

Breeding and Raising the Red-flanked Lorikeet

Charmoysa placentis placentis,
C.p. ornata and C.p. subplacens

by Sharon Thober
Tarzana, California

Editor's Note: Sharon Thober and her son Brook received an AFA First Breeding Avy Award for the nominate race of the Red-flanked Lorikeet *Charmoysa p. placentis* which hatched on June 29, 1987. Since then they have specialized with this beautiful lorikeet becoming the foremost avicultural authorities on this species. We wish to congratulate them on their work as this is not an easy species to reproduce consistently.

home 11 Red-flanked Lorikeets which had just been released from a quarantine station. I was surprised and delighted to see how tiny and colorful these little lorikeets were. They measure 6 to 7-1/2 inches in length one-third of which is tail length. Males and females are dimorphic in coloration. They look like two completely different species of lorikeets. The body color of both sexes is mostly green; the back and wings are a darker shade.

Males have bright royal blue ear coverts which are streaked with a vio-

let blue. There is variation in the subspecies. The male's cheeks, lores and chin are crimson red. Occasionally there is an iridescent aurora of aqua around the ear coverts on mature birds that can be quite outstanding, especially in the *ornata* subspecies.

The amount of red varies in individual birds, but *ornata* has considerable more red than *placentis*. These red feathers are sometimes scattered on the chest and lower body or extend down the throat. They sometimes appear in the cere.

The flanks on the side of the breast and partially under the wings of the male are always crimson red. It is the brilliantly colored red flanks of the male from which this species of lorikeet gets its name.

The *placentis placentis* and the *placentis ornata* have a royal blue rump patch. In the *ornata* it is very large and is still visible even when the wings are folded, especially at maturity. This blue patch in the *ornata* almost looks violet and is quite outstanding. This, combined with their more excessive red markings and slightly darker color of green on the nape, makes them notice-

In 1986, my son Brook brought

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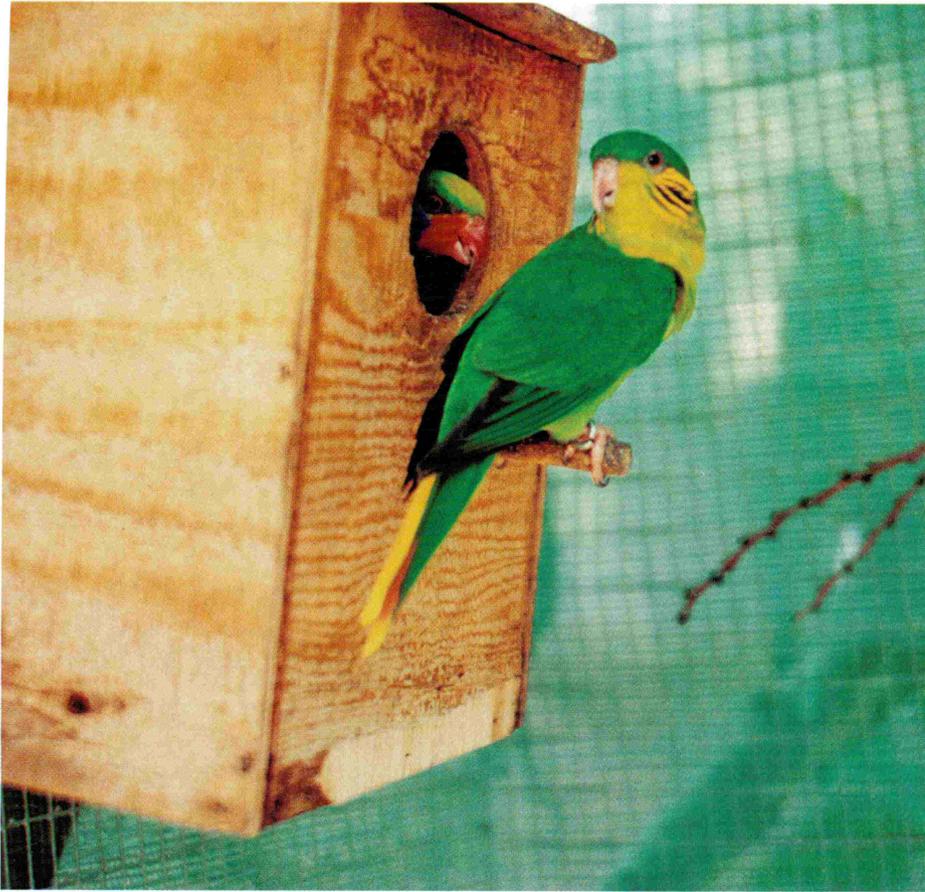
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The male Red-flanked Lorikeet guards his nest entrance while the female looks out. This subspecies *C.p. subplacens* shows the green rump.

ably different than the nominate *placensis placensis*.

The males have a yellow-green forehead and forecrown, almost chartreuse and the *ornata* males and immatures can have a spattering of red feathers in forehead and forecrown. When excit-

ed, all Red-flankeds can slightly raise the forehead feathers giving a look of a very small crest.

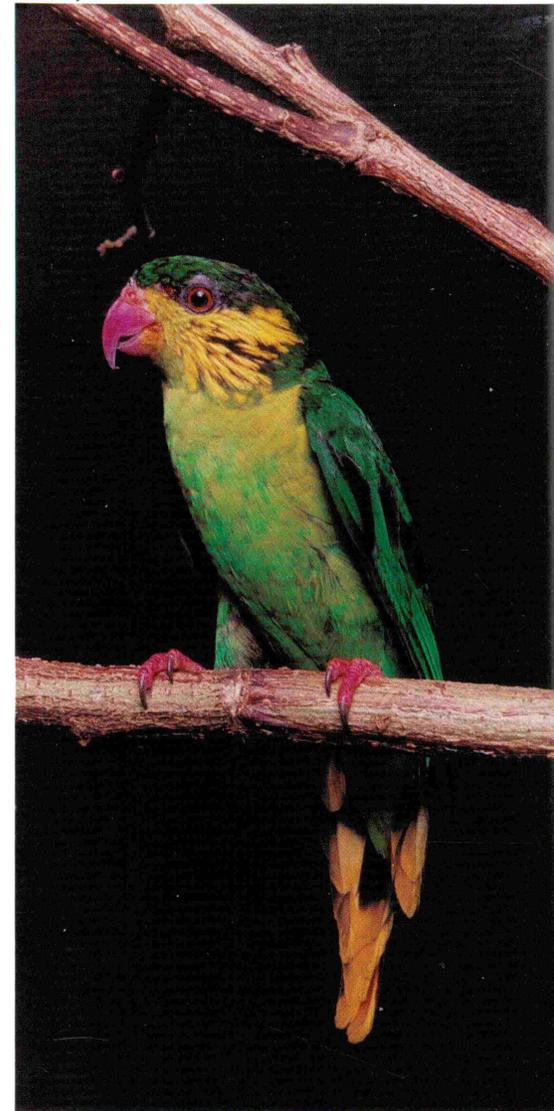
The *placensis subplacens* males and females have very much the coloring of *placensis placensis* males and females except they have *no blue* on the rump.

All our *subplacens* males or "green rumps" as we call them, have a lot of red on them, especially on the throat and flanks. They are slightly larger than the blue rump varieties although I have a few pair of *placensis placensis* and two pair of *ornata* that are the same size.

The females of all Red-flanked varieties have no red or blue color markings when mature.

Red-flanked hens were once thought to be an entirely different species of lorikeet, so different are their markings at maturity. The female has a dark green forehead and crown and ear coverts which appear the same green as the upper body, but in reality are a dark blue/black streaked with bright yellow feathers which flare when she becomes excited. These yellow feathers are seen in the nominate and subspecies of all our red flank hens, but in some individuals they are pronounced and profuse becoming more so as they

Photo by Linda Weitzman



The male Red-flanked Lorikeet

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mature. The iris of the eye of both male and female at maturity is orange with a very narrow eye ring of beige/gray next to the black pupil.

In immature Red-flankeds the iris is a dark brown/gray giving the baby a "big eye" look, almost like one large pupil. The iris changes rapidly to the mature coloring of the parents in just a few weeks once they have left the nest. The legs at maturity are an orange red, but are darker gray to black as babies, slowly taking on the color of their parents over a period of months. The bills are also black in the babies and slowly change to gray – then to pink-orange shade to the final color of red in the mature male. The female's bill at maturity is a softer coral or shrimp color in most individuals with a few similar to the male's color of red at maturity. In males, the color red deepens at the tip of the beak as it matures.

In both male and female *ornata* there is a color variation of turquoise blue on the lower feathering of the legs. We have noticed some have this wash of blue when only a few months old; others do not acquire these turquoise "pantaloons" until their sixth or seventh year.

We have one hen I raised from an egg in 1987 that has just acquired these "pantaloons," which are varying shades of turquoise and are very handsome against her coral colored legs. Immature Red-flanked Lorikeets vary greatly especially in the blue rump varieties.

Over the years we have had babies feathering up with the red feathers around the cere, cheeks and flanks and blue ear covers. At first we assumed these were males, but quite often some of these immatures slowly lost those male markings, acquired two or three yellow streaks on the blue ear covers and over a period of months (sometimes as long as five or six) became *definite hens*. We have had the reverse proven true also. A female immature slowly acquired male coloration. One little *ornata* male took almost a full nine months before I was sure he was a male. He kept three yellow streaks on his blue ear covers and dark green forecrown and forehead and took months to acquire his red flank. (He is now paired with an unrelated hen and has produced one baby male and so far it looks as if this baby will stay a male.)

We have always paired unrelated young together, same species and subspecies – we do not hybridize our Red-

flankeds so as not to lose the gene pool. We have acquired more imported Red-flankeds when they have become available. I am very careful when I acquire young Red-flankeds born in this country as so many have been crossed (blue-rump varieties with a green rump). It is sad when so many people set them up for breeding and never bother to check the subspecies. If you have a blue rump / green rump, put them in separate cages. Please do

not breed them. It is so easy to spot their hybrid babies if you have raised Red-flankeds. Those little hybrids must be kept together and never sold or bred.

I noticed this morning two *placensis subplacensis* "green rump" babies have just left the nest nine weeks old both feathered with markings of their father and looking healthy and happy. Their parents will have them lapping up their nectar and nibbling on apples or figs in a day or so, although I occasion-



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ally bring babies in before they have fledged and finish handfeeding them. If they are about the age of these two, it only takes a day or so of being with an older juvenile or a gentle adult until they are eating on their own, or better yet leave them with their parents for about two weeks – not much longer as the male can become aggressive towards them, *on occasion*.

I have also raised them from eggs after hatching them in the incubator when parents abandoned them, (usually caused by strangers 2-footed or 4-footed around the aviaries or an extreme change in weather). I prefer to allow them to fledge and stay with their parents a week or so before bringing them into my bird room for pairing with an unrelated mate.

Pairing

If you have enough Red-flanked Lorikeets, you can allow them to pair up on their own. If not, you can pair them up yourself with a bird about the *same* age and type. When the weather is mild, place them in an aviary of their own. I do not place siblings together to make a pair, and remember, please do not hybridize. We are their caretakers, and are responsible for their well being. Their gene pool is important, and once you hybridize it is lost forever.

Housing

We use a small aviary of all metal 3x3x4 feet or 3x3x6 feet long of 1/2" x 1" wire suspended on metal legs 3 feet off the ground. This allows their droppings to fall through to the grass and makes for easy moveability when rearranging cages. We try and place the cages under trees so they will have partial shade through the summer months and move them a bit if they need more sun in the winter months.

Each aviary is covered by a 2 foot runner of clear plastic attached to the upper and side portions of the aviary allowing one foot in the front portion uncovered, then we place green plastic nursery shade cloth over the two sides, back and top, leaving the front uncovered. This is fastened tightly with C-clips, and is removed and cleaned and replaced if necessary once a year. In the colder months a heavier plastic is attached to the top and both sides, leaving the front uncovered.

Once a year, we supply each cage with a Boston fern planted in a wire half

basket lined with sphagnum moss hung half way up one side of their cage. It takes up space, but the lorikeets get so much enjoyment from it. Some will play in it for months; others will tunnel in it immediately. We mist it every day, but in some cases the tunneling will kill most of the growth. The lorikeets get great pleasure and hours of exercise from it, keeping them well occupied and healthy; so to us it is well worth the cost and effort to provide. Always remember, only one pair of lorikeets to a cage. Red-flankeds will occasionally nest in the fern, making a cavity with two entrances; but they usually prefer a wood parakeet-size nestbox filled with pine shavings nearly up to the entrance hole of the box. The box is attached with a hooked door for periodically checking and changing the shavings and (hopefully) eggs and babies later on. Hang this nest box opposite to the fern and as high up as it will hook!

A water dish 2 in. deep by 6 in. in diameter is placed at the bottom of their cage. This we fill at least twice daily; and at the same time we wash off the bottom of the cage. Nectar is provided at least twice a day in a small dish – more often when birds are young. Young birds prefer nectar fresh and warm! We provide fruit in season plus apples each day – sliced, seeded and of course washed. They also enjoy pound cake soaked in warm water or nectar, and Zu-Preem primate monkey chow biscuit that has been soaked in hot water and allowed to plump. These are offered only occasionally in *small amounts*. They also enjoy "bottle-brush" blossoms. This plant is grown here in southern California as a bush, some becoming the size of large trees. Blossoms are broken off and offered two to ten per aviary daily when in season. Each lorikeet spends much time collecting the nectar at the base of each the red blossom and licking the pollen that has rubbed off and collected on his cagemates!

When feeding, lorikeet "brush tongues" are very active and reach around their beaks to wipe off every little bit of nectar and pollen that is left clinging to them. It is very amusing to observe these little characters busy at work.

Most important, before placing your lorikeets in their *outside* aviary, attach a piece of cloth the size of the door on the inside of the door, like a flap. We

attach it with C-clips at the top and sides about half way down the door. This will save you the loss of many a lorikeet! Without this extra precaution your lorikeets will zip past you while you are feeding or checking the nest box. We use tea towels or a cloth with a smooth surface so they cannot catch their toe nails in it. This cloth should also be bound so as not to fray and entangle your lorikeets as they are curious and will be tempted to climb on it. We replace it when necessary as it becomes soiled.

Red-flanked pairs are very affectionate with each other and love preening and playing together. When young, they tumble and roll around and are inseparable. As they mature – 11 months to two years – the male starts a more serious courtship of hopping and weaving around his mate with short bursts of energy and attempts to breed. If they are compatible, this occurs readily and often throughout the day, followed by more preening and occasionally the daily bath, etc.

When they decide to nest, which comes easily as the nest box is used for sleeping quarters year round, two eggs are laid approximately 1 - 3 days apart. They are round in shape and white. Both parents incubate the eggs; most are devoted parents. It is very important to provide privacy for the Red-flankeds and a routine that does not vary.

Incubation takes approximately 23 days, but can vary up to 48 hours. Sometimes the parents appear to spend more time than usual off their eggs. Don't be alarmed – this is normal. Observe them from afar and as long as they eventually go back in the nest box – all should be okay.

I check the eggs only once when the pair first goes to nest. At about mid-day I offer an apple slice or fig. When they come out to eat, I quickly check the eggs, make notes on my calendar, then leave them alone and just follow my normal routine. Close to the 23rd day, again at mid-day, after "fruiting" them, I check to see if any "little ones" have hatched. I check again two days later. Even if the second egg does not hatch, I leave it with the chick that has hatched. This gives comfort to the chick and something to rest its head on. Surprisingly, that second egg can hatch three or four days later.

If the parents have not discarded the unhatched egg by 14 days, I take it out and later open it to see if it was fer-

tile. Very often there is a completely formed chick that has not even begun to peck out of its shell. An experienced parent will actually release it from the egg if it starts to break the shell, but if it doesn't start the "breaking-out process," it dies within the egg shell usually because it became chilled.

I have also heard the second chick softly "peeping" within the shell; and a determined parent will help it out – completely removing the shell from the box. I have had two babies hatch the same day – one at 10 AM, another at 3 PM in the incubator and in the nest box, too – so there are variables in the incubation.

Baby chicks should not be more than four days different in age than their foster parents' babies as the size difference is too great and only the larger chicks will be fed properly. Three chicks for one pair of lorikeets to foster is OK up to 14 days. After that you may have to pull the smallest baby or it will not grow properly as it will not get its "fair share" at feeding time.

It is tempting to check on babies in the nest box, but it is better to leave them alone, providing lots of good food for

the parents to feed their babies. Once, you become familiar and experienced in their care and breeding you can check on them periodically when you "fruit" them.

Most parents will do a good job of caring for their babies if not pressured by human interference. Keep the same routine and do not be tempted to allow people to observe them until they have fledged!

Nest boxes do get very messy after about 14 days – at about mid-day, I change their shavings by placing the babies in a small container lined with paper towel. I leave the babies in the container on their cage floor. I remove the nest box quickly – tapping it upside down into a trash can and placing clean shavings, two inches below the entrance (pressing the shavings down "a bit"). I quickly place the babies back in and hang it back where it was before. I then immediately provide fresh nectar or figs or papaya in the cage for the parents to eat and in turn feed the babies. I advise you not to change the nest box as it will confuse the parents. If this procedure is done quickly and with a little pre-planning, I have never had

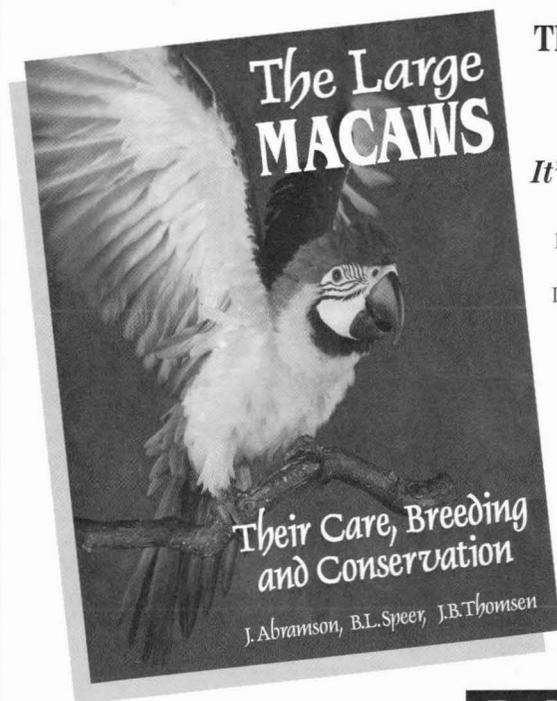
the parents abandon them. I repeat this procedure once a week until the youngster fledge at about 8-9 weeks of age. I also take that chance to feel their body weight and see that they are growing and healthy.

After the babies have fledged, I offer a new nest box and shavings, discarding the old one. I don't use chlorine bleach and soak them in the sun, as some lorikeets chew the sides of the nest box when brooding and wood that has been treated this way can cause problems. We discard old nest boxes and provide new ones. Nest boxes are made from untreated pine. We do not use cedar shavings, even in small amounts as they can be toxic!

Our baby bird room is basically a screened in porch, or lanai, 22 feet long by 8 feet tall by 9 feet wide, attached to the back of our house. We live in Southern California with a generally mild winter and a relatively warm summer. This screened-in lanai is an ideal environment for our lorikeets, allowing them free flight time several hours a day, year round.

Once a youngster is old enough to fly well within the confines of a 2 foot

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A screened porch freeflight area serves as exercise and fledging room for young Red-flanked Lorikeets.

by 2 foot by 18" cage, he or she is allowed access to free flight in the room and soon begins to socialize with other juveniles. This room has many potted ferns, palms and plants all, of course, non-toxic.

The interplay when all the lorikeet cage doors are swung open is a never ending joy and amusement to watch. There is a great deal of curiosity and exploring to do, climbing and flying up to the hanging ferns and on the top of each others' cages, lapping up a little extra nectar that I have provided on top of the cages for that burst of energy that is needed with so much activity. Naturally there is a certain amount of squabbling, but nothing serious, just checking everyone out and a lot of "zit-zitting" with short bursts of energy. That Zit-Zit is a natural call Red-flankeds make plus a "cheet-m cheet" raspy sound when confronting each other. These lorikeets have boundless energy, and are "busy-busy"! Once they take to the air they fly rapidly and glide agilely, zipping back and forth the length of the room, flying in small formations like brightly colored navigators. They are real "show-offs," and the little *ornata* males and females are *so quick* that when flight time is over they hide on the upper eaves of the rafters and ferns *defying* us to put them away. Only when enticed by fresh figs, apples and papaya offered inside their cages, will they finally return to their security.

It is interesting to us that even though babies have been raised together in a mixed group and are housed as juveniles in the same cages, when allowed the freedom of a large flight they naturally separate to their own subspecies or variety and we will often look out the kitchen window which faces their room to see all the *p. subplacens* (green rumps) sitting together preening and chattering; the *p. placentis* together, and all the *p. ornata* off in their own group. They may separate for a few minutes to play and preen with a little friend they have known since they were very tiny – some even being raised from eggs together within the incubator – but when given the opportunity to choose, they seek out their own kind. This is true, I have found, of all ages, when they are given enough space and time. Friendships seem to last a lifetime. We have lorikeets who were raised together, then separated and paired up, living for several years with a mate and having young. They still will acknowledge each other across the yard with a call if one is alarmed or angry about something. Birds brought back inside because they have lost a mate, have gotten very excited to see a friend so near after many years.

Lorikeets by nature are excitable, but there is something special about the relationships and moments of gentle, loving nature. I often wonder what is going on inside that little brain. They are

very smart and quick to learn.

After several years of raising Red-flanked Lorikeets, we are still learning. The more you have of them (we have raised over 50) and the more generations (we are on our third now), the more we discover new each day. Their unique qualities never cease to amaze us. Hopefully this article will be helpful to anyone interested in raising these little feathered jewels.

Red-flanked Nectar Diet

2 lb. canister of Spiritien, made by Natures Plus, purchased in health food store – high protein energy meal, Vanilla Dry Powder only.

16 ounces of Gerber Instant dry cereal Mixed Cereal

16 ounces of Gerber Instant dry cereal High Protein

8 ounces of powdered dextrose

8 ounces of powdered fructose

The cereal is put in the blender and ground to a more powdery consistency then all of the above ingredients are mixed together and stored dry in two air tight plastic canisters in the refrigerator.

When needed, mix one half cup of this mixture to a quart of very warm water, mix gently, but thoroughly. Offer warm whenever needed in fresh clean dishes. Do not top off! Should be replaced in cages at least twice to three times a day in warm weather. Young birds will need to be fed more often. The key to getting these lorikeets started is offering fresh warm nectar to them many times through the day and especially through the weaning process and when babies hatch.

Other Foods

Pound cake soaked in warm water just for a moment before you offer it to them – just a one inch square will do.

Zu-Preem Primate Chunks soaked in very hot water. You can microwave them for a minute if you wish. Allow them to puff up and cool off to just warm, and feed them once or twice a week in the cooler months.

One cup of frozen mixed vegetables cooked to just warm about two minutes in the microwave.

One cup of beans and legumes sprouted.

One cup blueberries or cranberries when available in season.

Two apples cored, seeded and chopped to 1/4" chunks all mixed together and offered to all about 10 AM.

I offer all our birds this mixture. Baby African Greys, Blue-rumped Parrots, Blue & Gold Macaws, and other lorikeets, all like this mixture. Double and triple the amounts, of course, if you have many birds. Offer this everyday. *I add cooked mixed beans in cooler months only.*

Fruit in season is offered:

Dried figs soaked over night in hot water can substitute for fresh.

Ripe melons, figs, pomegranates, papaya. Fruit is offered about 2 to 3 PM and nectar is replaced again about 4 - 5 PM. ➤