

# **BIRD OF THE MONTH**

## **KEEPING THE RAINBOW LORIKEET**

By Paul Stevens

### **Introduction**

The Rainbow lorikeet is without a doubt a most beautiful looking bird, kept here in Australia by a wide range of bird enthusiasts from the beginner to the more experienced. In its group it has many sub species, along with the nominate race, the Red collared lorikeet is the other species widely kept. Other sub species known to me are, the Green-Naped, the Mitchell's, the Weber's, the Edward's, the Rosenberg's, and the Massena's. These birds are kept in very small numbers, some as little as two birds only. Of these sub species the only one native to Australia is the Red collared lorikeet.

### **Other known names**

Other names given to the Rainbow Lorikeet are Bluey, Lory of the Blue Mountains, and Mountain Lory.

### **Size & Distinction**

The Rainbows overall length is around 26cm, the forehead, lores and chin are of a blueish colour, with the rest of the head sometimes showing a darkish brownish tinge. The nape reaches around the back of the neck, and is of a greenish yellow colour. The breast feathers differ in colour from reddish, yellowish, and orange. I believe this differs from areas where the birds are found. The lower abdomen is blue, with the under parts of the wings being yellow/orange. The upper parts of the wings, the tail, and the rest of the body is a darkish green colour. The bill is a bright orange colour.

### **Breeding**

Rainbow Lorikeets are usually good breeders, although some are renowned to eat their eggs. This can usually be overcome by giving them a calcium supplement, such as *Calcium Sandoz*, or *Calcivet*, or by taking the eggs away and placing them under foster parents. Most lorikeet species have only two eggs, and the incubation period is around 23days, although I have had eggs hatch after 26days, and have had birds lay three eggs. Many breeders take the young away from the parents after around three weeks for hand rearing, but if left with the parents they will fledge after 56 to 64 days. Young stay dependent on the parents for a further 2 weeks.

For nesting boxes, a recommended type to use is a standard type box, measuring 350mm x 200mm x 200mm. A good nesting material to use for Rainbows is a mixture of wood shavings and peat moss potting mix, and it is recommended to clean the nest boxes out every two weeks whilst young are in the nest. After cleaning them out they should be sprayed with *Coopex*, to kill all types of mites.

In captivity, when given the right diet and housing, Rainbows can breed all year round, although as mentioned only having two eggs at a time, this can mean they can have around 6 babies per year. When taken the young away for hand rearing, they can have more depending on the parents.

## **Housing**

Housing for Rainbow Lorikeets is recommended by the way of suspended cages, although they are kept in conventional type aviaries as well. In my experience, the better way is the suspended cage, as they can be better maintained and set up in rows for breeding individual pairs. This gives you a better breeding programme, and there is no fighting or confusion. The minimum size cage would be 2m x 0.6m x 0.9m, but of course a larger one would be more suitable.

## **Feeding**

Rainbow Lorikeets are natural nectar and fruit eaters, they should not be fed on seeds of any type. There are a lot of commercial lory dry formulas on the market these days, these are usually made up of glucose, rice flour and a range of other different ingredients. People with a large amount of lorikeets or lories may make up their own formula, saving them costs on feeding. Any Lory dry formula should be kept in a sealed airtight container, so it does not go off and then be harmful to the birds. Stainless steel dishes are a great way to feed and water lorikeets, they are very easy to keep clean, a smaller one for the lory dry and a larger one for water. Rainbows will take the dry mix and mix it with water themselves, this causes it to become a wet mix, and also gives the birds a type of activity to do. Along with this, a good wet mix formula can be given, there are also commercial formulas available.

As well as the main diet, fruit and vegetables should be given such as apples, pears, oranges, and corncobs. There are a range of other fruit and vegetables that can be used. I feel that one half of a piece per pair per day is quite sufficient, but more can be given. To have good success with lorikeets, both lory dry and fruit should be given each and every day, with a good wet mix given every other day.

## **Mutations**

There are a range of mutations now established in aviculture, with others coming through. The mutations that are known to me are as follows, Grey/green, Jade, True olive, Aqua, Cinnamon, Mustard, Pied (different variations), Blue fronted, and Lutino. There was once a blue mutation, but this bird soon died from complications.

## **Compatibility**

Rainbows mix well with their own kind, and other species of lorikeets and lories when placed in bigger cages. They should not be in the same cages as seed-eating birds, they will get on good enough with these sort of birds, but are then introduced to seeds.

## **Conclusion**

The Rainbow Lorikeet is a truly Australian icon, known all around the world as such. Although very common in Australian aviculture, it is great to see them in their natural environments in coastal areas. They are not an expensive bird to buy, and when placed in the right housing is a colourful inclusion to any collection. They can be kept both in pairs or together as a colony, this is an individual choice. Although the normal race is a truly colourful specimen, there is a range of mutations now available. They make great pet birds, but kept in small inside cages can become somewhat messy. Along with their cousins, the Scaly Breasted Lorikeet, they would be what I would recommend as a great starters bird, they are easy to breed, therefore keeping an interest in them. Lorikeets are a great favourite of mine and I can only speak highly of them, to have them in my collection of birds is truly something I will have for quite some time.

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