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Rose Breasted Cockatoos

by Jerry Jennings
Woodland Hills, California

Sometimes considered as pests in their native Australia, rose breasted cockatoos (*Eolophus roseicapillus*), or Galahs as they are known "down under," are a delight to the aviculturist and pet owner. With their brilliant pink breast and face, grey wings, back and tail, this moderate sized cockatoo stands out from the white cockatoos commonly seen in American aviaries. The Galah also stands alone in its monotypic genus, *Eolophus*.

Distributed throughout most of the Australian continent, the Galah is an abundant species in open country below four thousand feet elevation, where it prefers open grassland and savannah woodland. As the continent has been developed for agriculture, the Galah population has taken advantage of the available cereal crops and increased dramatically in numbers. In fact, its relationship with man has been so successful that, today, it may be found even in urban areas, nesting in parks and gardens.

Rose breasted cockatoos have long been established in aviculture both in the United States and in Europe. They are considered the most prolific species of cockatoo in captivity and are certainly the most frequently reproduced. Such fecundity has not had the impact, however, one would think for they aren't the most commonly encountered of the cockatoos. Unlike the white cockatoos of Indonesia, which have been imported into the U.S. by the thousands, rose breasteds have not been imported since the Australian wildlife export ban in 1959. Consequently, all the available birds are the result of very successful captive breeding. Unfortunately, the supply has always fallen short of the demand, resulting in fairly high prices.

Although rose breasted cockatoos are relatively easy to reproduce, the

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Mark these dates and plan to attend!

August 2 thru 7, 1988

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strategies employed will determine the numbers of offspring produced.

Galahs typically nest in the spring in the United States. They lay a clutch of three to five elliptical white eggs. If the adults are allowed to incubate and rear their young, only one clutch will be produced each season. Aviculturists, however, usually employ one of two different strategies. One is to simply collect the eggs, either as they are laid or when the clutch is complete, for artificial incubation. The other strategy is to permit the parents to incubate and hatch the eggs themselves. The young are removed for handfeeding any time after hatching, usually at about two weeks of age.

The strategy of removing the eggs for artificial incubation (at a temperature of 99.5 degrees fahrenheit) results in many more eggs being produced than would otherwise be possible. Removing chicks a couple weeks old, however, tends to produce sturdier young, which are a lot easier to hand feed, than those that are a day old when the handfeeding process begins. Even when the parents have had the young removed from the nest after two weeks of care, they will frequently recycle for a second clutch.

There are differing views on the appropriate size of cages and style of nest boxes to be used in breeding Galahs. Some breeders prefer long flights sixteen to twenty-five feet in length, while others are successful in flights as short as six feet in length. Preferred nestboxes vary from the twelve inch by twelve inch by thirty inch height up to forty-eight inches high. One breeding facility, Birds Unlimited, even used eucalyptus logs three feet high. Whichever size aviary or box style used, they have all been successful.

In the wild, Galahs seem to prefer nesting in eucalyptus trees, and they



Galah babies five weeks old.



Galah youngsters five months old.

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line their nests with eucalyptus leaves. Aviculturists have noted the importance of eucalyptus leaves and, those living in areas where the trees grow, offer a fresh sprig of leaves on a daily basis. The birds enjoy stripping the leaves and carrying them into the nest. When eucalyptus is not available, Galahs will often use other leaves, even pulling overhanging ones through the wire of their flight.

As the breeding season begins, Galahs may be observed courting and mating. Some pairs will vigorously defend their nests, while other pairs will flee from them at the first sound of approaching strangers.

Incubation begins with the laying of the second or third egg and lasts for twenty-four days. Newly hatched young are covered with a light pink down. After about two months, young fledge the nest. Nestlings reared via handfeeding can be weaned at about three months of age. At about one and a half to two years rose breasteds are considered mature.

Although rose breasted cockatoos are monomorphic, most mature birds can be visually sexed by comparison of the periophthalmic ring. This eye-ring is usually much thicker in males than in females. Foreshaw in his

book, *Parrots of the World*, states that males have a brown iris and females a pinkish-red iris. That is the case with the birds at Walnut Acres Aviaries; however, other breeders find it is not always so. It is wise, therefore, to have any recently acquired breeding stock surgically sexed, if sex is in doubt, especially in view of the early maturation of Galahs.

In the wild, rose breasted cockatoos are granivorous birds, eating seeds of grasses (button grass, Flinders grass, and Mitchell grass) and grains (including wheat and oats). They also dine on roots, shoots, buds (not as in weiser) and insects.

In captivity, rose breasted commonly develop fatty tumors which are presumed to be partially diet related. These tumors inhibit successful breeding and are, at times, responsible for infertile eggs. Left unchecked, these tumors may lead to death. Therefore, high fat content foods such as sunflower seed should be avoided except as a rare treat.

Current thinking on diets for rose breasted cockatoos suggests that pelleted diets amply supplemented with legumes, mixed vegetables, and fruit are in order. At Walnut Acres Aviaries a diet of Purina Layena pellets, Science Diet Dog Kibble, mixed vegetables (corn, peas, carrots, string and lima beans), cooked beans (pinto, red, white, kidney, and black-eyed peas) and fruits (apple, papaya, cantaloupe, and grapes) are offered. Parakeet mix is offered when there are young in the nest. Although Purina Layena pellets are good for breeding adults, their calcium content is too high for young babies and should be substituted after the eggs hatch until the young fledge or are pulled from the nest.

Handfed rose breasted cockatoos are not only good breeders, but they make delightful pets as well. Compared with other cockatoos, they are not noisy and they will learn to talk without much effort on the part of their owner. There is a lot to recommend the rose breasted cockatoo. ●

Don't miss the big
AFA 14th Annual Convention.

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valuable avicultural experience
and information.

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Tampa, Florida**

(see insert in this issue with complete information)

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