark. This is a sign of a Galah nest in the tree.

addition to their diet, a good quality block cheese is enjoyed by Galahs if it is cut into little "fist" sized pieces for them to handle. I will also give them seed pods off some of the native bushes from our garden like wattle, bottlebrush, and grevillea. They also periodically get eucalypt branches which are provided not only for nesting but as a supplementary food source.

I supply grit simply as fine gravelly

dirt spread out on the floor, and they will also glean dirt from the roots of some of the weeds I pull from the paddock. I even had one hen rearing chicks devour an earthworm out of that same dirt this year. To collect this earthworm she actually left her flight via the partially ajar door and pulled the worm from the dirt on the roots of a weed on the floor of the safety flight. Mealworms may be worth a try.

The one major problem with Galahs is that they will run to fat if their diet is not controlled. Don't give them too much fat in the form of hard seeds, rather, tend more to the greens and sprouts. When I am supplying sprouted seed, the dry mix hardly ever gets touched.

The Galah is a hard flying long distance hauler in the wild, and captive living takes away the opportunity to exercise, so watch that diet!

Transferring one of those field observations to an aviary situation, for

some time now I have witnessed Galahs feeding on dirt adjacent to the Calcium Molasses blocks that we supply to our cattle, and even chewing at the side of the block whilst hanging on with their feet. After having watched Galahs at this behavior for some time I decided to break a small section off one of these blocks and give it to a captive pair of my birds. The pair demolished this portion in no time. So it becomes obvious that we as aviculturists need to supply similar blocks to our birds. There are now quite a number of recipes around for such blocks.

Breeding in Field and Aviary

It is in this portion of my writing that I will elaborate on the two unique attributes of the Galah, although I have mentioned one already. In the wild around here the breeding season is heralded by Galahs inspecting nest hollows more frequently. Even though the pair will keep a check on "their property" at any time throughout the year, they now start to haul the eucalypt leaves to the site. Galahs carry the little eucalypt branchlets in either bill or foot. Once at the nest site the branchlet is broken down into small twigs and

as, individual twigs and leaves are ped off and placed in the hollow. They seem to do this to renew and refresh the old nest site, lining the nest sometimes to a depth of 300 mm (12 inches) or more with the leaves.

Why Galahs do this is a mystery to most. Is it to provide nest chamber humidity, insect control, maybe simply a way of raising the chamber contents to stop flooding in the advent of heavy rain? Is it a behavior of a long gone ancestral form, alternately a desert-species-induced behavior or even something from the days when Gondwana was covered by lush and tropical rainforest?

Whatever the reason, they do it and captive birds, if they cannot get any eucalypt leaves, will lay eggs and raise their chicks on whatever nesting material is provided in their nesting chamber. But if they cannot get the eucalypt leaves, they will often use the remnants of any green food supplied.

It is during this period that the Galah mating process can be seen. Often mating will occur close to the



Leona Valley Bird Farm

- Hookbill Exotics
- Ringnecks - a speciality
- Handfeds and Breeders

owners:
Lane and Mitzi Costle

(805) 270-0628 • fax (805) 270-0319



Eolophus roseicapillus assimilis hen leaving the nest log.

nesting site. As the urgency to reproduce increases, the frequency of mating will increase. The cock will approach the hen, mutual preening will take place, eventually the hen will lower herself to the perch, and the cock will mount her and copulation will occur. This process is repeated up to three or more times with mutual preening of both head and ventral area, occurring between each mating.

This display continues throughout egg laying, and I have seen this in my aviaries often over the years.

Once egg laying commences an egg is laid with intervals of at least two days between eggs, with incubation usually proceeding with the laying of the first egg. Both sexes incubate, the hen will do the evening, night, and early morning shift and the cock the day shift. The change over is at about 8:00 A.M. in the morning and about 4:00 to 5:00 P.M. in the afternoon.

Wild Galahs chew the bark off the tree they are nesting in, and coat the area chewed with a powder (apparently off their feathers). I have an *assimilis* cock bird that as the breeding season approaches vigorously runs his bill up and down any object close to his nest. From wild observations, this activity of chewing may not necessarily have any bearing on the entrance to the nest site chosen. I have seen the

chewings on a trunk where the actual nest hollow entry may be several meters above the cleaned area in a limb. Sometimes several sections maybe chewed on one tree and sometimes several layers of bark may be removed in successive seasons.

Why these bare sites? There are several proposed explanations, one being a mark of ownership of a site, another is, perhaps, to make the tree trunk too slippery for enemies like Goannas to get to the nest chamber for an easy feed. This latter theory could make sense when the Galahs lived in their former desert habitat where the trees were small and the tree could have been completely circumscribed with their chewing activity. This may explain why some of the large trees have bark off them in sections on all sides. Maybe time doesn't allow for the pair to complete the job on a tree of this size. Who knows? This behavior seems to be exaggerated with this species, all cockatoos chew to some extent around their nest site. I have only observed this behavior done on live trees and, for the observant, even if you are not looking up you can stumble across a heap of bark chips on the ground under a tree and you are able to make a fair bet the Galahs have a nest above.

The nest logs I supply to all my

cockatoos are a little shorter than an arm's length to the nesting chamber. This short log allows much easier inspection of both eggs and chicks. I inspect of all my cockatoo nesting logs twice daily as the breeding season nears. The birds learn to trust you but will sometimes object. Aviculture, though, is about bird husbandry, and therefore nest inspection must go hand in hand with good husbandry.

In the case of Galahs, a log around 600 to 800 mm (22-40 inches) deep with an internal diameter of 200 to 250 mm (8-10 inches) seems to suit them. I find that the natural nests of Galahs often are no more than arm's length down the hollow anyway, so I believe what I supply is close to their requirements. Galahs will enter the nest head first or tail first, sometimes a bird will use a combination of both head and tail first entry.

My logs are placed on top of 12 gallon drums or lashed by wire to the aviary wall. In both cases you can see into the nest. Again in both cases the logs are positioned vertically. A note of warning here — be vigilant that the end of the drum you are using does not rust out, which could cause the collapse of the nest log.

In the past I have been successful in breeding Galahs in 10 gallon metal milk drums (as milk was once delivered in) with a weld mesh ladder supplied and wood dirt in the bottom. The problem with them is they get very hot



Absolutely Aussie

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

Birds And Beasts

Quality Birds • Domestic & Imported
BUY • SELL • TRADE

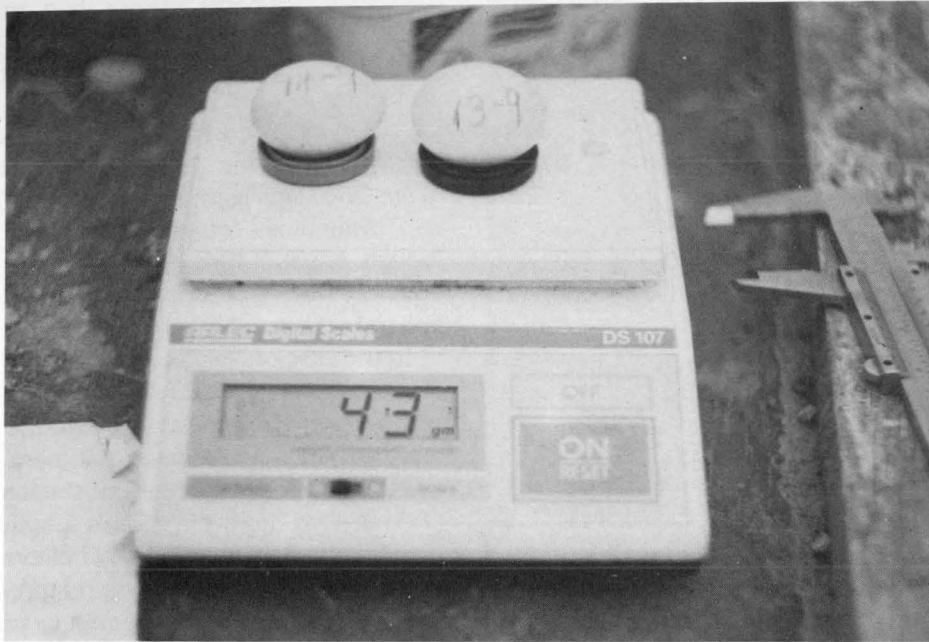
owner: Rick Rosenthal

(714) 996-BIRD • (714) 996-6740

fax (714) 996-7004

P.O. Box 651 • Yorba Linda, CA 92686





A digital scale is a useful tool for recording weights of eggs and young birds.

as the summer progresses.

I only supply one nest site per pair and with all my cockatoos the log stays in the aviary all year round.

The wild Galahs will nest in a variety of situations. I have seen nests in hollow tree limbs, either vertical or horizontal, at a great height off the ground or in stumps only about two to three meters (6-9 feet) off the ground. I know of one nest that was in a standing dead tree in the backwaters of the Burrinjuck Dam near here. (The trees died when the natural forest was inundated with backed up water 60 odd years ago). In this case it was only a matter of standing up in a boat to see the chicks.

Another example of how low the Galahs will nest was reported recently in a magazine article. A Queensland stationhand (ranch worker, i.e., cowboy or shepherd) was found dead, hung by one arm from a low stump. Apparently he had found a nest of Galah chicks on his rounds of the ranch and set off to collect them as pets. Apparently he had ridden his horse up to the stump containing the chicks. After reaching down for the birds his horse bolted leaving him suspended to die. Maybe the noise made by the startled Galah chicks had in turn startled the horse. By the time the other ranchhands noticed their mate was missing it was far too late.

A clutch of four or five eggs for Galahs seems to be about the norm. When first laid, the eggs appear to have a dull luster, are oval, and weigh between 13 to 16 grams (fresh). They soon lose this luster as they become nest soiled. I date each egg with a lead pencil as it is laid.

From my notes, approximately 25 days seems to be the incubation period for Galahs.

Generally a chick takes about 48 hours to free itself from the egg. The Galah chick is born blind, weighs about 10 grams, and is covered with wispy vermilion pink down. I believe it to be the only cockatoo chick to have pink down, barring, apparently, the Goffin's Cockatoo from Indonesia. I read about Goffin's having the same down color as Galahs in an article on Indonesian Cockatoos in *AFA Watchbird Journal* March/April 1997 page 32.

I find I am able to band Galahs about the time their eyes start to slit at about two weeks of age and the chicks weigh in the vicinity of 100 grams. As with any form of banding, repeated checks need to be made to see the leg band stays on the chick.

I had a really remarkable old pair of disabled Galahs that in 1996 laid a total of nine fertile eggs in two clutches. Relate fertile egg figures to the situation in the wild — with many disasters awaiting the unsuspecting chick —

and it is easy to see the species would need the numbers of eggs to survive.


This excessive number of fertile eggs and clutch size may explain a natural phenomenon, one that I call "flyers." Usually the youngest of a clutch is in a position where it is left in the nest on its own and, being on its own, it attempts to follow its siblings without being fully able to fly. It will flutter and crash to the ground in an unprotected area often to be consumed by a predator. Actually, if found, these particular birds are often very close to being weaned and, from my past experience, take very little to feed to independence and can become tame and confiding pets.

Double brooding for Galahs seems to be to some extent normal, as a few years back the first pair of Galahs I referred to in this article completely "disemboweled" the contents of their nest from the first round — eggs leaves and all were out on the deck in a heap with eggs beyond hope. The same season I saw a pair of eastern Galahs, down in the field do exactly the same thing — total nest contents at the base of the tree. Both pairs did exactly the same to the day. There may have been a problem in the season. The captive pair laid their second clutch and raised chicks from it.

I know that a person may be classed as crazy for breeding Galahs but, as you can see, this cockatoo can be a real challenge.

If you want additional information on Galahs I recommend the following:

- Video- "White Cockatoos:" part of the *Land of Parrots* set.
- *Australian Parrots and Parrots of the World* by Joseph M. Foreshaw.
- *The World of Cockatoos* by Karl Diefenbach.
- *Parrots, Their Care and Breeding* by Rosemary Low.
- *Australian Cockatoos* by Stan Sindel and Robert Lynn.
- *The Galah* by Ian Rowley Also a back issue of one of the Australian Bird Keeper series carried an informative article by Dr. Jim Gill on the Northern Subspecies of Galah *E. r. kubli*.

I keep all of these references in my own library. It is surprising that overseas aviculturists often know a lot more about our Galah than we do, as can be borne out by some of the texts listed above. The last two books are long overdue Australian titles that cover the Galah in detail. 

Great things come to those who wait!

FREE
Incubation
& Hatching
Video



Introductory Special: Buy three 20 lb. bags of any ZuPreem Avian Breeder Diet and get a copy of the video **Lessons in Incubation and Hatching**, by respected aviculturist Rick Jordan. This video is a great overview of the basics of incubation and hatching. \$29.95 value.

ZuPreemTM

Fruit Blend

Now Available in Breeder Formula!

ZuPreem Avian Breeder Diet features and benefits:

Available in three sizes:

- Cockatiels (Small)
- Parrots & Conures (Medium)
- Large Parrots (Large)

Higher levels of protein, fat, and calcium than the maintenance formulas of ZuPreem Avian Diets.

Money back guarantee if you are not completely satisfied.

For your free video, **Rick Jordan's Lessons in Incubation and Hatching**, cut and send labels from three (3) 20 pound bags of ZuPreem Avian Breeder Diet along with original sales receipt(s) and \$2.95 for shipping and handling to:

ZuPreem Video Promotion
PO Box 2094
Mission, KS 66202

Include your name, mailing address, and phone number with the three (3) labels along with original sales receipt(s). Offer not available to ZuPreem distributors or retailers. Limit 1 video per household. Void where prohibited. Offer ends 12/31/1998. For more information about ZuPreem Avian Breeder Diet call ZuPreem Customer Service at **800-345-4767**.

Video Produced By Bird Lady Productions: utahjungle@aol.com.