



Colorful Birds

TURQUOISE PARROT (*NEOPHEMA PULCHELLA*)

By Dr. Slobodan Ivić

Introduction

The Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*) is a parrot which attracts the attention of numerous bird lovers. It is a very popular pet, and it is also very popular among the aviculturists for its beauty and mild character. The first data of the existence of this species is from 1788, and the first person who described it was George Shaw in 1792.

At present, it is native to southeastern Australia, from the eastern part of the southeastern Queensland, through New South Wales all the way to Victoria. It can also be found in the urban suburbs of the big cities like Sydney and Melbourne.

Their natural habitats are woodlands, the trees surrounding seasonal streams, savanna woodlands and cultivated areas. It is estimated that the population of the Turquoise Parrot consists of about 20,000 birds, while in the aviaries (considering both normal colour and mutations) around the world there is a significantly greater number of birds. Along with the natural enemies, cutting old trees containing hollows which can be used as nesting sites, and fires can represent a big problem and affect the decrease of birds in nature.

Diet

In nature their diet consists of the various grass and shrub seeds. Sometimes they eat crop seeds.

The adequate diet is very important in the aviaries. Food must be: 1. Fresh, 2. Diverse, 3. Of good quality, 4. Clean, 5. Well dried, 6. Always having the same composition.

Since I have a considerable number of birds, there is a need to provide a larger amount of food in time. I have to store the bought food properly in order to preserve the high quality of the seeds. It must be kept in a cold and dark place with no humidity.

My Turquoise Parrots get an exactly measured quantity of food every day; and the quantity is determined by my long experience. This is why they always have enough of quality food. There are no weight changes.

Turquoise Parrot's dish consists of: white millet – 30%, light seeds – 24.5%, red millet – 11%, peeled oats – 9%, foxtail millet – 6%, hemp – 5%, buckwheat – 4.5%, niger seeds – 4%, flax – 4%, cardamom – 2%.

They are regularly given various fruits and vegetables, especially carrot and apple and greenfood: chickweed, dandelion, wild chamomile, chicory. Eggfood and soft insect food as well as some sprouted sunflower for rearing is also offered.

The integral part of every day diet is a solid mineral mixture. It can be bought in each of the well supplied pet shops. For some years now, I make mineral-vitamin cake based on my own recipe and which is very similar to ready-made products. If minerals and vitamins are provided only together with water, the organism of the Turquoise Parrot would experience the deficiency disease. The reason is a very low intake of fluids daily.

Housing in the aviary

Taking into consideration that they live in warm and dry climate conditions, it is necessary to provide similar microclimate conditions in the aviary. However, smaller exceptions are possible because their ancestors lived and bred very successfully in the aviaries. The Turquoise Parrot can be successfully kept in the cages of 100 x 60 x 50 cm. In my personal opinion, they will have more quality of life if they are placed into the aviaries that are 2 m high, 1 m wide and 3 m long. The aviary must be placed on the spot where adverse weather conditions cannot affect the birds that live in it. The winter temperature must not be too low. We must not allow water to freeze.

During the day, they must be provided with lots of light because it is an important factor for healthy life. During the night I leave a dim light on, as in the full moon night. There were situations where one bird gets scared and then all the others start flying uncontrollably. The dim light will enable them to find the roost and to continue sleeping.

The construction of the aviary can be wooden. For outer aviaries I use double finer wire. It must be dimensioned not to allow the nails of the birds of prey to enter. When birds of prey are hungry, they will attack a parrot standing on a wire. Likewise, it is necessary to include it because of the neighbouring birds from the next aviary. I use sand for the floor of the aviary and I bring it from the sands. I always clean the sand, and then I sterilize it at 180°C for 1 hour. The sand has multiple uses, and one of them is sand-bathing that affects the quality of feathers. Hygiene is very important in keeping these parrots, so I change the sand once a week.

I put a lot of roosts in the aviary, but they must not obstruct the flight. The roosts are different in diameter which influences beneficial development of the locomotor organs. The roosts must be bigger in diameter during winter. The bird covers the roost with toes, but only the upper parts. When it sleeps, it covers all the toes with the body and the feathers. Even if you do not put the bird in the warmer space in time, this will save them from frostbite, which can be fatal.



Broody hen with newly hatched chick.

Breeding

I make nestboxes only from wood. I do not use glue, because of the odors, but because of resulting, potential respiratory obstructions. The dimensions of the boxes are 20 x 20 and the depth is 30 cm. The depth of the box is very important. I prevent young birds from leaving the nest early by making the box deeper. The depth can be deeper, but the level of sawdust must be enlarged. In that case the parents leave the nest easily and return, and there is no danger of egg breaking or hurting young birds. The circular opening which is placed in the upper part is 5 cm in diameter. I always place the nest boxes at the top parts of the aviary.

However, breeding this parrot species is very easy. The mating starts at the beginning of March. There can be 4 to 7 eggs in the nest. The eggs are oval, and the dimensions of the cross section are 21 mm x 18 mm. Five days later I check on whether the eggs are fertile. The incubation period lasts up to 20 days.

The male feeds the partner at the beginning, and the hen feeds the young. Later, the male takes over the complete feeding the young, and the hen prepares for the next parent cycle. They are very good parents, especially the hens. I band young birds at the age of 7 days. When the young birds fledge, they leave the nest and this happens after about 25 days. The breeder must cautiously approach the young birds during this period. They are scared and they fly uncontrollably. A certain interval of time is needed in order to achieve precision for landing at the roosts, and to become confident with the breeder.

I separate the young and the parents within a short period of time. I make the final decision when to do this by following their growth; and when the length of the tail approaches the length of an adult bird, I separate them. The other sign is when the parents push them away. It happens 2 or 3 weeks after leaving the nestbox. The male can be more aggressive, especially towards the male offspring. It is favourable to place the young birds into wide aviaries, in order to properly develop their

musculature, which will enable them for regular and safe flight. This separation also helps the male and hen to rest, preparing for the next parent cycle. At the end of the breeding season, I remove the nestboxes and disinfect them. Complete physical and mental maturity for entering a new breeding cycle for the young Turquoise Parrots will be achieved in the next year.

The characteristics

As it is obvious from the photos, sexual dimorphism is present. The Turquoise Parrots are 22 cm long. They weight about 40 gm. They are agile and good flyers. When they are scared they stand in a 30° angle position. They are not shy and their voice is melodious. They often spend a lot of time on the floor of the aviary.

It is necessary to put a bowl of fresh water in the aviary in which the birds can bathe when they wish to. The bowl dimension should be 3–4 cm deep and 25 cm in diameter. They usually bathe when outer temperature is high. They show aggression towards the males of the same or similar species. If the aviaries are very spacious, you can have other species such as Bourke's Parrot or Lineolated Parakeet. They can also be kept together with some exotic birds such as the Jave Saprrow (*Padda oryzivora*) or the Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia guttata*).

However, you must not keep two male Turquoise Parrots in the same or neighboring aviaries, because fights and injuries can ensue.

There is a possibility of crossbreeding with similar species, like Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*), but I am personally against these experiments.

Medical chart

They belong to a group of very sensitive parrots. If they become sick, the clinical picture evolves rapidly. The conditions which can affect their health are humidity and coldness, resulting in bacterial infection. They are prone to conjunctivitis, an eye infections that can be treated with drops. I do not recommend ointments due to dust and other substances in the aviary which it would attract. Infection with candida is frequent. Adding medication to the water, one should bear in mind that these birds live in warm areas and they drink little water. Considering the fact that they do not drink water for long periods of time, this can be fatal. If they do not take the medicine dissolved in water in time, it can be the base for unsuccessful treatment, even if it is a good therapy. That is why they receive their medicine subcutaneously or per oral dosage.

Colour Mutations

There are a great number of color mutations which are very different from the nominant phenotype. These include: cinnamon, olive, opaline, yellow, dark green, red-bellied, lutino and multiple combination mutations, etc. It is this vast variation on the number of mutations that make them more interesting and inspire a special feeling to aviculturists.

Avicultural note

Being very calm parrots, quiet and with a large number of colour mutations, they are excellent exhibition birds. Since they are smaller parrots, they can easily be placed in the exhibition cages and display themselves in all their glory at master competitions. When exhibiting, normal birds belong to section K 6, while all the other colored birds belong to section K 8.

The diameter of the closed ring is 4 mm.

The Turquoise Parrot is listed as CITES II.

Social network groups for the Turquoise Parrot fans

Colorful feathers attract a great number of bird lovers all over the world. This is why numerous groups are created on the social networks who keep the Turquoise Parrot. You can exchange information and photos with all the members—the admirers of this species are all over the world. This network will contribute information and education and will certainly improve the life of Turquoise Parrots.

If you decide to obtain these parrots, you need to consider the condition required to provide in order not to negatively affect their health, and not to disappoint yourself. It is also very important to buy a bird from an established breeder who uses closed leg bands on his progeny and maintains accurate breeding records.



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