

EASTERN ROSELLAS AND THEIR MUTATIONS

There are three basic races of Eastern Rosellas. One is native to Northern NSW and Southern Queensland and is known as the Golden Mantle. The Southern race of Eastern Rosella is found in Central/Southern NSW through to Victoria. Tasmania is home to its own race of Eastern Rosella which is the largest of the three and the least common of the Easterns held in captivity.

Easterns are fairly easy to cater for in the aviary situation although it is not recommended that suspended aviaries are used since these birds are a type of grass parrot and can be rather flighty if they have space underneath them, without the opportunity to fossick on the ground.

The speaker has a bank of nine aviaries with a walkway at the back and front with feeding slots in the back and front of each pen. Heavy gauge 25mm wire is used with each aviary being double wired.

To this point, Peter has only kept Eastern Rosellas but has started to diversify into crimsons, which in Europe, have about 40 mutations.

Basic seed is canary mix with a little sunflower added in a ratio of 6 to 1. A small amount of green feed is fed all year round with most being picked from the wild, being careful to ensure that what is collected has not been sprayed or too heavily polluted with traffic fumes. Endive, which is similar to thistle, seems to be most favoured by the rosellas. When this is not available, silver beet and apple are fed together with a little bit of sweet corn. Water bowls are stainless steel and elevated off the ground. On most days water is changed twice per day. Grit, cuttlefish and pigeon blocks are also made available.

Birds are wormed once per year using crop needles. Panacur™ and Avitrol™ are the wormers used in rotation. A hospital cage is a must to provide birds with warmth when they have experienced some form of stress such as hawks hanging around the aviary. Veterinary advice has also been given that birds can get concussion from knocking their heads after being frightened. If this situation occurs, you have a 50/50 chance of saving the bird if it is placed in a box and then kept in the dark in a cupboard for a day or two. Provide a little water and feed for the bird during this time. If you do nothing then you have a 100% chance of losing the bird.

When breeding mutations, it is important to keep exact records by using a closed ring on each bird. The nest box is best made of cheap hardwood and fitted with a flat metal lid. Fence staples are nailed into the side of the box to allow access for the birds. Easterns do not like being in hot boxes so when necessary the lids are opened up and the boxes placed on the floor of the aviary where it is a little cooler. Hardwood sawdust is placed in the bottom of the nest box at breeding time. Once the nest box becomes too soiled or dilapidated, it is discarded. During the off season the boxes are taken out of the aviary. Breeding can be stimulated by giving the birds green feed – thistles, chickweed etc. A small amount is fed at first with the amount gradually being increased. Once breeding has started it is not advisable to change the nesting material, but it can be added to, if necessary. Rosellas can only be kept one pair per aviary with no other birds in with them. Peter does not hand rear birds, but if problems occur will foster out eggs to other Easterns or Kakarikis, which apparently make very good foster parents.

Peter keeps and has bred the following mutations – red or opaline (a bird with a straw coloured tail); a second red mutation which has less flecking and pink in the tail; cinnamon mutation; black mutation (this mutation is the only one which is dimorphic and has very little red in the body or head, but in the cock bird the head and front turn red after about two years); lutino (this strain has two mutations, one with a silver streak down the shoulder and wing) dilute (this mutation is not strongly established, they do not seem to be strong breeders and much work can be lost if one bird dies and the out breeding has to start again); pied (this is a very rare mutation but is slowly becoming established); yellow headed (established in both the red and green forms); blue (now lost).

Secondary Mutations – In this group the cinnamon red is well established. Rubinos are also found in good numbers and are one of very few species which have both red and white in their colouring. Also in the secondaries are the pied red, the cinnamon black (which is not common), the very rare cinnamon lutino and the lutino black.

A few triple mutations are now starting to appear including the cinnamon black/cinnamon red; cinnamon red/black, cinnamon red/rubino, cinnamon red dilute with efforts being made to breed a rubino/black.

One of the problems cited with mutations is that they come and go as breeders lose interest in one type and move on to something else.

Based on a talk given by Peter Rankine at the UBSSA Seminar held in the Enfield Community Centre on Sunday May 30th 2004.