

MULGA PARROT

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Psephotus*

SPECIES: *varius*

OTHER NAMES: Many-coloured Parrot or Parakeet, Varied Parrot



Description: Small bright, multicoloured parrot. The male's head, neck and breast are brilliant green. The forehead, shoulder bar and under tail are yellow and the back and wings a dark green. There is a red patch on top of the head. The margins of the wings are blue, flight feathers purple and the rump light green with two bands. The upper band is dark olive, the lower reddish brown. The tail is dark purple-blue, green at the base and there is a scarlet area on the abdomen.

Females have a brownish green head, back and upper breast. The crown has a dull red patch, the forehead is greenish and red mixed. The wings are green with a red shoulder patch and the underparts are pale green. Immature birds resemble the adults, but the males have reduced or absent patches of red on the belly and thighs and have a red tinge on the shoulder patches. An off-white bar under the wing is variably persistent until around 12 months of age.

The Mulga Parrot is quiet and unobtrusive and is mostly encountered in pairs or small parties - rarely in flocks. Its foraging and general behaviour is similar to that of the Red-rumped Parrot.

Subspecies: None.

Length: 275-280mm.

Distribution: Erratically distributed across interior mainland



Australia from central NSW westwards.

Habitat: Arid woodland, especially Mulga, but also mallee, cypress pine and box woodlands.

Diet: Seeds of various grasses and herbaceous plants.

Breeding: August-December, but is dependent upon good rainfall. The usual nesting site is a cavity in a tree (as low as 2-3m above ground) or sometimes a fallen log/post. The female incubates the eggs whilst being attended and fed by the male. Both sexes participate in rearing the young. In captivity Mulga Parrots will readily take to a nest box. Logs may also be used however. Boxes should be approx. 35cm x 15cm x 15cm and hung vertically. Similarly, logs should have roughly the same internal diameter and be a little taller. As these birds nest very early, there may be some difficulty in breeding them in temperate areas. At night the hen is apt to leave the chicks uncovered in the box (before they are sufficiently feathered). Because of this, it is best practise to withhold a nesting box/log until spring is in full swing.

Courtship Display: Like the Red-rumped Parrot, the Mulga Parrot cock settles on a perch and stretches to his full height. He pushes the shoulders forward to reveal the blue and yellow markings and fans the tail which he wags from side to side. This is accompanied by much head bobbing and is followed (usually) by courtship feeding (i.e. by regurgitation).

Sexual Maturity: Mulga Parrots become sexually mature and capable of breeding at 12 to 15 months of age.

Clutch: 4-6 white rounded eggs (25mm x 19mm). Incubation period: 19 days. The young usually fledge at around 28 days but remain with the parents until the following breeding season.

Mutations and Hybrids: Mutations in this species are as follows: a form with a bluish tinge and a pale red rump (occurs at Innamincka (SA)) and a Yellow (or Cinnamon) (sex linked). The Mulga Parrot has hybridised with Red-rumped Parrots, Blue-bonnet, Hooded and Golden-shouldered Parrots.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds: As a minimum, a single tame bird could be housed in a small cage provided it measures around 400mm x 400mm x 600mm (approximately). Birds kept in this way should be provided with the opportunity for exercise every day. For breeding purposes, these birds are best kept to themselves and the best results are often obtained in suspended breeding cabinets (around 1200mm x 1000mm

x 600mm). Mulga Parrots are quite amicable and will readily share with other birds such as Red-rumped Parrots and *Neophema* Parrots and even Budgerigars.

Species Specific Problems: Mulga Parrots have a tendency to become overweight when kept in small aviaries. This is easily remedied by removing the majority of oily seeds (such as safflower and sunflower) from their diet. Mulga Parrots also do not take well to wet or damp conditions, and it is important that their aviary floor is covered with sand or fine gravel. Because Mulga Parrots spend quite a great deal of time feeding on the ground, they are at risk from fungal infections and intestinal worms. This is relatively easy to prevent by maintaining a high standard of hygiene.