

Rosellas



This fact sheet gives an overview on keeping Rosellas.

The family of birds known as Rosellas are probably amongst the most widely

kept and bred of the Australian parakeets. Certain members of the family can offer a start into the hobby of breeding birds for the beginner, but they can also offer a challenge for the more experienced fancier.

What's in a name ?

The origin of the name “Rosella” seems to have been lost in the myths of bird keeping time. Two stories have emerged over the years as the most likely candidates for the naming of this group of birds.

The first seems to come from a name given to the birds in the wild where they were first found—now a part of Sydney but in the 18th Century, known as Rose-Hill. This name, over the years, has supposedly been hybridised – this being the “Rose-Hill or Rose-Hillier Parakeet”. This is quite possible—a simple change of a name has been used in the bird world before.

The second story is from a simple spelling mistake made in the middle of the 18th Century. It would seem quite likely that the name of “Rosetta Parrots” may have been given to the birds, being named after the Christian name of the wife of George Fife Angas, a pioneer of Southern Australia. Several place names are still to be found in Australia named after his wife such as Rosetta Harbour a small town on the coast. In a diary from John Gilbert a slip of the pen – forgetting to cross the “t’s”, may have resulted in the name being used right up to the present day.

Anyway enough of the history lessons. The Rosella family consist of a group of eight species and many subspecies, which are regarded as some of the most colourful birds available in aviculture. The group as a whole are classified under the heading *Platycercus* – this Latin name can easily be interpreted as “*Broad Tail*” or “*Flat Tail*”, hence the family is also known as broad tailed parakeets. All forms of Rosella should be kept in pairs, as they are well known for their quarrelsome nature. If you wish to keep more than one pair it is advisable to put a quieter species in between them, such as Barrabands, Cockatiels or Splendids. The eight main species of Rosella can be split into two groups :

Group 1 – Green Rosella (sometimes referred to as the Tasmanian Rosella)
Crimson Rosella (also referred to as the Pennant’s parakeet)
Adelaide Rosella
Yellow Rosella

This group are the four largest physical species. All four species have blue

cheek patches and the young, when fledging the nest, are mainly green. The hens sometimes show a slight wing bar on the underside of the flight feathers. Cocks show NO wing bars. The cocks and hens of these species both show the same colour markings so sexing birds can be difficult. The cock bird can usually be sexed by his more powerful looking beak, quite often it is broader across the head than the hen bird which carries a more delicate “feminine” looking beak. (Looking at the beaks of a cock and hen side by side should help to clarify this statement).

Group 2 - Eastern Rosella (this species is not readily available, however a sub species of the Eastern Rosella, the Golden mantled Rosella is easily available)
Mealy Rosella
Northern Rosella (better known as Brown’s Rosella)
Stanley Rosella

The Stanley is the only form of Rosella where the difference between the sexes in plumage is obvious. The cock birds show a bright yellow cheek patch, whilst the hens normally have a duller yellow cheek patch. The young of this group fledge from the nest in a dull coloured plumage similar to that of the parent birds. The cheek patches are white in colour (except the Stanley) and the hens often show a wing stripe on the underside of the flight feathers.

The Species in More Detail

The **Green Rosella** or **Tasmanian** (*Platycercus caledonicus*) is the largest of the Rosella family. It is to be found in the wild throughout the whole of Tasmania, living their lives amongst the dense woodland and mountains. Because of their ability to live in a somewhat colder region they can cope quite easily with the UK climate.

The **Pennant** (*Platycercus elegans*) is to be found throughout Eastern and Southern Australia, where they love to inhabit the many Eucalyptus and Acacia Forests. Three sub-species have been recognised. As aviary birds the cock can prove to be very aggressive and will constantly chase the hen, however once they have become established they can prove to be prolific breeders. Many colour mutations are now becoming quite common. A Blue mutation is particularly striking as the normal red marking have been replaced with a silver-grey plumage. Yellow, White and Lutino mutations are also beginning to be more readily available to the average bird keeper.

The **Adelaide Rosella** (*Platycercus adelaide*) is said by some to be in the

middle of the species between the Pennant and the Yellow Rosella. It has been suggested over the years, that in the wild the Adelaide is the result of where the Pennant and Yellow Rosella cross breed. The jury, I'm afraid, remains out on this subject. However to add further debate to the arguments two sub-species of the Adelaide have been recognised. Within aviculture the Adelaide does not appear to be very popular, this could be due to the fact that sometimes it shows a very dull plumage. Several colour mutations have been bred in Australia, including a Lutino and Cinnamon form.

Yellow Rosellas (*Platycercus flaveolus*) are becoming quite popular again in this country. Their numbers have declined as less and less attention has been paid to them as an aviary species. This species is slightly shy than Pennants or Adelaide's and tends to be more flighty when kept in a small flight. The suggested size of flight for this species is at least 12 feet long x 7 feet high and 3 feet wide. A pied colour mutation is now available.

Golden-Mantled Rosella (*Platycercus eximius ceciliae*) Because the Eastern Rosella is very difficult to obtain, the next best thing available to the beginner is the sub-specie, namely the Golden-Mantled Rosella. This is a very easy species for the beginner as it is now extremely cheap to purchase stock, it does not need any special attention, it will breed readily and the hens will rear the clutch of chicks without too many problems. Their only vice is that sometimes the cocks can become extremely aggressive towards the hen, so it is advisable to provide a nest box for the hen to use as a bolt hole, but ensure the cock does not keep her captive in the box and let her starve. Several colour mutations are now well established including Lutino, Rubino, Red, Cinnamon and Pastel.

The **Mealy Rosella** (*Platycercus adscitus palliceus*) is a sub-species of the nominate race the Blue-Cheeked Rosella (which has white cheek patches with blue shadings on the bottom of the patch). The Mealy is quite easy to keep and again is a good bird for the beginner. Often referred to as the Pale Headed Rosella, the youngsters, when they first fledge, often have several red feathers on the top of their heads. These disappear after the first moult—as yet no satisfactory explanation for this has been given. A pied colour mutation is now available and there are rumours of a Lutino being bred in Australia.

The **Brown's Rosella** or **Northern Rosella** (*Platycercus venustus venustus*) is perhaps the most beautifully coloured of all the family, with its unusual light yellow (almost golden) plumage and its distinctive bright blue shoulder patches. This species comes from the tropical rain forests of Northern Australia, and when kept in this country can be susceptible to our cold climate. They do not prove very easy to breed, and when you are able to obtain a proven pair, they often only have 1 or 2 chicks a season. They can also prove to be very

choosy about their partner. If one of the pair dies unexpectedly it is often very difficult to get the remaining bird to accept a new partner. Another of their problems is the fact that they do not adapt easily to our summer months, and are quite often ready to breed in the middle of winter. Some breeders have adapted their nest boxes so that they are heated, this way the eggs and chicks do not get chilled quickly when the hen leaves the nest box. Their dietary needs are different to the other Rosellas. In the wild they are known to consume more insects, beetles and grubs than other types. This species is only recommended for the experienced breeder. No sub-species or colour mutations have been reported for this Rosella.

The **Stanley Rosella** or **Western Rosella** (*Platycercus icterotis icterotis*) is the smallest member of the family, and is probably the least aggressive by nature. The Stanley is also the only Rosella that can be visually sexed. The cock bird usually has a strong coloured yellow cheek patch, whilst the hen's cheek patch is not so strong. Immature birds, when they leave the nest, show little or no signs of cheek patches until their first moult in the Autumn. One sub-species of the Stanley has been recognised. A blue mutation of the Stanley is now becoming established in Australia. A Lutino mutation has also been reported but as yet has not been established to breed true.

How Do You Sex the Birds ?

The simple answer to this is from observation. Most of the Rosellas can be sexed by looking at several obvious features on the birds. The first and most prominent is the size and shape of the beak. Cock birds normally look stronger and bigger across the nostrils, whilst the hen birds show a slightly narrower beak across the nostrils and very often look more delicate. Cock birds also sometimes look brighter in plumage than the hens. Some breeders go by the shape of the head and nape of the cock and say that the cock's head will often be flatter. In the second group the hens may display a small wing stripe of white feather on the underside of the flight feather. However, young birds also show this wing stripe until the moult, when the young cock birds will lose the white feather and show a clear grey colour under the wing flight feather. These are just general guidelines, the most obvious solution would be to trust the breeder you are buying the birds from and ask him/her to show you the differences in the species you are purchasing.

Housing

Long flights benefit all of the Rosellas. A flight of at least 10ft is recommended for most species, but obviously if you are able to provide a longer flight then the birds will benefit from the extra exercise. The choice of wire is quite

important because some birds have a habit of sitting next to the wire mesh trying to close the gaps on the wire. 19-gauge wire is not really suitable, when housing these birds (apart from the Stanley). It is recommended that a heavy gauge wire is used.

The Rosella family as a whole are very hardy and do not suffer any adverse affects from the British weather. They should be provided with frost proof sleeping quarters and also quite large perching, so that they are able to cover their feet with their feathers thus preventing any frostbite. The exception to this statement is the Northern Rosella, this is NOT a hardy bird and heated winter quarters should be provided. These should be fairly large to allow the birds full exercise.

Feeding

Rosellas benefit from a good quality parakeet mixture, containing mixed millets, plain canary, striped sunflower, safflower, buckwheat, all forms of nuts etc. Hemp should be offered in small quantities as the birds can become quickly overweight if they eat too much of this seed. A regular supply of fresh vegetables and fruits should also be offered, such as carrots, spinach, peas, corn-on-the-cob, apples, oranges. The Brown's Rosella needs to be offered more fruit and vegetables than the other Rosellas. Their diet should contain at least 30-40% fresh produce. They should also be offered the occasional live food, which they will relish.

All members of the family love to bathe regularly, (bathing water should be changed daily). Cuttlefish and grit should be available at all times.

Breeding

What have we done to the family of Rosella's over the years ? The first most obvious point is that when birds came into breeding collections within this country in the 18th Century, very little was recognised about the sub-species that have since been classified. So the early breeding birds were allowed to cross breed. For example, the Eastern Rosella and the Golden mantled Rosella have been allowed to cross hybridise for many years. So now we have a strain of birds that we like to call Golden Mantled Rosella's, but how true is the gene pool ? Very few pure bred, 100% Eastern Rosella's are available in Europe. The Pennant is another case in point; the species and sub-species were interbred many years ago. If you intend to breed any of the Rosellas, ensure that the birds that you purchase are true to type and have not been crossbred or hybridised with any other family member.

Many birds that are available to the beginner are not the size that they should

be. Most good books on the subject can give you the correct size for all Rosellas. Some birds offered for sale appear to be small because they have been inbred and produced small offspring.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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