

# THE KING PARROTS

## AN INTRODUCTION



AUSTRALIAN KING PARROT

Photo: Robyn Jay

The King Parrot family consists of three medium-sized parrots in the genus *Alisterus*; the Australian King Parrot, *Alisterus scapularis*, the Papuan King Parrot, *Alisterus chloropterus*, and the Moluccan King Parrot, *Alisterus amboinensis*. The range of the species is Eastern Australia, New Guinea, and Indonesian islands including the Maluku islands respectively. Predominantly of

red and green plumage, these long-tailed parrots are related to the genera *Aprosmictus* and *Polytelis*.

King Parrots are 35-43cm (14-17 inches) in length with long, broad tails. The beak is relatively small in comparison to their body size. The adults have bi-coloured beaks: blackish on the lower mandible and orange-reddish on the upper. However, there are two exceptions to this beak pattern: the subspecies *buruensis* of the Moluccan King Parrot which has a grey-black beak, and the female Australian King Parrot which has a grey beak.

The Papuan King Parrot and the Australian King Parrot are sexually dimorphic in colouration, but the Moluccan King Parrot male and female have identical plumage.

The two subspecies of the Australian King Parrot are similar but the more northerly bird is smaller in size. The head and neck of the male is a red, as are the under-parts; the rump and back are blue, the wings green with a pale-green shoulder stripe. The female has a red lower abdomen, the chest, back, neck and head are green, the pale-green wing band is small or absent.

All three subspecies of the Papuan King Parrot are sexually dimorphic. The males of all three subspecies have a prominent broad pale-green band on each wing.

The females of the three subspecies vary more in appearance than the males. The female of *A. c. moszkowskii* has the same green wings, and a red head, neck, chest and abdomen as the male, but differs in having a much smaller pale-green wing-band. The females of the two other subspecies; *A. c. chloropterus* and *A. c. calloterus* broadly differ from the males in a similar manner to that of the Australian King Parrot, but the chests of the females of these two subspecies have indistinct transverse green and red striations.



Australian King hen  
Photo: Peter Firminger

All three species are forest-dwellers, and can be found singly, in pairs, or in groups. Australian Kings sometimes gather in groups of up to thirty or more around food sources, the Papuan Kings sometimes form groups up to ten, and the Moluccan Kings may gather in groups of five or six. The diet of the three species is similar; consisting of seeds, fruits and berries.



Gregory Mathews  
1876-1949  
Photo: courtesy of  
National Library of  
Australia.

Classified in the subfamily Psittacinae within the true parrot family, the genus *Alisterus* was described by Australian amateur ornithologist Gregory Mathews in 1911. Previously to that they were considered part of the genus *Aprosmictus*, which contains the Red-winged Parrot, *Aprosmictus erythropterus* of Australia and the Olive-shouldered Parrot, *Aprosmictus jonquillaceus*, of Indonesia and East Timor.

The most closely related species are those of the genera *Aprosmictus* and the long-tailed parrots of the genus *Polytelis*. There are similarities in food begging and contact calls by chicks, and by molecular analysis in 2005. This study also showed the latter species to be related to the genera *Eclectus*, *Tanygnathus*, and *Psittacula*.

There are three King Parrot species with having several subspecies:

**Moluccan King Parrot, *Alisterus amboinensis*, (Linnaeus, 1766)**

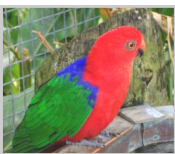


Photo: Scott Hamlin

- *Alisterus amboinensis amboinensis* (Linnaeus, 1766)
- *Alisterus amboinensis buruensis* (Salvadori, 1876)
- *Alisterus amboinensis dorsalis* (Quoy & Gaimard, 1830)
- *Alisterus amboinensis hypophonius* (S. Müller, 1843)
- *Alisterus amboinensis sulaensis* (Reichenow, 1881)
- *Alisterus amboinensis versicolor* (Neumann, 1939)

**Papuan King Parrot, *Alisterus chloropterus* (E.P. Ramsay, 1879)**

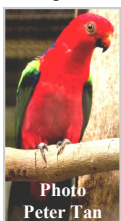


Photo  
Peter Tan

- *Alisterus chloropterus callopterus* (Albertis & Salvadori, 1879)
- *Alisterus chloropterus chloropterus* (E.P. Ramsay, 1879)
- *Alisterus chloropterus moszkowskii* (Reichenow, 1911)

**Australian King Parrot, *Alisterus scapularis* (Lichtenstein, 1816)**

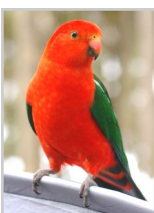


Photo : "latch.r "

- *Alisterus scapularis minor* (Mathews, 1911)
- *Alisterus scapularis scapularis* (Lichtenstein, 1816)

The individual species will be dealt with in following editions.

R.V.C. With help from Wikipedia