

Black-winged Lovebird

Agapornis taranta

Photographs by Cyril Laubscher

Text by Joseph M. Forshaw

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Almost 30 years have lapsed since I first saw captive Black-winged or Abyssinian Lovebirds in the collection of Mac Sanders at Los Angeles. At that time they were rare in aviculture, and even today they remain quite scarce, though some specialist breeders have been particularly successful with them. In appearance, they always have impressed me as being noticeably more bulky or thick-set in body shape than other *Agapornis* species.

Adult males are predominantly

bright green, becoming more yellowish on the underparts, and a conspicuous red frontal marking extends from the forehead to lores and periophthalmic ring. The flight feathers and underwing-coverts are black, while the short tail is green, with the lateral feathers being basally suffused yellow and subterminally banded black. The bill is coral-red, the iris is dark brown, and the feet are grey. Adult females lack the red frontal marking, and have the underwing-coverts green, though some-

times with black markings. Juveniles resemble the adult female, though young males have black underwing-coverts, and the bill is dusky yellow with black at the base.

Common in Highland Forests

Confined to the highlands of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Black-winged Lovebird is fairly common between 1800m and 3200m in plateau forests dominated by *Juniperus-Podocarpus* associations. At lower elevations, it occurs less



Photo by Cyril Laubscher

Pair of Black-winged or Abyssinian Lovebirds. Female on the right.

commonly, and possibly only as a foraging visitor, in *Combretum* or *Euphorbia* woodlands and savanna grasslands with acacias, but rarely is encountered below 1400m. It is a common resident in wooded habitats within the urban limits of Addis Ababa, and at times birds are offered for sale by roadside vendors.

In parties or small flocks of less than 20, these lovebirds usually are seen in swift, direct flight, when the twittering call-notes herald their approach, or amidst the outer branches of a fruiting tree, where they busily clamber through the foliage in search of fruits and berries. Larger numbers will congregate in heavily fruiting *Ficus* or *Juniperus* trees, the fruits and berries of which are favored foods.

Nighttime roosts are in hollows in dead limbs, especially in old nesting holes of woodpeckers or barbets, and these are occupied by small groups of birds throughout the year. Departure from the roosts occurs soon after dawn, and the return takes place at about an hour before nightfall.

Nesting Habits Poorly Known

Black-winged Lovebirds belong to the so-called 'primitive' subgroup, which is characterized by the presence of sexual dimorphism and solitary nesting behavior with little or no construction of nests. Dates of confirmed or estimated egg-laying suggest that the breeding season may be quite protracted or is dependent on seasonally variable rainfall. The nest is in a hollow limb or hole in a tree, and the bottom of the cavity is lined with small pieces of twigs, grass or leaves brought by the female tucked amidst her body feathers. Little is known of nesting habits in the wild, but in captivity incubation of the three or four eggs by the female lasts approximately 24 days, and young birds leave the nest about 50 days after hatching. Males acquire adult plumage with the first complete molt when about four months old. ➤

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