

RAINBOW LORIKEET

FAMILY: *Loriidae*

GENUS: *Trichoglossus*

SPECIES: *haematodus*

Other Names : Coconut Lory, Rainbow Lory, Blue-bellied Lorikeet, Swainson's Lorikeet, Blue Mountain Lorikeet, Blue Mountain Parrot.

Description : Medium to large strikingly coloured lorikeet with like sexes. The head is bright blue with lighter feather shafts. Yellow green collar on the nape, rest of upper parts including tail green. Breast and sides of belly bright yellow orange barred with dark blue. Large patch of deep blue on centre of belly. Thigh, lower flanks and under tail coverts green strongly marked with yellow. Outer wing marked with yellow and outer wing primaries green washed with dull blue. Underwing coverts orange washed with yellow and narrow yellow band on underside of flight feathers. Eyes are orange red, the bill coral red and legs green-grey. Females are generally a little smaller than males.

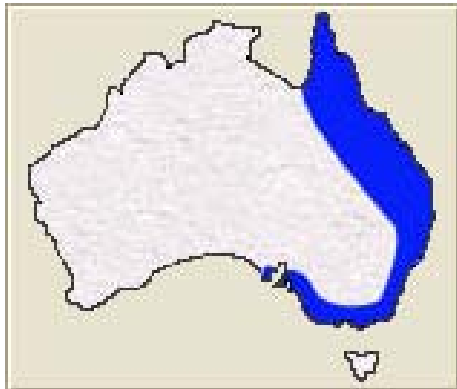


Immature birds are duller than adults with a shorter tail, brown eyes and a brown bill with yellow markings near the tip.

Rainbow Lorikeets are usually seen in pairs or flocks and often occur in mixed flocks such as with Scaly-breasted Lorikeets to which they are similar in size and behaviour. Rainbow Lorikeets are strongly gregarious and essentially arboreal.

Length: 300mm.

Subspecies : A population in the Top End is distinguished by a conspicuous red band across the nape. This form was formerly recognised as a distinct species (*T. rubritroquis* or *Red-collared Lorikeet*) and is still regarded as such by aviculturists.



Distribution : Apparently, the Rainbow Lorikeet has declined in the south of its distribution since the arrival of Europeans and is now uncommon south of about Sydney (NSW). Throughout coastal lowlands of

northern and eastern Australia. An introduced population is well established at Perth (WA). Elsewhere it is widespread from Indonesia to Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

Habitat : Wet sclerophyll forest, rainforest, mangroves and other coastal forests, suburbs and urban areas with trees.

Diet : Mainly nectar, but this is substituted with also pollen, seeds, fruit and insects.

Specialised diets have been developed for lorikeets in captivity. These are pollen and nectar substitutes and a number of reputable brands are now available. Essentially, these come in two forms; a wet mix (nectar substitute) and a dry mix (pollen substitute) both of which are essential. Although these diets are designed to provide the essential requirements for lorikeets, they must be substituted with other foods such as fresh fruits (apples and pears, stone-fruits, most citruses, banana, melon etc.) and seed. You will find that certain fruits are preferable to others at particular times of year (eg. citrus is preferred in summer).

Breeding : August - January.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity (often at great height) lined with a layer of wood dust.

Despite the fact that the male spends much time in the hollow, especially at night, only the female incubates the eggs. Both parents feed the young however.

In captivity, Rainbow Lorikeets are easily pleased with respect to nesting receptacles. They will accept both hollow logs and nest boxes, however for the sake of practicality it is best to use nest boxes as these are much more easily cleaned and maintained between broods. Logs should be around 60cm - 80 cm deep with an internal diameter of around 25cm and an entrance near the top with a diameter of around 8cm or so. Boxes should be approximately 25cm x 25cm x 45cm. The best position is vertical in a fairly sheltered spot. Preferred nesting material is wood-dust or shavings. Shavings should not be too coarse so as to prevent the eggs becoming buried in it.

Courtship Display : Males approach hens stretched to their full height. With the neck arched, they bob the head and hop along the perch, all the while emitting a low whistle. The pupils constantly dilate and contract during this process. The female's interest will depend on how near to nesting she is.

Sexual Maturity : Rainbows appear to mature at around nine months of age. However most birds do not breed until 18 months or two years old.

Clutch : Two or three white oval eggs (28mm x 23mm). Incubation period: 26 days. The young usually fledge at around 50-55 days.

Mutations and Hybrids : A golden yellow form has appeared in Australia. Little is known about this form however.

Rainbow Lorikeets are known to have hybridised with Scaly-breasted and Musk Lorikeets. Hybrids have also been recorded between this bird and the Chattering Lory (*Lorius garrulus*) and the Ornate Lory (*Trichoglossus ornatus*).

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds : Rainbow Lorikeets may be kept singly or in pairs in a medium sized 50cm x 50cm x 65cm suspended cage. Clearly however, larger cages offer more room to fly and choices for the inclusion of a nesting box etc. Although these birds usually spend the night in a nesting box, it is good practise to provide larger aviaries with some form of shelter (partially covered roof and sides) to offer some protection from the elements. Rainbow Lorikeets are generally intolerant of other birds and it is therefore best to house them in separate pairs. They will however, share an aviary quite peacefully with other larger lorikeets such as the Rainbow and Musk, but it is unlikely that they will breed under these conditions. The best breeding results are obtained when these birds are housed in breeding pairs.

Species Specific Problems : Because lorikeets have specialised diets (part of which is liquid) and a very short gut-passage rate (and hence produce large volumes of liquid faeces) they are very susceptible indeed to bacterial and fungal infections of the digestive tract. This means that in order to avoid disease a high standard of hygiene is essential. Similarly, aviaries and feeding stations should be constructed in such a way as to minimise the opportunity for birds to foul their foods.

Fungal infections tend to manifest themselves as slimy or cheesy blobs inside the beak, throat and crop although milder cases may not be as easily detected. Bacterial infections, on the other hand, are usually detected by means of examining the faeces. Faeces of an infected bird may have either a (too) large liquid component or (more commonly) is discoloured and tends to be green. In less virulent infections the bird may just seem lethargic and disinterested in foods or toys etc.

Other problems encountered in lorikeets include feather plucking of nestlings by their parents (unavoidable when encountered except by removing chicks for hand rearing) and psittacine beak and feather disease. The latter is an incurable

condition which is transmitted through the faeces. The disease prevents proper feather formation and feather loss and causes the beak to become weak and crumble. Birds carrying this disease are best destroyed as it is debilitating and inevitably leads to death.

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