

MY EXPERIENCES WITH PRINCESS PARROTS

By Martin Hilton

One of the first parrots I started keeping was the Princess Parrot and twenty years later I still keep three pairs.

Early Experiences

A \$110 was a reasonable amount of money for a pair of birds especially as the hen died a month later. I replaced the hen and was delighted with the eleven young that were raised by this pair.

Princess Parrots

While this species are not as brightly coloured as some parrots, I find their subtle colours quite attractive. Apart from the breeding season they are quiet birds. My mother-in-law made my father-in-law return a pair of blue Princess I gave him due to the cocks 'machine gun' like call. It is fairly loud but I do not find it annoying.

Being fond of good mutations, I like the blue, cinnamon, yellow and to a lesser extent the white Princess. I only keep normal and blue Princess currently, having learnt the hard way not to spend too much on mutations. I'm quite happy to wait several years for more experienced aviculturists to do the hard work of establishing newer mutations! The main attraction to me of albino (white) parrots is the challenge of breeding them from blue and yellow birds.

Feeding

My birds are fed budgie and striped sunflower seed. Soaked seed consisting of striped sunflower, wheat and feed oats is fed daily. I have not found Princess Parrots to be very fond of fruit except for apple, corn on the cob and pomegranates. Frozen corn and peas (thawed out) do not interest them, but they are very keen on silver beet and seeding grasses. I feed the silver beet while it is only 20-30 centimetres long and only the smaller varieties. A lot of books recommend blanching silver beet before feeding it to birds, but I have never done this. Mineral blocks made of shell-grit, mineral grit, cuttlefish, charcoal, baked eggshells and plaster-of-paris are always available, as is clean water.

Breeding

Princess will often breed at twelve months old and double-brood, with clutch sizes usually ranging from four to six chicks. They nest in either boxes or logs and I use a mix of sawdust and unfertilized potting mix in the nest. This nesting mix is put into the microwave on high for four minutes to kill any nasties. Princess are very good parents. One year I swapped a hen for another bird and neglected to worm her and all three pairs in the colony became infested with round-worms. One hen died leaving five chicks less than a week old and the cock bird raised all five chicks by himself.

Colony breeding does work as long as the aviary is large enough and has at least two dry seed feeding stations and two soaked seed and fruit feeding areas. I only keep one pair of Princess to an aviary now days. I did try a pair of Bourke's with a pair of princess one year the cock Princess and hen Bourke ignored their own mates and paired up, so I separated them. A local bird keeper had a lutino Indian cock and a Princess hen in a holding aviary. They raised one chick. Hybrid breeding should be strongly discouraged, especially as it is illegal to hybridize protected birds in South Australia.

Another interesting occurrence with princess is some have been bred with unusual colouring. The late Ron Hastings of Victoria had Princess Parrots with red backs and I have also seen birds with lots of pink flecking down their fronts. Both types are very pretty.

Health Problems

As already mentioned Princess are susceptible to worms but quarantining new birds and a regular worming program will help solve this problem. I also had a bird with 'watery' eyes. After many trips to the vet, medicines and cultures were taken, but with no lasting results and the bird was put down. It is the only Princess I have seen with this eye problem. Generally Princesses are hardy birds. On hot days they can look sick and listless but once the day cools down they will liven up. If they are perching on one leg they are fine but birds perching on both legs may be sick and need help.

Conclusion

Princess Parrots are not only ideal aviary birds they also make excellent pet birds when hand raised.