

AGAPORNIS...THE LOVEBIRD FAMILY



FISCHER'S LOVEBIRD
Photo: BS Thurner Hof

Lovebird is the commonly used name for the genus *Agapornis* (from the Greek agape for love, and ornis for bird), and can refer to any of the nine species of the genus. They are a very social and mutually affectionate parrot.

Lovebirds are about 13-17cm in size, 40-60gms in weight and are characterized by a small, stocky build and a short, blunt tail. This puts them among the smallest parrots in the world, although their beak is rather large for their overall size. Most lovebirds are a blend of blue, green and red tones, but colour mutations can feature many different colours. Some Lovebird species, like Fischer's, Black-cheeked, and Masked Lovebirds, have a white ring around the eye. Their lifespan is 10 to 15 years.

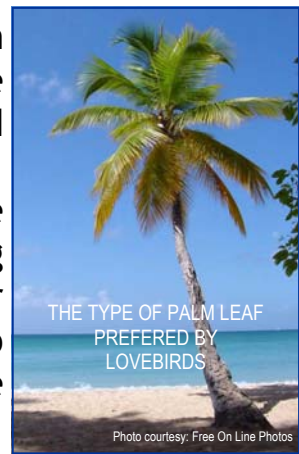
Eight of the nine species in the genus come from the mainland of Africa. The ninth species, originates from Madagascar. In the wild the different species are separated geographically. Lovebirds live in small flocks and eat mainly seeds, fruits, vegetables and some grasses. Black-winged Lovebirds also enjoy figs and [insects](#).

Some of the species are sexually dimorphic (male and female visually different). These being the Abyssinian, Madagascar, and Red-faced Lovebird. While the rest are monomorphic (no easily discernable visual difference). Lovebirds can produce offspring with other species within the same genus. Therefore it is important that only birds of the same species are housed together. If this is not done worthless, genetic polluting hybrid offspring will result.

Their diet should consist of a wide variety of foods, including whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. They should not be fed any dairy-based products. Nor should avocado or rhubarb be fed. Carrots, beans, silver-beet, broccoli and corn are foods that provide healthy proteins. Grains should include white millet, canary seed, Jap millet, grey-striped sunflower and hulled oats*. Apple, pear and sweet grapes will be appreciated. They will also benefit from various seeding-grasses and parrot pellets. The addition of soaked seed in the breeding season will not only stimulate the birds to breed, but is an easily digested nutritious food for rearing. Be sure to change any perishable food within a few hours of feeding or at the maximum within the day.

*winter months only.

They prefer to sleep in a nest box, usually with the hen inside and the male either on top of the box or just inside the entrance hole. Palm leaves are by far their preferred nesting material. These should be fresh when supplied, as they then retain moisture when packed down into the nest, and thus provide essential humidity for the hatching eggs. Dry nesting material will not only dry out the inner membrane of the egg (making it harder for the young to cut their way out), but will also turn to dust and cause eye infections.



Eggs are laid every second day, with the average clutch being six or seven.



PEACH-FACED AT 10—12 DAYS

The incubation period is eighteen days. However, the hen usually doesn't start sitting until at least the second egg has been laid. Fertility is good, usually 95% of the eggs laid are viable. It is important that humidity levels are kept high at hatching time. Most hens will achieve the desired level by returning to the nest very wet after bathing. However, if this isn't happening, and the weather is hot and dry, it may be necessary to gently spray the eggs with a mist of tepid water a few days prior the estimated hatch date. The first young will hatch at about twenty-one days after the first egg was laid, with the remaining eggs hatching every second day. The young usually take forty-two days to fledge, a little longer in very cold weather.

Some of species are no longer available in Australia, those commonly available being:

- Peach-faced Lovebird, *Agapornis roseicollis*
- Masked Lovebird, *Agapornis personatus*
- Fischer's Lovebird, *Agapornis fischeri*
- Nyasa Lovebird, *Agapornis lilianae*.

THE PEACH-FACED LOVEBIRD

Also known as the Rosy-faced Lovebird in some parts of the world, the Peach-faced Lovebird is a species

native to arid regions in south-western Africa, such as the Namib Desert. They are loud and constant chatterers,

and being very social birds congregate in small flocks in the wild. They eat throughout the day



NORMAL PEACH-FACED FEEDING YOUNG



DISTRIBUTION OF THE PEACH-FACED LOVEBIRD

frequently. Females are generally larger than males, but males are usually somewhat brighter.

Being an arid-land species used to living on a poor quality diet, but eating a lot to get enough nutrition, Peach-faced Lovebirds thrive in captivity when fed a balanced diet. However, care should be taken to avoid over feeding rich oily foods, which will quickly make them run to fat.

A deep Budgie-type nest box is the best roosting and nesting receptacle. Unlike the other *Agapornis* species available in Australia, the Peach-faced does not build a fully domed nest, just a saucer of material in the bottom of the box. Also, females tear the nesting material into long strips, tuck them into their rump feathers, and fly back to their box to make a nest.

Peach-faced are, on the whole, good parents. Although an occasional pair will feather-pluck the youngsters' backs if they are anxious to go back to nest. If this happens, the young come to no harm and soon regrow the missing feathers.



To be continued.



THE WISE OWL SAYS...newly hatched King Quail are so small they can easily get through 12mm (½”) wire for the first few days. Therefore, it is necessary to have at least the bottom 150mm (6”) of the aviary sides covered with flatiron, or similar, to prevent escapes. Also, they cannot easily manage seed for the first few days, and as most aviaries wont have enough small insects present to satisfy their needs, it is necessary to supply them with “egg & biscuit” for the first few days until they are old enough to eat seed.

If using black poly piping for a sprinkler system on an aviary, it is important to drain the system when not in use. Legionnaires' bacterium, *Legionella pneumophila*, has been found to occur in such systems after a long period without use; and this bacterium can be fatal to humans.