

# **INDIAN RINGNECKS : IDEAL FOR BEGINNERS**

**By Martin Hilton**

I have kept Indian Ringnecks for 18 years and have gained a lot of enjoyment from them.

One problem that I have heard of from a couple of new-comers to aviculture is buying expensive mutations and then becoming disappointed for various reasons. I only buy birds I really want and never with the idea of making money. It is not always the sellers fault either. I sold a blue Indian cock and a lutino hen to a casual friend – he simply would not believe me when I told him all the young would be green. The hens he breeds will be split for blue and the cocks split for blue and lutino. So a basic knowledge of genetics is an advantage!

## **Aviaries**

Indians tend to live and breed in any size aviary but I think the bigger the better applies – if you have the room. Some people say that young Indians erratic flight causes injuries in long aviaries but the only times I have had this happen is twice when young birds have flown into the perch sticking out of the nest log. I now use square blocks of wood at the entrance hole of nest-boxes.

Most of my Indian Ringneck aviaries are 4m long, 1m wide and 2.2m high. They are only this height so that the birds can fly over my head when I'm in the aviary. I've had no trouble keeping Indians next to each other providing that the aviaries are double wired, but I only have the top half of the aviary double-wired.

## **Water**

Indians have a bad habit of dropping orange peel, corn cobs, shells and anything else they can pick up into their water bowls. My water bowls are large, glazed ceramic bowls, which are easy to wipe clean. During hot weather a mist spray comes on 4 times a day for four minutes.

## **Feeding**

The dry seed I use is Budgie mix with grey striped sunflower, feed oats, wheat and pigeon peas. This is fed daily. Indians are great when it comes to fruit as they are willing to try anything. Once I was listening to an A.B.C.

gardening program on the radio on which the Gardening expert stated that birds could not taste the heat in chillies. This did not seem right to me so I picked a chilli, tasted it to make sure it was not too hot, and then gave it to a hand-raised pet Indian. I can tell you that birds can **definitely** taste the heat in chillies!

### **Rings**

I have seen a couple of Indian Ringnecks with only one foot. They had squeezed their aluminium rings tight, cutting off the circulation to their foot. Eventually the foot drops off – birds are tough! I have had birds squeeze their rings but have cut the ring off before any permanent damage had been done. Stainless steel rings solve this problem. They have to be put on with special pliers but cannot be squeezed flat or removed. The only problem I have with them is that the letters and numbers on them are very small and hard to read.

When ringing young birds be sure to put only two birds with each leg ring colour in the same holding aviary, with each bird having a ring in a different leg. This information I write down when sending feathers for DNA sexing so that when the results come back it is easy to know which bird each result applies to. For example: the sexing card will read “Blue hen left leg M.S.741 aviary number two, 2004 Indian Ringneck.

### **Sexing**

It is easy to sex most adult Indians as only cocks have the rings around their necks. I say most, as albino cocks do not have the ring. Many years ago I purchased an adult pair of lutino Indians. Breeding seasons came and went with no breeding success, despite trying different boxes and logs. After three years the hen changed into a cock! Nowadays I prefer to young DNA or surgically sexed birds and wait.

### **Breeding Age**

Eighteen years ago Indians seemed to take three years to mature and colour up. Hens laid for the first time at three years of age but cocks often had to be four before they mated successfully. Nowadays I have two year old hens laying eggs and being fertilised by three year old cocks. In 2003 I had my young birds DNA sexed and kept three cocks from different pairs: fifteen months later two of the cocks have their full rings. I have also checked up on cock birds I had sold and most of those I tracked down had their rings. Why the change has happened, I do not know. Maybe it's something in the food? There has always been the odd story of an aviculturist buying two split blue birds and breeding four blues when they were only twelve months old. Maybe birds with trait are becoming more common?

### **Breeding**

Indians usually lay around four eggs in August in a box or log. The log should be around 90cm long with an inside diameter of 20-25cm and an 8cm entrance hole. The eggs take between 21-24 days to hatch and the young take seven weeks to leave the log. Some pairs sit together and often groom each other. One year a good breeding cock died so I put a new cock with the hen. They never went near each other so when the hen went into the log I swapped him for another cock bird. Within a week she started laying eggs and the new cock helped her raise the young, even though I could tell by their colour that they were not his. I often change pairs around, especially to breed different colours.

### **Conclusion**

Indian Ringnecks are good looking birds that are usually good breeders. They can be noisy, especially when someone or something new comes into the yard.

I recently heard of a NSW aviculturist buying three beautiful violet Indian for \$50,000 each! Hopefully he did not mortgage his house, they start to breed soon – and hold their price. In other words, only buy birds you really like and can afford to lose.

### **Further Reading**

*A Guide to ... Asiatic Parrots in Australia.* Published by Australian Birdkeeper and available from the Society's Book Steward, Jack Hannant.