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The Northern Rosella

Platycerus venustus (Kuhl)

by Dale R. Thompson
Bird Keeper, Los Angeles Zoo

The Northern Rosella, also known as the Brown's Rosella, is quite a rarity in American collections. It is found in the extreme northern and northwestern parts of its native Australia. The Northern Rosella is a small rosella (28 cm.), the only rosella that is smaller is the Stanley, or Western Rosella (25 cm.). There are no

subspecies of the Northern Rosella.

Although very beautiful, this rosella does not have the multitude of colors that can be seen in many of the other rosellas. The most striking aspect to their coloration is probably the pattern of the body colors. The feathers of the back and wings are black with broad yellow mar-

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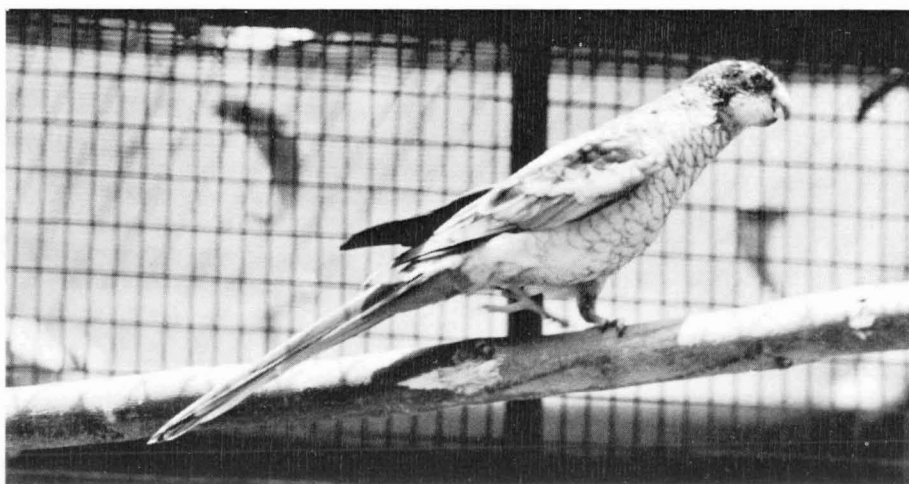
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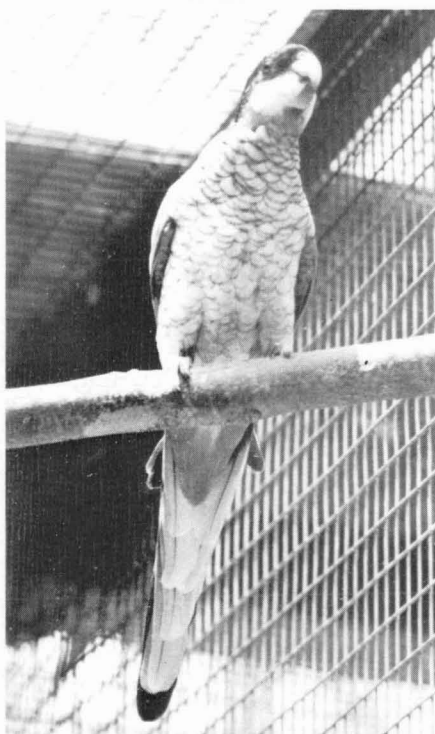


Male Northern Rosella



Female Northern Rosella

Male Northern Rosella



gins; and the feathers on the rump and underparts are yellow and edged narrowly with black lace-like fringes.

Both sexes of the Northern Rosella are alike in coloration and only after close observation of known pairs can it be sexed. The males are overall more intense in coloration, especially the white cheek patch and the violet-blue edge below.

Though the males of the rosella group are known for their wide, heavy upper mandibles, it is especially noticeable in the Northern Rosella. This species is also very agile on the wing and can maneuver very well with sharp, quick turns.

The Los Angeles Zoo acquired a group of Australian psittacines in August of 1976. Among this shipment were four Northern Rosellas. These birds were eventually placed in the Zoo, but some were first year birds and many were in poor condition. A specialized avian breeding complex was then planned for this valuable group of birds. Through the direction of Warren D. Thomas, D.V.M., Director, and Richard Rundel, Curator of



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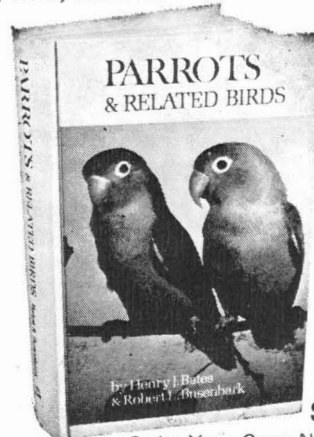


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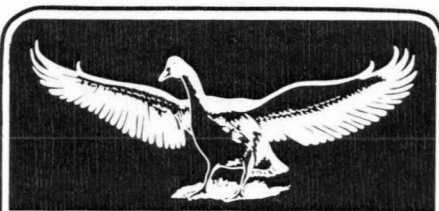
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Birds, and the funding by the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association, this complex became a reality. During the interim time of planning and building, these parrots were placed in the Aviary Section of the Zoo.

The four Northern Rosellas were observed closely as to coloration and behavior and it appeared that they were two pairs. One of these pairs courted and went to nest in a relatively short time. It is very remarkable that after the tremendous stress and several transfers that they would ever think about nesting this season. In the middle of October they were placed alone in a large aviary that had recently housed eagles. This exhibit was hexagonal in shape with a width of 14 feet and a height of 17 feet. There were definite signs of courtship and feeding of the female in January of 1977. Three cockatiel-type nest boxes were placed high in the aviary. The rosellas chose an east-facing nest box which was 11 inches long, 9 inches wide, and 10 inches high. The entrance hole was 2½ inches in diameter. It had been filled with one inch of wood shavings.

The nest was not checked too often so as to keep disturbance to a minimum. Four eggs were laid starting in the last week in January. Remember, this would coincide with summertime in Australia where the birds were not more than six months before. Three chicks hatched after an estimated 21 day incubation. The young were similar in size. Both adults were excellent parents. The male was especially diligent in his duties of feeding the female during the incubation and brooding periods. At 31 days of age one of the chicks came out of the box on

a rainy day. It became very wet and grounded and was removed for a portion of the day to dry. It was then placed back into the nest box. (A risky situation, but one we felt was needed.) It was a success, for three days later the young chicks came out on successive days with no problems. At approximately 45 days of age they were seen to be eating on their own. Additional greens, fruits, egg yolk, and mealworms were supplied for the young. Broccoli greens were especially relished. Eucalyptus branches were supplied periodically. At 56 days the young were identical to their parents except for a lighter colored scarlet vent and a lighter upper mandible and cere. The care and records of these birds were handled by a very diligent, experienced aviculturist, Animal Keeper, John R. Tobin.

The avian breeding complex was finished in June, 1977 and this pair of Northern Rosellas is now being housed there along with several other species of parrots that include four pairs of Hooded Parakeets. This complex contains 22 breeding cages placed in two banks of 11 cages each with a four foot isleway between banks. One bank contains 4X8 foot runs and the other contains 4X12 foot runs. This excellent complex was designed and built for the zoo by H. Richard Mattice.

This pair of Northern Rosellas was seen frequenting their nest box after being in the complex for only one week. This would be wintertime in Australia and it will be interesting to see if these birds will breed at this time of year. Most Australian parrots in the U.S. will start their molting season at this time.

Pair of Northern Rosella in breeding aviary.

