

“STELLA’S LORIKEETS”

Charmosyna papou goliathina

By Carl McCullough



It's 8:00 a.m. as I make my way under the overgrown Cape Honeysuckle to the door. I put the large Medeco key in the slot and the familiar loud click alerts the residents. There is a silence in their world as I step inside and close the door behind me. Steep mountains, deep valleys, misted forests, and headhunters, is the dangerous world they instinctively know. As a result, they show no fear as I make my way to the third isle fourth door on the right.

I open the door and there he is, a large dark powerful male already strutting towards me. He looks menacing and confident as he moves in my direction his beady eyes leaving no doubt as to his intentions. I can close the door and retreat or I can stand my ground. As he gets within range I lunge for him. He deftly avoids my grasp as if he has done this hundreds of times. Another lunge, he bobs and weaves making

my fast reflexes look slow. Then before I can recoil for another lunge, the expected attack happens.

His strength, accuracy, and speed are impressive. I still manage to get him in a headlock, but not before he reaches around and grabs me with his beak. I throw him off of me but he is back in a flash of color and speed. This time the headlock leaves no room for grabbing my hand and he relaxes. I gently rub the feathers on the side of his neck and his orange eyes begin to show the attention he is looking for. After a few minutes of neck and head feather massage he is done for the morning. He's had enough contact with that strange species that has no feathers and can only fly with the help of a machine. Time to jump off the hand and head for the high perch in the back of the cage. This is where he will stay until I pour nectar into his bowl.

This is of course a male melanistic Stella's lorikeet. He is three years old and has been unlucky in finding a mate. In our morning mock confrontation, he never bites or even pinches with his beak. He is more careful around my hands than many hand raised lorries I have handled. He is parent raised and completely tame. I imported some Stella's in 1996 and found that even imports after a few weeks were very trusting. They have taken to captivity very well. They make much less noise than a parakeet. They are hauntingly beautiful and breed very well, if set up properly.

Charmosyna papou goliathina

These birds are called Stella's lorikeets, but that is really an incorrect name. The true Stella's Lorikeets are *Charmosyna papou stellae*. The birds we have in the United States are really Mount Goliath Lorikeets. The scientific name is *Charmosyna papou goliathina*. I believe the difference is very slight and the goliaths are bigger. I have only seen one true Stella's Lorikeet. One cannot tell the difference by just comparing one bird to many others.

To the best of my knowledge these lories were first imported commercially into the USA in 1976. My first pair came from progeny of that importation. I purchased them in 1987. I still vividly remember when my first pair arrived from Washington State. They were in a square box with a strong smell of fresh apples. In San Diego we do not get apples with that quality of taste or smell. Even in the box these lorikeets were unafraid. They were a breeding pair of very large red Stella's Lorikeets. I put them in an aviary with a cockatiel box. They were very calm and immediately started to nest in the cockatiel box. They were copulating the next day and within in two weeks there were two eggs in the nest. "Great we are going to have baby Stella's!" One can imagine my excitement...

Then the bad news after about a week, we had broken eggs. This cycle repeated itself for three more months. It was at this point that I almost abandoned this species. Then I read an article in the AFA about different kinds of nest boxes.

Nest Boxes

There was one box mentioned in the article that had some type of ramp. I decided to make my own nest box for these birds. After several very frustrating prototypes, the nest box that these birds love came into existence.

The nest box front is a half Oak log split vertically. I bought a 2" drill bit that cost about \$50 back in 1987. I use a heavy-duty drill press and it takes about hour of drilling to get through each log. The oak is hard and the drill motor will over-heat without many stops to let the motor cool down. The log front is attached to the back of the aviary high up on the inside of the cage. The hole in the wire is cut to match up to the hole in the log. Attached to the hole on the back of the aviary is a 45-degree ramp. The ramp and nest chamber is made of cedar fencing. The ramp is about 15" long and 6" square. The ramp leads to a

nesting chamber that is 6" wide 12" long and 6" high. The nesting chamber has a lid that lifts up for easy inspection. Problem solved. No more broken eggs. I was lucky in guessing what design these exotic birds might like. I think luck has a lot to do with raising any birds, especially parrots.

Each nesting chamber has about two inches of pine shavings covering the bottom. Occasionally when it is hot, a nest box will have mites. Since the box is made of cedar wood, there are very few times that our babies have had mites. On the occasion when this happens, we mix cedar shavings with the pine shavings. The cedar shavings solve the mite problem.

Breeding

Stella's Lorikeets start mating early in January in Southern California. After mating, two eggs are laid about a week later. The eggs are laid three days apart. Both parents share in the incubation of the



Melanistic male Stella's Lorikeet
Photo by Lyrae Perry



eggs. The eggs hatch in 24 to 26 days. The babies hatch with primary down. For the next two weeks a secondary down replaces this first down. These second down feathers are so thick that they feel like fur. When the babies are first hatched they have different color skin and primary down, according to whether they are red or melanistic Stella's. Red Stella's have pink skin and white primary down, and melanistic Stella's have light brown skin and grey primary down.

Feathers grow into the secondary down starting at about three weeks of age. Head feathers are first to show, followed by primary flight feathers. Stomach, chest, neck, tail and secondary flight feathers show up over the next three weeks. At six weeks, the only feathers left to grow in are back feathers. They grow in over the next two weeks. These lorikeets are sexually dimorphic. During the last two weeks before the babies fledge, one can tell the differences between the sexes. Red males have red back feathers. Red females have yellow back feathers. Melanistic males have red back feathers. Melanistic females have green back feathers.

After the babies hatch we do not change the shavings for ten days. The shavings are changed about once a week for the next three weeks, and then twice a week until the babies fledge. The parent's reaction to my intrusions into their nest box is very interesting. Most of the pairs just leave the nest box when I scratch my fingers on the outside of the box. Some parents sit on the babies even after I lift up the lid to change the shavings. I have to push them off the babies with my hands. There are a few males that will bite my fingers if I reach in the box. When this happens, I stuff a pair of socks rolled into a ball, into the ramp. There was one very aggressive male that refused to leave the babies even after I pushed him off, and he would bite. So I waited to change the shavings when his mate was the in the box, because she would leave without any problem. The aggressive male would make a run back into the box before I could stuff the sock into the ramp. Finally, I used a hand held mirror. He would fight with the image in the mirror. I held the mirror against the side of the cage with my left hand and removed the babies and changed the wet shavings with my right hand.



*Red Stella's on the oak tree nest front.
Photo by Lyrae Perry*

Color and Variations

Describing the size of these birds in inches never really made sense to me as comparison is easier to understand. Stella's Lorikeets are slightly smaller than a cockatiel. They are red birds with green wings, a black head with a blue streaked cap, orange irises, feet and beaks. They have two yellow elongated central tail feathers. These tail feathers give the birds beautiful symmetry that is rarely matched, even in the bird world. Just replace the red body feathers of the red form of this bird with black feathers, and you have the melanistic or black variety.

Everyone at first glance wants the red form of this bird. I think the melanistic version of this bird is much more interesting. The black ranges from very black to a dark purple. In the sunshine a purple bird is stunning to look at. The red form of this bird can also have a purple hue on its chest feathers. Over the years I have seen red feathers on melanistic birds in unexpected patterns. There may be red feathers on the nape, neck, crown and chest. On the chest, the red feathers may appear on the right or left side as well as in a symmetrical pattern. I did see yellow wing feathers on the primary flights of one baby, but it died in the nest. Unfortunately I did not get a picture of



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need fresh nectar every day. There are a variety of commercial diets available. Dick Schroeder of Cuttlebone Plus has a very good diet and there is a commercial diet from Germany with good reports about the quality. There are probably more commercial diets out there but I do not know of them. In the wild these birds eat a mixture of pollen and nectar, which they collect with their unique, brushed tipped tongues. If you ever get a chance to see a lory up close and it extends the tongue one can see the brushes unfold. It is truly a unique experience.

Conclusion

My wife and I have been raising these birds for 19 years now, with the occasional help of our daughters. We look forward to going out this morning, as we do every morning, and feeding them. After the play battle with the three-year-old male, I will turn on the misters and watch them take baths. Some will fly back and forth under the misters, while others will roll around on the bottom of the cage. Still others will hang by one foot upside down to take a bath. They are truly comical birds.

If one is looking for an exotic, beautiful, quiet bird with a great personality, why not try a Stella's Lorikeet? I did and I am still happy with them after 19 years.

this bird. The melanistic or black version of this bird is always a surprise as to where red feathers will appear on the offspring.

Melanism in the case of these birds means black feathers have replaced the red feathers. This is confusing, because the red form of this species is not the nominate color variation. The nominate color for this species is the melanistic or black variation. The red form is the recessive form of this species. To the best of my knowledge, a red bird mated to a red bird will always produce red babies. I have never seen proof to oppose this fact. Although the red variation is a magnificent bird, the melanistic variation is more interesting to a breeder. Two melanistic birds will produce black babies, unless they both carry the recessive red gene. In this case, they can produce red babies, but red offspring will always be females. If one mixes black and red birds, the black parent must carry the red gene to produce red babies of both sexes. Otherwise they will always be melanistic.

Diet

The diet of these birds is mostly nectar with some fruit and vitamins. I know some people feed their lorries a pellet and powder diet that the birds mix with water. This is fine for the larger lorries, but *Charmosyna*



Red Stella's Lorikeet. Photo by Lyrae Perry

Editor's Note: Several months ago, I drove toward San Diego on a sunny morning to visit Carl and Donna McCullough. They graciously allowed me into their aviaries to photograph their beautiful birds. The McCullough's have specialized in the Mount Goliath lory, which we commonly refer to as the "Stella's lory". I was impressed with the neatness and efficiency of their breeding set-up. It was wonderful to see a large number of birds of the same species, and to compare colors. While the colors and genetics were surprising, the behavior of the birds was not. Stella's behave in the comical and endearing manner of most lorries. It's always a pleasure for me to visit breeders who are so committed to learning and sharing knowledge and experience about the birds they love. Thank you Carl and Donna for generously sharing with me and the AFA! Lyrae Perry ■



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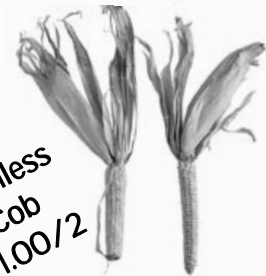
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