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Port Lincoln Parakeet

brief notes on a beautiful bird

by Sheldon Dingle
Norco, California

I've always liked the Port Lincoln parakeet (*Barnardius zonarius zonarius*) for a number of reasons but mostly for its striking black, yellow, and green color combination and its strong, inquisitive personality. Its cousin, the subspecies *B.z. semitorquatus*, usually called the twenty-eight parakeet because its call resembles those words, is in all aspects of color and personality the equal of the nominate race. The main difference is the Port Lincoln's breast is green while its belly is yellow but the twenty-eight is mostly green all over its front. The twenty-eight usually is slightly larger and has a definite red frontal band on its head.

Fortunately this is one bird that, even in its wild state, is doing rather well. It is one of the most successful parrots in Australia, being quite common over about one third of the land mass. Port Lincolns are very adaptable and flourish in several different ecosystems ranging from lush tropical forests to semi-arid outback (where the stock watering tanks make life possible for wild birds as well as for domestic sheep and cattle). The vast but rather remote grain farms have also proven a boon to the Port Lincolns who enthusiastically take advantage of man's agricultural efforts. If it likes the countryside and farms, this species has the good judgement to generally avoid the more populous towns and villages.

Historically Port Lincolns have been rather scarce in aviculture and have usually brought good prices. Over the last few years, due to improved techniques and a greater number of aviculturists, many Australian parrots, including the Port Lincoln, have become more common and prolific in captivity with a corresponding lowering of their monetary value. This does not in any way, however, lower the Port Lincoln's worth as a desirable aviary subject.

Indeed, I still enjoy having a pair or two of Port Lincolns or twenty-eights. For me the subspecies are equally desirable and almost interchangeable. Of course, I'd never cross breed them in my aviaries but in the wild where their ranges overlap there is a gradual shift in color from that of the Port Lincoln to that of the twenty-eight with many birds displaying character-

istics intermediate between the two. This suggests a natural hybridization between the subspecies.

In captivity these excellent birds have fared well under the same conditions that have been good for rosellas and other Australian broadtailed parakeets. Mine all receive the same basic seed diet (and many seed mixes are satisfactory, not just mine) which is supplemented with apple, corn on the cob and a motley assortment of local weeds that I pick free of charge out of our field to the advantage of the field *and* the birds. The weeds, by the way, I try to pick root and all and, surprisingly, many of the birds eat the root, dirt included, first.

Our Port Lincolns and/or twenty-eights nest in the ordinary pine board nest boxes we use for all psittacines of about the same size. Ditto for the aviaries. What is good for a rosella or red-rump is okay for a Port Lincoln. The aviaries we use are eight feet long by four feet wide by seven feet high and partially covered.

In general, the Port Lincolns have been good breeders and good parents. We have let the parents raise their own and we've pulled babies for hand-feeding. A handfed Port Lincoln or twenty-eight makes a pretty good pet and never becomes as wild and flighty as, say, a hand-reared Indian ring-necked parakeet. The tame birds, in my opinion, make better breeders and we have handfed breeders to prove it.

Male Port Lincolns and twenty-eights are very macho. They strut, threaten, sound off and act generally tough but not to the point of being stupid. In one case when I open a small wire door in the flight to change the water, the resident male darts and thrusts at me in a most vicious way but he always stops about six inches from my fingers. If I poke at him he backs up (in a very threatening way, of course) and when I retreat he charges. As soon as my hand is withdrawn and the wire door snaps shut, ol' Bee Zee hits the wire hard and beats the living hell out of it.

Such a bird is a joy to care for. I recommend all members of the *Barnardius* genus as good aviary subjects that will bring happiness and pleasure into your avicultural life. 