

GREEN ROSELLA

Platycercus caledonicus

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Introduction – Natural History

This common, endemic bird is well-known to many Tasmanians. It occurs throughout a wide range of forest types, from the mountains to the coast. It also occurs on the Bass Strait Islands. Although its diet consists largely of seeds, it also feeds on fruits and berries. It often comes to the ground to feed. It is usually seen in pairs or small flocks, although larger flocks tend to form in autumn and winter. Breeding occurs during spring and summer, and 4-8 white eggs are laid. Tree hollows are used as a nest.

Description:

The Green Rosella has an overall body colour of yellow on the under parts, as well as the top of the head to behind the ears. In contrast the upper parts, from the back of



the neck extending to the back of the wings, rump and tail feathers are a dark bluish green. The outer parts of the primary flight feathers and tail feathers are similarly coloured with a mix of light and dark florescent blues. The cheek is blue and a band of red feathering across the cere completes the facial features. The legs, nails and eyes are a grayish-black in colour, while the beak is ivory in colour.

The species is basically monomorphic i.e.: both sexes look similar in appearance. Females are considered to be smaller (32cm compared with 37cm) and paler in colour. Other features used to sex birds include:

- The males head shape is usually broader and larger in shape

- The female beak tends to be narrower
- Males tend to have a more darker and brighter blue cheek patches than females. An orangeish blemish can be seen on the neck region, just under the blue cheek patches in adult females.

Sexing birds is only easy with a pair. Should you have two males or two females in a cage, sexing will be a lot more difficult, so care is required when sexing birds in bird shops and other areas selling these birds, just because there is two birds in the cages doesn't necessarily mean they are opposite sexes.

Young Birds: Young birds have a white under wing stripe that is lost when they mature, which is usually around 12 to 14 months. At this time young males will become brighter in the yellow areas, and their head and beak will be larger and broader than females. In addition, young males may start to show courting behaviour.

Avicultural Notes

Feeding: The Green Rosella may be fed a Small Parrot seed mix, or Parrot Pellets, along with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. They will also need a source of grit and enjoy gum branches, which provide recreation as well as food. A good worming program is essential to maintain good health.

Hybrids: The Green Rosella may hybridise with other rosella species as well as with other broad tailed parrots, such as the Mallee Ringneck and Port Lincoln. Other species such as the Red-rumped Parrot may also breed with the Green Rosella.

Compatibility: Like other rosella species, with perhaps the exception of the Western Rosella, the Green Rosella is fairly aggressive towards other species of birds and is not suitable for a mixed collection. Don't make the error and consider their blunt looking beak not to inflict any serious damage. The Green Rosella could easily kill most birds in or out of breeding season, as well as inflicting an unforgettable bite on fingers if held incorrectly. Therefore the Green Rosella should be housed as a single pair to an aviary without any other species. Aviary types can either be standard flight aviary or suspended aviaries. An adequate aviary size should allow for at least

1.5m x 2m x 3.5m for one breeding pair. Larger free flight aviaries are better for the birds and allow them to show off their keen flying ability. It is a good idea to obtain an unrelated young pair of birds so they can grow and bond together. Rosellas can become quite noisy at times, especially when wild birds are near by.

Breeding: The breeding season in Australia usually lasts from late October to January, while sometimes they are able to double brood. Unfortunately this time can include some of our hottest weather, not ideal for a bird that normally lives in a cold climate. This often leads to heat stress and nest losses and has been cited as the reason the species has never achieved high popularity on the mainland. Chicks are hatched with a dark thick down and later develop a woolly secondary down. This does nothing to improve their sensitivity to heat!

Clutch size: 5-6 eggs.

Incubation period: 20 to 21 days

Nest box size: Nesting logs offer better insulation than boxes and should be wider at the base than the top to allow the chicks to spread out in hot weather. Due to their sensitivity to heat, birds should be housed in the shadiest aviary and the nest box protected from direct sun. On very hot days sprays or soaked sacks may be used to cool the log down and the lid removed to allow heat to escape.

Summary: Although a species that has never been very popular in South Australian aviaries, the Green Rosella is an active alert bird with neat plumage. It needs a shady, large aviary with water sprays and other devices to escape the heat, especially when breeding. This coupled with recreational activities and a healthy diet is all that is required to keep and breed Tasmanian Rosellas successfully.