

# Rosie

## The Qualities of a Handfed Blue Rosella

by Rich Long  
Lakekand, Florida

I had heard a lot about "Rosie," so I was really looking forward to meeting her. This was especially true, since she was of a species totally unfamiliar to me. Having lived in a jungle area of Venezuela for about 10 years, I had seen a wide variety of hook bills, softbills, and myriad water birds. Blue and Gold Macaws, mini-macaws, Black-headed Caiques, Red-billed Toucans, and several Amazon species, were common sights along the river. Thus, I did not really consider myself a complete novice to the bird world. Little did I realize how much I had to learn.

Other than having had pet cockatiels, I knew very little about Australian birds. Our "Rosie," however, opened up a whole new world of birds for our family. Granted, "Rosie," is not a very original name for a Pale-headed Blue Rosella (*Mealy*). Yet, it somehow fit her and we never thought more about it.

It all started in class. I teach secondary students Bible and Spanish at a local private school. During the course of the year, students usually discover my love for birds, as I often use them to illustrate various concepts. One afternoon, one of my students, told me about this "just from the nest" Rosella that his father was handfeeding. His description was vivid. I was fascinated by his talk of iridescent blues, purples, and black of the wings,

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the cobalt blue breast, and the soft pale yellow of the head. I was hooked! I just had to see this bird. He also mentioned that his dad was president of the local bird club (Imperial Bird Club, Polk County, Florida).

That evening his father, Richard Pearson, called me to inquire of my interest in the bird. After a lengthy and profitable discussion, it was decided that I could pick up the two week old Rosella baby the very next day. My wife, Carol, and I had handled many birds through the years, yet Richard was very careful to give me a refresher course and to teach me the nuances of hand feeding a Rosella. (They can be reluctant eaters.)

He was also careful to remind me that Rosellas were not normally kept as pets. He said that they only rarely talked and that "Rosie" would probably never form a strong bond with any of us. As a successful breeder of Mealy Rosellas (and several other Australian species), he emphasized that I would have to enjoy "Rosie" for her beauty and song and to expect little else.

The next few weeks were great fun for my family. We actually looked forward to feeding her. I continued with KayTee's Exact handfeeding formula, which proved very successful. Hand feeding was a special time for all of us, and most of all for "Rosie." She clearly

took delight in our attention. It was love time, cuddle time, and play time! Soon she was responding to us with peeps, coos, and whistles. Before she was weaned, she was wolf-whistling and saying "pretty bird!" If she had learned no more, we would have been happy. Her desire for learning was phenomenal. Teaching times were short, usually about five minutes once or twice a day. Since her cage was in our family room, we all spent time casually communicating with her. Soon she was saying, "I love you." When wanting a "Cheerio" or seed treat, she would ask for a "cookie." She then mastered saying "hi" by waving one foot. She even performed for total strangers. "Rosie" especially enjoyed "kissing" on cue. There has also been some limited success in putting pennies into a mini-bank!

What we enjoy most of all is her ability to whistle long portions of songs, usually adding a few trills and note changes of her own for variety. She is capable of whistling all of "Jesus Loves Me" and "Joy to the World!" At times, she improvises tunes that she heard on television. She still amazes us with new things from time to time.

For whatever reason, although I am the one who does the formal teaching of "Rosie," she is much more likely to perform on cue for my wife. Clearly, she prefers her voice to mine.

Because I had been adequately prepared by Rosie's breeder, we did not have any unrealistic expectations of her. I am convinced, however, that the bond that so solidly developed was the result of handfeeding. It was not only the actual feeding itself, but also the quality play time which became a mutually beneficial experience for all involved. It established the foundation for future learning and communication. I do not attempt to explain how all of that learning happens, nor why it happens. I only know that it does happen!

My experience with a "non-talking, non-performing" species may not be common. For many aviculturists it may even be deemed undesirable. Certainly some species by their nature and/or rarity, should never be kept as pets. Many commonly kept aviary birds, however, have individuals within the species which would make excellent pets. We will never know unless we give them the opportunity. Obviously, the odds for success are much greater if the bird is handfed. I am grateful that one caring breeder gave "ROSIE" a chance. ➤



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