

bottom of the cage should be covered with clean sand. These birds seem to enjoy a little stroll on the ground, so keep the cage bottom clean.

The nest box should be the size of a peachface lovebird box but deeper; 10" wide by 10" long by 15" deep with the entry hole on the high part of the box. The nesting material should be a combination of peat moss, shavings and eucalyptus leaves mixed together. I like to use 3 to 4 inches of this mixture in my boxes.

The breeding season starts about February. The female usually lays four to five eggs. The eggs hatch in 17 to 19 days, and the babies will stay in the nest for four or five weeks. I recommend only allowing the pair two clutches a year, so as not to overbreed. Overbreeding will cause you to have weaker babies.

I like to provide small hookbill mix, Petamine, canary seed and mixed parakeet seed to my birds along with carrots, apples, wheat bread and some soaked seed. It is also very important to provide cuttlebone, a mineral block and gravel. The food should always be fresh. Any sign of mildew can cause illness in your birds. Fresh water should also be given each day.

If you notice any sign of distress, your bird should be brought into the house and kept warm (90-95°F). I have found that a fish tank with a wire screen on the top works quite well as an infirmary. I put a heating pad on low heat, with a towel on top, *under* the bottom of the fish tank. You should not have a perch in this tank. I have found that these tanks can be cleaned easily and thoroughly.

If the bird is not eating dry seed, a little soaked seed should do the trick. The seed should be rinsed well and refrigerated from 24 to 30 hours, then rinsed again.

Once the bird is feeling better, remove the heat gradually. Put the bird in a wire cage in the house to make sure the bird is well. Acclimate the bird to the outside cage on a sunny day. Keep a close watch for any signs of distress.

These birds are best raised with only one pair per cage, but can easily be caged with finches. I think you will enjoy the caring for and raising of these interesting birds. I have had a great deal of joy and success with these lovely birds. Good luck to those who will take up this endeavor. ●

Those Wonderful Neophemas

by Joe Atkinson
Clements, California

Editor's note: *The Turquoise Parrot this article refers to is Neophema pulchella. In American aviculture, it is more commonly known as the Turquoise Parakeet.*

Neophema is the scientific genus name given to a group of small, Budgie-sized parakeets from Australia. Neophemas are quite beautiful, all being grass-green except one member, the Bourke's Parakeet. The Bourke's Parakeet is light brown with a soft pink chest and belly and large, dark eyes. These large, dark eyes give them the ability to see better at twilight time than other grass parakeets, thus earning them the name of the Night Parrot in their native Australia. The grass-green Neophemas, who spend most of their time on the ground, have been given the nickname "grass parakeets."

Grass parakeets are not considered difficult to raise, in fact, some members are quite good breeders. However, like all birds we attempt to raise in captivity, they have their special requirements. This article is by no means the last word on raising grass parakeets. Birds seem to know when their keepers are thinking too highly of themselves and will show us just how little we do know.

In any new undertaking, trial and error is the best rule of thumb. Grass parakeets are no exception. Over the years, I have certainly made my share of errors and hopefully I have learned a few things along the way. I hope this article will smooth the road for you and help you have an enjoyable time with your grass parakeets.

Flights And Nest Boxes

Grass parakeets will reproduce in just about any size flight, from 2'x 3' indoor setups to the largest outdoor flight. Because they will not normally colony breed, it is best to have only one pair per flight, so large outdoor flights are not practical for the serious breeder. In California, grass parakeets are kept outside in flights that are two feet wide by four feet high by

six feet long. Four feet of the flight should be covered, containing the feeding and nest box area. The remaining two feet of the flight should remain uncovered, allowing the birds access to any available sun. Nest box privacy is essential. Therefore, if you have side-by-side flights, you must place partitions in the flights which will provide adequate privacy. Weather is usually not a major problem, but cold wind can be. Many breeders prefer to cover their flight with plastic neoprene during stormy weather.

In the wild, grass parakeets are cavity nesters, using hollow tree branches and hollow tree trunks which are their preferred nest sites. I have used natural nest boxes made from hollow logs and the birds loved them, but these natural nests are difficult to clean and impossible for banding the baby birds. The common Budgie box works great, is easy to clean and easy to repair. Fill the box three inches deep with pine shavings, and pack it down smooth. Grass parakeets like to dig in their nest box. With the shavings packed smooth, you can tell if your birds are working the nest box in preparation for nesting.

Nesting takes place in the spring and throughout the summer. The clutches are usually three to five eggs in number but can go as high as eight. Grass parakeets will stop nesting on their own in late summer and should be encouraged to do so. However, in indoor setups where light and temperature are controlled, they will nest all year. In outdoor setups, leave the nest boxes up all year because on cold winter nights they will use them for sleeping.

Diet

Grass parakeets will do well on most diets that are well-rounded and balanced. I use a dry seed mix of white millet, canary seed, oat groats, black sunflower seeds, safflower seed and powdered vitamins. On the

side, I feed oyster shells and in the spring fresh wild grass with seed heads on the stocks. Some breeders will feed the same dry mixture, but sprouted. Sprouted seeds are soaked in water and are starting to germinate. I have fed both diets and have found that birds do equally well on either one.

Grass parakeets do not enjoy fruit. Only the Scarlet-chested Parakeet will take apple, which is a real treat for them.

Popular Grass Parakeets

The most commonly kept grass parakeets are the Scarlet-chested Parakeet, the Bourke's Parakeet and the Turquoise Parakeet, the favorite being the Scarlet-chested Parakeet. Besides their beauty, these three popular parakeets are easy aviary breeders.

Color mutations do occur in grass parakeets and, like all birds, there are good ones and poor ones. Mutations in all birds are rare and expensive. Since grass parakeets are easily reproduced, when a mutation does occur, through selective breeding it is not lost. Mutations are judged on how

they improve the original bird. The pied mutation in grass parakeets is not particularly attractive. When I think of a pied, a good pied cockatiel comes to mind but in grass parakeets these peds are not that refined. They look more like the colors are diluted instead of being pure. Not to say that they aren't interesting, but don't expect a clear, refined colored pied — maybe someday. The pied mutation can be seen in Scarlet-chested Parakeets, Turquoise Parakeets and Bourke's Parakeets. The Bourke's Parakeet pied is the most refined with the Scarlet-crested Parakeet next and followed distantly by the Turquoise Parakeet.

Scarlet-crested Parakeets also come in cinnamon and blue. The blue can be a very attractive mutation. But buyer beware, there are two shades of blue - a grayish blue and a royal blue. The gray blue is just that - more gray than blue. The royal blue is by far the prettiest - bright royal blue with the males having a white chest. I have only seen one royal blue in the United States. They are well established in Europe but rare in the States.

The cinnamon mutation is not a major change from the normal color of the Scarlet-chested Parakeet. The grass-green color of the body is a more pastel green in the cinnamon mutation, with the scarlet-red chest being orange in the males. The normal sky-blue face is changed to a lighter powder blue. The cinnamon is important for genetic reasons. You need this mutation to produce the royal blue mutation.

The Bourke's Parakeet comes in the most mutations, pied, yellow, cinnamon and the very popular rosey mutations. The pied has already been discussed and the yellow and cinnamon are both quite nice, but to the untrained eye look like color phases of the rosey mutation. The Rosey Bourke's is certainly the best known of the grass parakeet mutations. Most people, new to the world of bird breeders, do not realize that this is a mutation. A good Rosey Bourke's is "Pepto-Bismol" pink all over with a light powder blue strip on the forehead. Good ones are hard to find and cost more. They do come in many different shades of pink, ranging from a light pastel to a bird with a pink color

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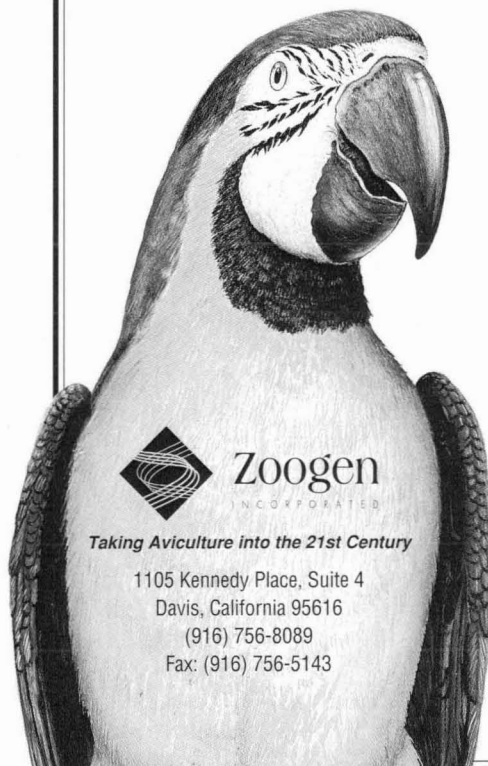
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Scarlet-chested Parakeets, pair, they are one of the most colorful of the Neophemas, and they are an endangered species.



The cinnamon mutation of the Scarlet-chested Parakeet is one of the uncommon mutations found in captivity.

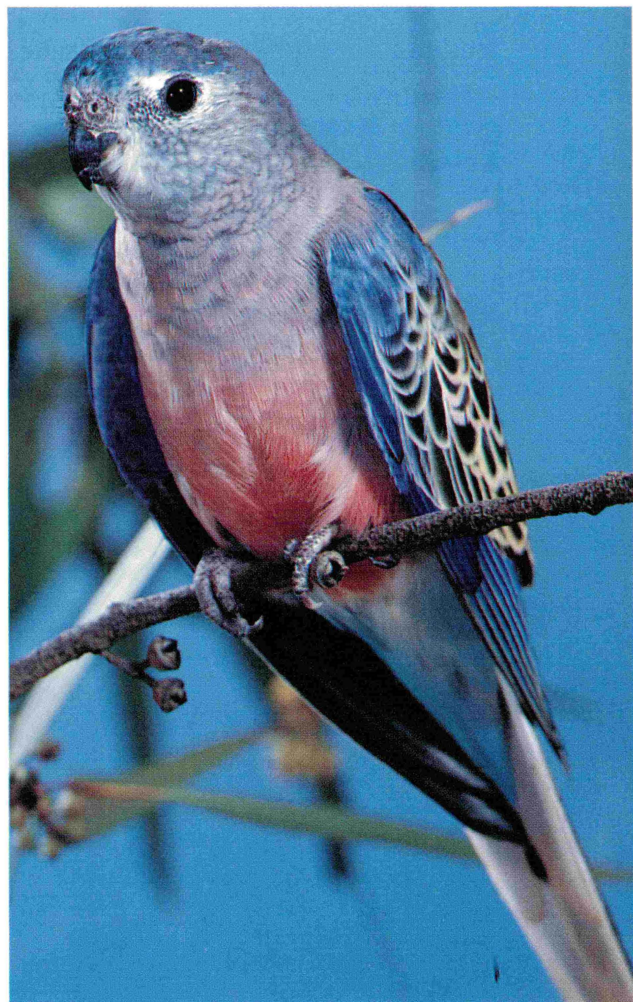


The yellow mutation of the Turquoise Parakeet is one of the most beautiful mutations found in the parrot world. It is a recessive mutation.

just a shade off from the original.

The Elegant Parakeet has a yellow mutation that is very attractive. This mutation has not proved to be very popular. The Elegants do not have many colors to start with, so the change to yellow, although nice, reminds people of the common Budgie. Unlike the yellow Elegant the yellow Turquoise Parakeet is considered one of the most attractive mutations of all. The female yellow Turquoise Parakeet has a powder blue face and shoulder, contrasting nicely with the deep yellow on the body. With the males, the blue is a little darker and covers more area on the shoulders. They have a blood red shoulder patch which adds the finishing touch to this beautiful mutation.

There are more mutations of the grass parakeets than I mentioned here. I have only touched on some of the more well known ones. No matter which grass parakeet you choose, you will find them all delightful. They are a very pleasing addition to any aviary. ●



The normal male Bourke's Parakeet shows a blue brow band when it matures. This species can be easily colony bred.

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