

The Genus *Barnardius*

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Taxonomists have argued for years over the proper placement of this Australian group of birds. Some have preferred to place them with the Rosella (*Platycercus*) and some have decided to isolate them into a separate genus (*Barnardius*). So, for the present, we will refer to them as the *Barnardius* group.

There are two species in the *Barnardius* group, the Barnard Parakeet or, as the Australians refer to them, the Mallee Ringneck Parakeet (*Barnardius b. barnardi*). This species has three subspecies, but only one of them has become focused on as an avicultural subject in the past few years, the Cloncurry Parakeet (*Barnardius b. macgillivrayi*).

The second species is the Port Lincoln Parakeet (*Barnardius z. zonarius*) which has two subspecies of which only one is being kept as an avicultural subject, the Twenty-eight Parakeet (*Barnardius z. semitorquatus*). This particular subspecies is the largest of the group, has the widest range and occurs in the most diverse of habitats.

As a group, *Barnardius* are excellent avicultural subjects, much like the Rosellas in dietary requirements, space requirements and nesting behaviors. In captivity, the group has a great tendency for becoming overweight. As a precaution, sunflower seed should be limited or eliminated altogether. A good cockatiel mix works very well, given with large quantities of green food such as spinach, New Zealand spinach, kale or romaine lettuce. Fruits and vegetables such as apple, pear, cherries, carrot, sweet potatoes, celery, corn on the cob and berries such as Pyracantha are relished.

Like the Rosellas, the *Barnardius* group can be readily appreciated in good size enclosures, somewhere in the neighborhood of four feet by 12 feet by eight feet. With flights sheltered on one end and protected from the wind, this group tolerates the

cold very well and can handle down to 25°F for short periods with no ill effects.

Generally, the breeding season begins in June and lasts through December, which is the Australian spring and beginning of summer. While this is winter in the U.S., the climate reverse does not seem to deter the group at all. Nest boxes provided should be 14" x 24" x 14". Clutch sizes vary from three to five eggs and if a pair has started early enough they will often double clutch.

The Barnard Parakeet occurs in Northern Queensland and across the interior of New South Wales through to the interior of South Australia. The adult males' crown and nape are a bright green bordered by a red frontal band and bluish cheek patches. There is a brownish V-shaped band extending from the eyes through the back of the head which meets a narrow yellow collar encircling the back of the neck. The underparts are a turquoise green with an orange-yellow abdominal band, which is often irregular. The back and mantel are deep bluish-black and the shoulders are yellow. The secondaries are green as are the rump and upper-tail coverts.

Hens are slightly duller than the males and are slightly smaller. Average size for this species is around 13-1/2 inches.

The Cloncurry Parakeet is perhaps the most beautiful of the group. The general coloring is a pale turquoise-green. There is no red frontal band. The lower parts of the ear coverts are a bright pale blue merging into a pastel bluish-green on the sides of the head, with a very wide uniform band of pale yellow. Again the hens are slightly smaller, but look identical to the males in coloration. This subspecies occurs in Queensland only.

As with many of the species of parrots that come from Australia, males will often come into breeding condition prior to females. It is wise to trim the adult males' first three primaries

on each wing, if they begin to show aggressive behavior towards the hens, such as driving them to the nest box or not allowing them to leave the nest box to feed. Often behaviors such as this will accumulate to the point, if left unchecked, of the hen losing her upper mandible.

The head, nape and upper ear coverts of the Port Lincoln Parakeet are dull black. There is a red frontal band in most, but it is not always present. There is a yellow collar on the neck and the back and the wings are a brilliant green. The yellow changes to a yellowish-green on the underside of the tail coverts and the vent as well as the under wing coverts are a bright blue. Again the hen is identical in coloring to the male, however, she is slightly smaller.

The Ports, as they are affectionately called, have the largest range of the genus. They are found throughout southern, central and western Australia, as well as ranging into the northern territory. This is probably the most adaptable species occurring in a variety of habitats throughout more than one-third of the coastal Eucalyptus forest of the southwest and in the wheat-belt or western Australia.

The Twenty-eight Parakeet is entirely green, with a pronounced crimson frontal band. While the female is similar, her coloration is slightly duller. This is the largest of the group, being 15-1/2 to 16 inches.

It is best not to house pairs adjacent to each other since they can be argumentative to the point of that is all they will do.

One caution with Ports and Twenty-eights is that they easily hybridize. While it is difficult to spot a hybrid, you will see a hefty bird with a broken yellow abdominal patch where as in true Ports the yellow should remain solid. In true Twenty-eights there should be no yellow at all.

The Europeans are now reporting mutations in Port Lincolns and Twenty-eights which are showing up with blue, yellow and cinnamon. So far there have been no reports of mutations of Barnards or Cloncurrys.

As the limitations of our ability to procure birds seems to be imminent, it is essential for aviculturists to ensure the safety and well-being of the species we have been able to establish. The *Barnardius* group is not there yet and it is imperative that we make it so! ●



Barnard Parakeets, pair, or Mallee Ringneck Parakeet (Barnardius b. barnardi)



A group of Cloncurry Parakeets (Barnardius b. macgillivrayi)

Twenty-eight Parakeet (Bardius z. semitorquatus)