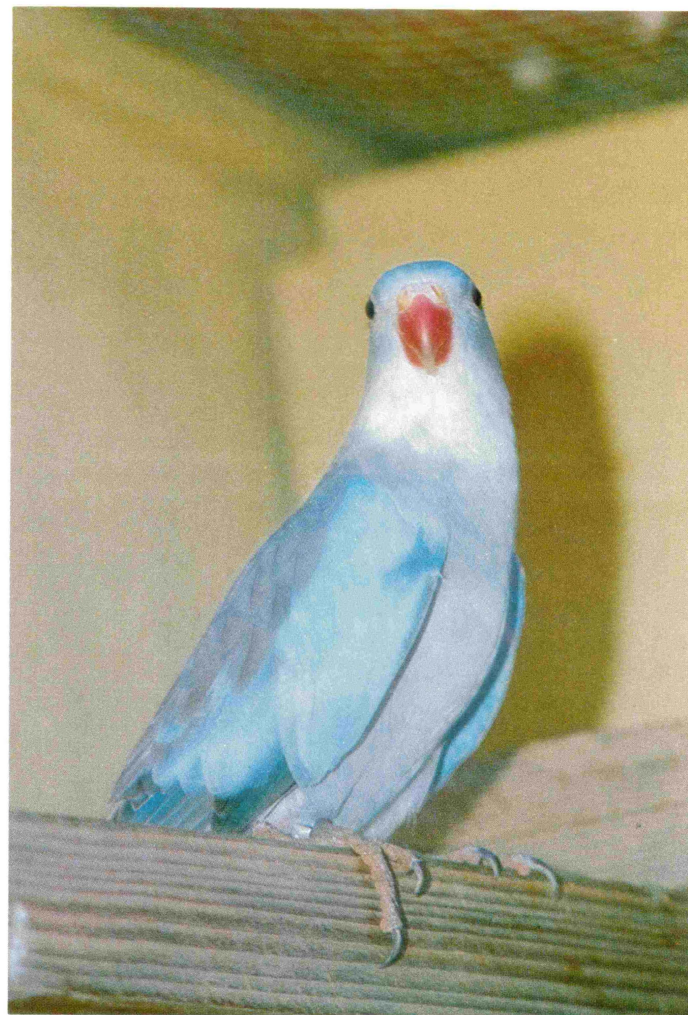




photos by Dale Thompson

The Princess of Wales parakeet is one of the most beautiful parrots in the world. Its unique shades of green combined with pink and red make it really spectacular. The blue mutation shown beside the normal bird doesn't have the striking contrasts but has a very beautiful, delicate pastel that is exceedingly pretty.



Here the different shades of blue reflect the different shades of green found in the normal bird.

In this photo one can see how in the blue mutation the normal pink has turned almost white.

Princess of Wales Parakeet

POLYTELIS ALEXANDRAE

by Dale R. Thompson
Director, Behavioral Studies in Birds and
Animals, Ltd.

European aviculturists, in my opinion, are a number of years ahead of the American aviculturists in their techniques and successes. This can be attributed to several reasons. The most important one is that they have specialized in one group of birds, the Australian parakeets. This is not to say that they do not do well with other groups of birds; but that they are so exceptional with the Australian parakeets. So many of the European aviculturists started out with Budgies or Cockatiels, advanced to the Rosellas; and then worked their way to the rarer species. They have done their homework on the less expensive, more common species and they have gone to extraordinary lengths to learn the specialized requirements of the rarer and more delicate species. It is not uncommon to hear of an aviculturist saving his money for a long period of time, to acquire a pair of rare Australian parakeets. With the goal of reproduction in mind, much energy is spent keeping these birds healthy.

I would like to relate to you the life of one such aviculturist in West Germany and explain his avicultural techniques with just one of the Australian parakeets, the Princess of Wales Parakeet. Herr Josef Dexler, who lives in Burstadt, West Germany, is known throughout Europe for the blue mutation of the Princess Parakeet which first appeared in his aviary in 1964. He is one of the very few people who are successful in breeding this mutation with regularity. All of his birds are bred in outdoor aviaries and are able to withstand the sub-freezing winters. It is because of his extreme dedication to his birds that I feel Josef Dexler is one of the finest aviculturists I have ever known.

He started raising pigeons at nine years of age. After World War II he worked as a farmer, and besides growing crops in the open fields, he built a long greenhouse for vegetables and flowers. In 1948 he acquired his first psittacines, budgies, and built an aviary for them in his greenhouse. In the early 1950's the English budgie was extremely difficult to obtain and commanded a very good price. In 1953 he joined the AZ (*Austauschzentrale de*

Vogelliebhaber), the national avicultural society of West Germany. (He is number 83 on the list of aviculturists who joined this organization; it now numbers over 17,000.) He became so good with breeding show budgies that he won many awards locally and won 1st. place in the National show for five years, (1956-1961).

It is surprising that prior to the middle 1950's the mutation of any Australian parakeet was not generally considered to be of high value because the thinking was that aviculturists must be pure in their breeding. The mutation was down-graded to where it was unthinkable to let anyone know that a mutation had shown up in your aviary because then your birds were not considered top quality. In the 1940's a lutino many-colored parakeet occurred in Germany. It was not sold as an aviary bird but was turned over to a pet store in hopes it could be sold to the public as a pet. Ironically, this mutation has not shown up again. It was only in the late 50's that this trend started to change and very shortly thereafter the mutation was considered to be a highly desirable bird.

In Australia the Princess of Wales Parakeet is found in the dry, arid, interior regions. Their habits in the wild have not been well documented and they are considered rare in their natural habitat. Being from the arid regions enables these birds to withstand cold temperatures in captivity.

In captivity the Princess Parakeet has been a very popular bird. They were first imported to Europe around 1895 and since World War II have been bred in great numbers and are now a very common aviary bird. The Princess of Wales Parakeet will breed when it is a year old and on rare occasions females have been known to lay eggs and rear young as early as eight months of age. It is not uncommon that eggs are infertile the first year, for females often will lay when the males are not sexually active. The Princess Parakeet should breed in their second year and normally is a spring breeder. Though not common the Princess Parakeet may lay a second clutch during the summer.

Josef Dexler will place several young

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Princess Parakeets together in a large aviary before their first breeding year to enable them to choose their own mates. He knows his stock very well and does not let related birds pair-bond together. He most often sets up a single pair to an aviary, but has very successfully colony bred these birds. It is much better to place at least four pairs together instead of two pairs as two males will often contest a single nesting site; where-as four males have so much to contend with, that seldom do serious altercations occur, and they will then settle down together. It is a must to supply more nest sites than the number of pairs. Mr. Dexler often supplies two or three boxes for a single pair and will locate them in different spots. They then have more choice. Though they most often stick with one nest site year after year, it must be noted that they may unexpectedly choose a different site and even a different shaped box.

When a mate from an older breeding pair dies, several birds may have to be introduced before a pair bond can again be established. They may cause a loss of a year or two before one gets production again. The Princess is a free breeder, but often the eggs are infertile.

The nest box supplied to Mr. Dexler's Princess Parakeets measures 14" by 14" and is 18" in depth. The entrance hole is 3" in diameter. The thickness of the board on the bottom of the nest is 2" thick, but this does not apply to the sides. This aids in the insulation of the eggs as it gets quite cold in West Germany during the early spring. There is a scalloped out portion of the wooden bottom of the nest box and only about 1/2" of wood pulp is placed in the nest box. The scalloped area is to keep the eggs in one spot as the Princess Parakeet will lay and then scatter her eggs. The Princess is noted for being rough on the eggs or young chicks as the hen will often not use the ladder, but will jump directly onto the nest. This habit causes many eggs to be broken or slightly cracked, and this is why so many Princess Parakeets produce only two or three chicks, when a normal clutch of eggs is 5 to 6 in number. Mr. Dexler's nest boxes do not contain a ladder on the inside going from the entrance hole to the nest bottom. He feels it is not needed for this depth of box. This only applies to the Princess Parakeet as he uses ladders in the boxes of the other types of Australian parakeets.

The eggs are normally laid in March. When the hen first visits the box to build her nest, the box is checked every night so that the first egg can be pulled the very night it is laid. The eggs are normally laid between 7:30 and 8:30 at night and are pulled immediately. The hen lays every

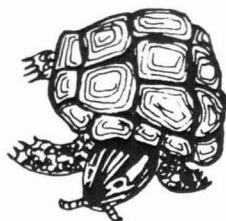
other day and each egg is pulled until five have been laid. The eggs that have been pulled are placed in the house at room temperature (65 degrees fahrenheit). The eggs are turned 180 degrees each day while in the house. After the fifth egg has been laid, five dummy eggs are placed together inside the nest box. The dummy eggs can be old infertile eggs from the previous year or artificial eggs of correct size, color, and density. A careful watch must now be done to insure that the hen stays in the box during the night and that incubation has started. The hen will not stay in the box at night during the laying stage. When incubation is assured, the five good eggs are returned to the nest, replacing the old ones. When the hen is incubating tightly, she is much more gentle and seldom cracks her eggs. The incubation period is 18 days, but may extend an extra day if there is cold weather. The female incubates the eggs without the help of the male. The white eggs are smoother and are more glossy than most of the other Australian parakeets. The eggs are candled the seventh day to insure they are fertile. Blood vessels are first seen forming just under the shell in a web-like fashion. All eggs that prove infertile are removed. If the complete nest of eggs are infertile they are removed, for there is a good possibility the hen will lay again. If only a small number of eggs are fertile, these eggs are often placed under another hen which also had only a few fertile eggs. The Princess of Wales Parakeets, as a species, will lay very close to the same time of year. It is to the aviculturist's advantage to have several pairs of the same species as one can easily foster out eggs if a nest is abandoned or few fertile eggs show up.

Young chicks can also be fostered if one pair stops feeding or will not feed their chicks enough food. This often happens to first year birds. Fostering young chicks to other species of Australian parakeets is also done when problems arise, for hand-feeding Australian parakeets is seldom done in Europe. The Golden-mantled Rosella is the best Australian parakeet to use for foster parents, for they are most consistent in feeding the foster babies until they are weaned on the perch. Several other species may be used as foster parents, but they will often stop feeding the young as soon as they come out of the box. Two good foster parents for the small Australian parakeets are the Red-rumped Parakeet and the Red-fronted Parakeet. Mr. Dexler keeps quite a number of Golden-mantled Rosella pairs in which he has bred the good traits of fostering parenting. Ironically they are the yellow-mantled variety.

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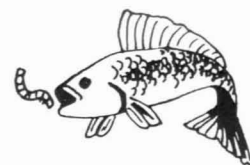
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own chicks they are left in with the parents even if a second clutch is laid. Often the eggs will be laid when the first clutch chicks are still in the box. The parents are normally not aggressive to their chicks after they have been weaned and they will all stay together until the young birds are sold either in September or early spring. Needless to say the best breeding results will come from the young birds raised from your own aviaries.

The young Princess Parakeets are very difficult to sex but one can make an educated guess from their mandible size. The males generally have a larger upper mandible. The intensity of the male's blue forehead shows up at about six months, and the male's behavior is more dominant for he will display more often with a bobbing of the head. At one year, the male will acquire a much more intense color of blue on the head, and pink on the throat. His bill will be coral pink, whereas the female's is darker. He will also acquire a longer tail and a spatulated elongation on the third primary of each wing. This blade-like elongation never occurs on the female.

There are many degrees of color intensity in the Princess of Wales Parakeet. Both male and female birds can be seen that appear to be faded in color in contrast to the outstanding individual showing a vibrance of color. Though the size of a bird is easier to control through breeding management, color also can be acquired through selective breeding.

The male Princess Parakeet has a very obvious and persistent courtship. He will often display without a female being present, using a nesting hole or other inanimate object to satisfy his affection. His display is quite elaborate, and it is a delight to observe.

The Princess is not very active during the day and they can often be seen with their heads tucked over their shoulder. This should be watched carefully so as not to confuse their behavior with a sick and fluffed bird. The Princess is noted for not enjoying bathing in water as do the Rosellas.

The seed diet that is used by Mr. Dexler consists of a mixture of white and striped sunflower seed (20%), canary, large natural hulled oat groats, and white millet. A small percentage of red millet, small German millet, niger, and hemp is added. The niger and hemp percentage, though small, is increased just prior to breeding season. Mr. Dexler has several fields in which he grows sunflower, white millet, canary, and spray millet. Except for canary, he gives these seeds to his birds in the green stalk form. The green stalk of the white millet is enjoyed highly by his birds and when the harvest is about over, he will

cut many of these stalks and place them in the freezer for use in the early spring when it is not available. It can then be used to feed the young chicks. He uses a great variety of natural greens including dandelion and chickweed. They are used when they are in the seed stage and he will travel good distances to pick it; following the seeding seasons from the lowlands to the hillsides. In the wintertime the amount of rich food is reduced, and then dramatically increased in the spring time.

During the time that the parents are feeding young chicks, Mr. Dexler puts a type of egg food in the aviary. This soft crumbly food consists of many items, but it is basically made of an oat-based cereal (similar to Gerbers Hi Protein Cereal). Zwiback, egg yolk, grated carrot, powdered dextrose, and a liquid vitamin complex are included.

Other items supplied include, charcoal (wood), lime, and a form of calcium. Grit is not supplied but can be picked up from the dirt floor.

Mr. Dexler worms his birds once a year just after the breeding season. He normally places the medicine in the water, but has a special technique for making sure each bird has a full dosage of the wormer. Many Australian Parakeets will drink very little water and it possible some of them may not be wormed completely. Mr. Dexler also mixes a certain quantity of worming medicine in a watery cereal mixture and feeds each bird from a syringe. The plastic needle cover (without the needle) is placed back on the syringe and a 1/8" hole is drilled in the base of the needle cover. The bird then bites the side of the needle cover and is fed the worming mixture through the small hole. The amount of wormer is then controlled especially for very high priced birds.

Mr. Josef Dexler very early in his avicultural life acquired several pairs of Princess of Wales Parakeets. It was from one of his normal colored pairs that four offspring were hatched in 1964 which included one blue mutation. A very sad event occurred when the young were weaned. The parents were stolen from his aviaries and the blue baby died. It took five years working with the other offspring which were only possible splits, to obtain the blue mutation again. Split birds are birds of normal color, but carry the mutant color in their genes. He then worked for years outcrossing this blue mutation to keep it strong and to increase its size. When a blue mutation of the Princess Parakeet first shows up it is often a very small bird. Mr. Dexler has never bred blue x blue, but always puts one with a split bird. This is one reason for his continued breeding success. Very few breeders can

match his breeding results.

The blue mutation of the Princess of Wales Parakeet, like all other blue mutations in parrots, is an autosomal recessive one. Therefore both sexes can be split to blue. Two blue birds will produce all blue offspring. A blue x split will produce 50% blues of both sexes and 50% split birds. Two split birds produce 25% normal-green, 50% split-blue, and 25% blue birds. A normal and a split will produce only normal colored offspring, with 50% being split for blue. This is a somewhat undesirable mating, but must be done if only one split is available. It may take several years breeding back into the line to obtain the blue bird.

The blue mutation Princess of Wales Parakeet is very beautiful and delicate in color. The normal pink feathers in the throat, in the under-tail coverts, and in the tail are changed to white. The body is light bluish-grey and the wing-coverts are an incredible sky blue.

The second mutation of the Princes of Wales Parakeet to be bred is the lutino. It was bred by Herr D. Meyer, in Halle, East Germany (DDR) in 1975. It is believed that he had three lutino Princess of Wales Parakeets in his aviaries prior to the 1979 breeding season.

The normal Princess of Wales Parakeet is now well established in the United States, but this is due to imports. It should be our goal to improve our breeding successes. Only recently has the blue mutation been bred here in the U.S., and hopefully, we will see the day when this mutation will be bred with regularity. With care and perseverance maybe someday we will breed a lutino and eventually even an albino!

I must give special thanks to Mr. Dexler and his family for their graciousness and hospitality. Mr. Dexler spent many hours showing me the wonderful secrets of his avicultural experiences in Australian Parakeets. It is now up to me to use them in our own aviaries.

NOTICE TO ALL BIRD FANCIERS

As of July 1, 1980, Dr. Matthew M. Vriends is the new managing editor of De Zuidgroep, Publishers in The Hague, Holland. He left T.F.H. Publications, Inc., Neptune, New Jersey as of the 24th of June 1980, and accepts no responsibility for any ornithological material published by TFH after that date, except for three books that were being prepared prior to his departure: "HANDBOOK OF CANARIES," "ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SOFT-BILLED BIRDS" and "STARTING AN AVIARY," all written by Dr. Vriends.

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