

THE BLUE BONNETS

Psephotus haematogaster

By Keith Hocking



This is a group of Australian Parrots that are very much overlooked, in aviculture currently. The lack of popularity of Australian Parrots in general, and the lack of “hit you in the eye” colour and their reputation for aggression and difficulty to keep plays against them.

They are basically a grey bird with a yellow and red abdomen, blue on the face and blue at the fold of the wing, there is some olive brown to the tail and on the wing coverts of the yellow-vented and a red to olive-red on the wing coverts on the Red-vented. The Naretha is smaller and has an amount of brighter almost iridescent blue on its face. Blue-bonnets are approximately 28cm in length.

Fortunately there are a number of people around Australia who are working with these birds and seem to be dedicated in ensuring they do not disappear from the avicultural scene entirely.

I had never kept Red-vented Blue Bonnets, *Psephotus haematogaster haematorrhous*, until I purchased a pair, at a bird auction in the year 2000, not the best way to purchase the only pair of birds available as they were offered individually, and there was a chance of the price being run up as I needed the second bird to make the pair. Anyway I was successful and took these birds home and settled them into an aviary that I deemed suitable and supplied a choice of nesting sites, I was fortunate that these birds settled in and eight months later we fledged four young, this breeding success continued for the next two seasons, it appears that the change of residence in 2003 with its upheavals of moving birds and aviaries and the resiting of same upset the birds as no more were bred until I had purchased some new blood and moved birds about until they were happy. Breeding again took place in 2006, but not from the original pair which are probably still waiting for conditions to suit at the new premises. There was no breeding of the Red-vented in 2007 as the second very trying season of hostile weather and lack of rain seems to have affected them.

I was drawn back to Yellow-vented, *P.h.haematogaster*, by a chance encounter in July 2006 at a Bird Dealer’s premises, and realising that I had not seen many, if any, in aviaries for some years and also remembering how much I had enjoyed keeping and breeding the Yellow-vented Blue Bonnet when I lived in Cleve 30 years ago I was sure it must be time to

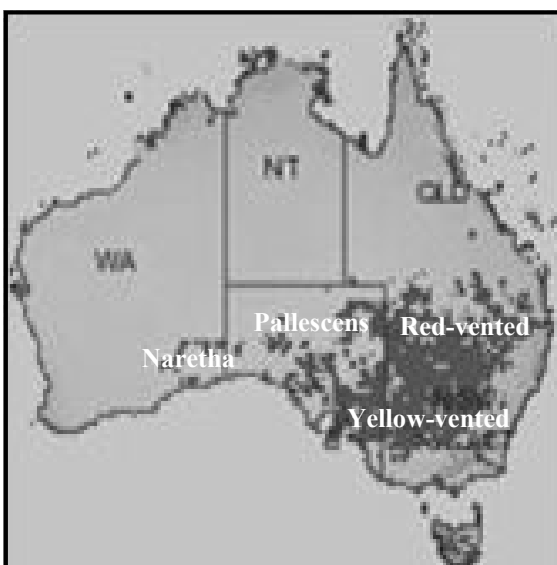
revisit these birds, and therefore bought the pair available. Subsequently, some months later I was able to obtain another pair. In the 2006 season it was, as expected, too much to hope that the birds would nest as they were still getting used to our aviary regime, although I had hoped all would be well.

Season 2007 was almost a replica of 2006 weather-wise and lack of rainfall, but as time went by it was obvious that the Yellow-vented were going to at least try and nest. They were left without unnecessary interruption and we were rewarded with success from both pairs, a nest of 3 and a nest of 1 (with 2 infertile eggs also) this was pleasing to say the least.

A pale version of this sub-species *P.h.pallescens* which originates from the lake Eyre basin is not widely kept in aviaries, however there are some and when seen, the difference in colour to *P.h.haematogaster* is obvious.

There is a fourth member of the Blue Bonnet family, viz, the Little or Naretha Blue Bonnet, *Psephotus h. Narethae*, which I have not kept in our aviaries but have observed in the aviaries of friends who have kept them over the years. This bird may be more expensive but in fact may be easier to obtain as more people seem to have made the effort to continue the work of establishing them for the long term in Australian aviaries. If it had not been for the determined work of a few in the late 1970s this bird would be gone from South Australia and possibly other states as Governments were determined at that time to see these birds, along with the Golden Shouldered, *Psephotus chrysoptergius*, and others were made unavailable to aviculture.

Distribution of the Blue Bonnets is shown on the accompanying map:



We house our blue bonnets in a variety of aviaries that are 900mm wide, 3600mm long, 2100mm high, with about 1/3 shelter. Another the same size, but 2/3 shelter and also 900mm wide, 1800mm long, 2400mm high and 2/3 shelter. Our nest boxes which have been the most successful are 300mm in height, 160mm in width and 1600mm in depth, they have a lift-up door on one side and an entrance hole centre top of the front wall of approximately 75mm, the inside front is fitted with a ladder of wooden cross



pieces, the top of the box is hinged to allow for cleaning and replenishment of nesting material which we make from a coarse basic potting mixture (ensure no fertiliser has been added), if you have access to well rotted sawdust and/or crushed white-ant nest these would make an alternative medium.

Nesting activity can begin as early as July with nest inspections and much displaying and bowing, head nodding and erection of the head feathers into a small crest added to wing squaring and a low whistle at times. We find the end of August, or a little later, to have been our successful times and have had clutches of 3 or 4 eggs although there are reports of up to seven making some clutches. Incubation is usually from the second egg and takes approximately 22 days with the young leaving the nest at approximately 30 to 32 days after hatch, they can be a bit flighty in the first days out and are always wary, or you could say nervous. It is recommended that you move steadily about your aviaries when in their vicinity. This is, in fact, a good rule of thumb at all times around aviaries.

We have found that Bluebonnets appreciate not being disturbed when they are nesting even though the hens sits tightly. It has always seemed that if one was to hassle them they would resent the interference and give up nesting activity. In fact we have had success in some aviaries that could best be described as dark and/or isolated.

As far as neighbours or near neighbours I would not be suggesting any of the *Psephotus* species within two or three aviaries. If your aviaries have solid dividing walls you may even be better off, although even then I would not have near relatives next door.

We feed our Bluebonnets a staple dry feed of small parrot mix, and from July to the end of March-early April we also provide a mixture of fruit and vegetables with sprouted seed daily.

In adult males the under-wing stripe is almost always absent (some young adult males may still carry remnants of the under-wing stripe, so don't get caught out) and present in females, in young it is present although sometimes to varying degrees. With these birds, and the availability of DNA testing, it is not unusual to be asked for DNA Testing Certificates to accompany immature



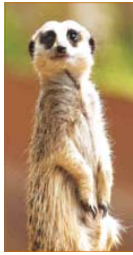
birds when sending to a new owner.

When housing young, after moving from their parents, you will need to ensure no over crowding, not even mixing different broods, as they have been known to attack each other, or pick on one particular bird with disastrous results.

An understated bird well worth the trouble to have and enjoy in your aviaries.

Photos: K.A. Hocking

FREE ENTRY TO THE GORGE WILDLIFE PARK



Our Co-patron, Yvonne McKechnie, has kindly granted free entry to the park for members and their families. Also, a special discount will apply for accompanying friends. To gain this privilege all that is required is production of your **current** Membership Card when entering.



We thank Yvonne for her generous gesture.

This informative monthly Newspaper is now available at a Special Members' Price of

\$3.50 per issue
Normally \$4.95

See Tony Melbourne at General Meetings (sorry not available by post at this price)



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Kilkenny Grain & Fodder, 106A David Terrace, KILKENNY. (08) 8347 1554

Please Note - Membership cards are being issued to all new members and will be automatically sent with future renewals.

Q: Is there a right way of ringing birds for identification?

A: No, but in most parts of the world the cock is rung on the right leg and the hen on the left. This is particularly useful when the two sexes are visually identical.

