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Rosellas:

Colorful & Delightful Parrots

by Gene Hall
Woodlake, California

The genus *Platycercus*, commonly known as Rosellas, comprise a group of eight species and are indigenous to Australia. They are very colorful, neither noisy or destructive, and reproduce quite readily in captivity. They are very active both in the air and on the ground.

All Rosellas possess cheek patches and have the characteristic Australian broadtail, which is used to display their varied moods. The median wing coverts generally are the color of the breast and are edged in black. The colors range from red, orange and yellow, to green, blue, black and white, which doesn't miss much. Individual species descriptions can best be found in the many books available.

Sexes are colored alike making it difficult to pair them correctly. In the "dark ages" of aviculture, the "Rudkin" method was the rule. If a pair laid an egg, you had a hen. If it hatched, you had a "pair." In spite of all of our advances in the field of aviculture, that method has remained valid. Many books describe the theory that the wing stripe found on the underside of the primary flight feathers is a guide as to sex, however, I have not found that theory to be dependable. Now that surgical sexing is available, obtaining true pairs is not difficult. There is a good supply of well bred, strong stock available today. And thus, there is absolutely no excuse for breeding brother-sister pairs. There is also no shortage of good, reliable aviculturists available, enabling trading of stock to ensure continued strong specimens for future generations.

As long as I am on my soapbox, I can find no reason or excuse for the breeding of hybrids. For those among us that must, try raising chickens!

The Green Rosella is found on the island of Tasmania; the Brown's or Northern in found not surprisingly in Northern Australia; the Stanley or Western in Western areas; and the

Red or Eastern, Mealy or Blue, Yellow, Adelaide and Crimson are all found in the South-central and South-eastern regions. As in the case of many species, sub-species occur, and again are described in the many books available.

Rosellas are quite hardy and in most areas of the United States can be kept in outside flights. In the colder regions, it would be well to provide inside-outside areas for their comfort. In their native surroundings, Rosellas fly great distances in their quest for food and water. Thus they have developed the ability of strong, rapid flight. For this reason, I feel that they are best kept in as long a flight as possible. It need not be wide and, as they are not prone to chewing the flights to the ground, 19 gauge wire will do nicely.

Only two problems are common in their care. Since they love to feed on the ground, Rosellas are susceptible to worms. With the help of your veterinarian, a good preventative program in this area is very necessary for their good health. The second problem has to do with their rapid flight. Broken necks and head injuries are common, but this can be corrected by building the open end of the flight solid. If it is wire, the birds will often attempt to fly straight through it, thus a broken neck is the result. Otherwise, conventional aviary construction design will work nicely.

Perches should be placed at the extreme ends of the flight to allow the maximum distance for exercise. Tree limbs, securely mounted, are best as they vary in diameter which is beneficial for fertility.

A good rule to follow is to never place pairs of Rosellas next to each other. If you must, double wire is needed as they will fight and cause great harm to each other through the wire. They also are apt to "fall in love" with the girl-next-door and thus doom the breeding season.



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All that needs to be done to correct this, is to place non-Australian species between them. This will also make it easy to rationalize the need for twice as many flights complete with birds to make things go smoothly.

I prefer to supply seeds on a free choice basis; straight canary, small finch millet, proso millet, hulled oats, safflower, sunflower, flax, niger and poppy are offered. Cooked whole feed-corn is fed each morning with apple or carrots and whole wheat bread. Natural cuttlebone and mineral blocks are also available for their needs. New Zealand spinach and/or Swiss chard from your own garden is an excellent way to feed greens safely.

The nest boxes furnished are of the grandfather clock-type and are constructed from 1/2 inch plywood, 12 inches by 12 inches by 32 inches deep. The entrance hole is three inches in diameter and six inches from the top. A six inch porch, two inches below the entrance hole is used rather than a perch. It allows room for the birds to sit by the entrance hole and does not become loose as a perch quite often does. As we are all aware, loose perches can be the cause of infertile eggs. A ladder of wire is fastened inside to provide access to the bottom of the nest. A six inch layer of pine shavings is placed on the bottom of the nest and is soaked with water four weeks prior to the nesting period.

The hen will lay every other day and a clutch usually consists of four to eight eggs. Incubation takes approximately 18 to 21 days with the hen doing the setting. At hatching time she will leave the nest to bathe, returning to the nest quite wet, which adds moisture to the nest. The moisture softens the shell, enabling the chicks to hatch in good time. At this time the male feeds the hen, who, in turn, enters the nest to feed the young. By the time the chicks are two weeks old, we generally find both parents at the feed station and entering the nest to feed the young. The chicks will leave the nest at about six weeks of age. I like to leave the chicks with their parents for as long as the male will allow. I feel that this allows them to imprint on the behavior patterns necessary for future breeding use.

Occasionally pairs will double clutch, which has never upset me. While many are capable of breeding

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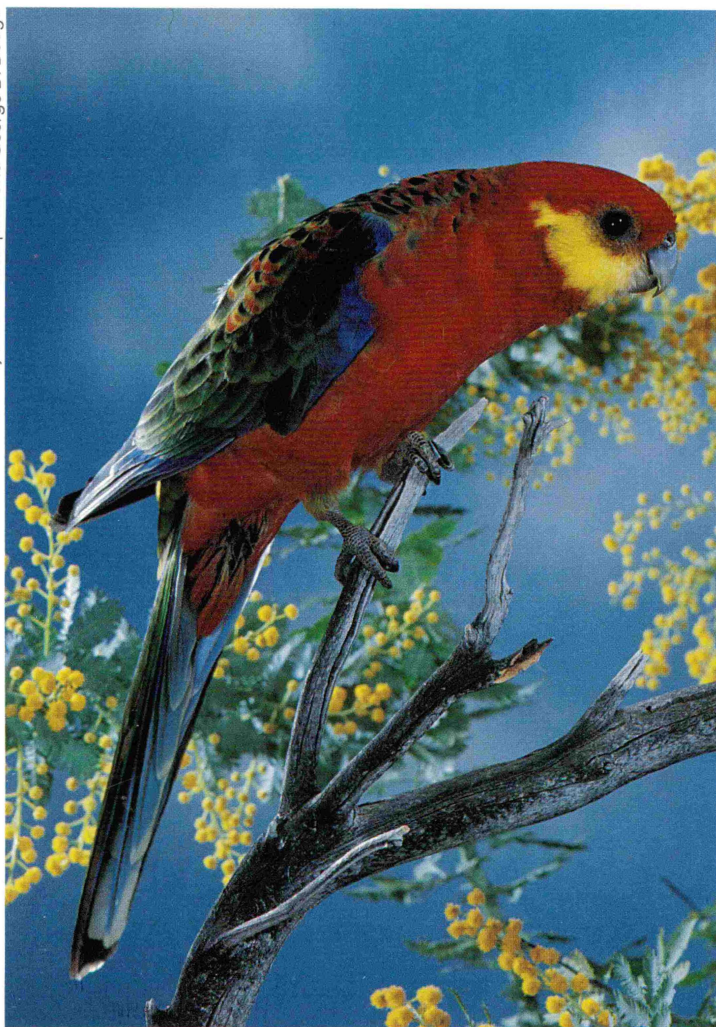
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Photo by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge



Stanley or Western Rosella (*Platycercus icterotis icterotis*)

Photo by Nancy Vigran



Pair of Northern Rosellas (*Platycercus venustus*)

Photo by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge



Adelaide Rosella (*Platycercus elegans adalaidae*)

Photo by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge



Blue or Mealy Rosella (*Platycercus adscitus adscitus*)



Crimson or Pennant's Rosellas (Platycercus elegans elegans)

at one year of age, I prefer that they not be put to work until their second year. I have found that they continue to grow for the first two years.

On the subject of medication, the average aviculturist is far too quick to put something into the water. In a sincere attempt to save them, birds are often lost due to incorrect use of the wrong medication. I agree that a well-stocked medicine chest is necessary; one that contains a complete assortment selected by your veterinarian. It is also a good idea to submit to your veterinarian all articles in the avian journals you receive to assist him in his growth in the field of avian medicine. By the time that the average sick bird has indicated his distress, you are already too late. Thus, you must, on a daily basis be well aware of your birds' behavior pat-

terns and daily routines. When the routine changes, be alert as to the possible reason causing the change. Prevention cures more birds than medication.

Back to my soapbox. Down through time, birds, with the help of our creator, did quite nicely in their reproduction efforts, making it possible for us to take large numbers of them captive, thereby altering their lives. As it turns out, this has been a blessing for their continued existence, as their habitat is being destroyed at an alarming rate. Regardless of the opinions of the radical few, aviculture has done the right thing. It is now our obligation to furnish proper and adequate facilities for their good health as well as comfort. We have become their "keepers," not their "manipulators."

In the area of avicultural management, we do not need to re-invent the wheel. It was done long before we got here. A group of 10 Rosella breeders will offer 11 different methods for successful results. In truth, there is not one secret to success. Meetings are necessary for the exchange of ideas. We cannot read enough. However, I suggest that we spend as much time as possible quietly observing our birds. By doing this, we will often detect things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Please understand that I do not wish to condemn. I just ask that we all think of how fortunate we are to work with birds. Enough said. Last, but certainly not least, if you do not already own a pair of Rosellas, do yourself a favor, go out and buy a dozen or so and enjoy! ●