

Psephotus Parakeets



This fact sheet gives an overview on keeping Psephotus Parakeets.

Taxonomy (the classification of flora and fauna) has for many years caused many arguments between the experts and the aviculturists, as to the grouping of certain species into families. This fact is very true of the family of *Psephotus* parakeets. For the purposes of this fact sheet the group of birds collectively known as the Blue-bonnets have been included. Some experts like to group the Blue-bonnets into the genus *Northiella*.

With the above in mind we can quite easily classify the *Psephotus* group into the following sub-groups.

- a) The Red-rump Parakeet (*P. haematonotus*) and Many Coloured Parakeet (*P. varius*) – The sexes are dimorphic and easily sexed visually. These two types of birds nest in the wild in tree cavities, trunks and hollows.
- b) The Golden Shouldered Parakeet (*P. chrysopterygius*) and its sub-species the Hooded Parakeet (*P. c. dissimilis*) – The sexes are still dimorphic but this time they are specialist nesters requiring cavities excavated into termite mounds. (The now “extinct” Paradise Parakeet would have also fitted into this category).
- c) The Yellow-vented Blue-bonnet (*P. haematogaster haematogaster*) and its three sub-species, the Red-vented Blue-bonnet (*P.h. haematorrhous*), the Pale Yellow-Vented Blue-bonnet (*P.h.pallescens*) and the Naretha Blue-bonnet (*P.h. narethae*) – This time the sexes are very similar in colour, so it becomes more difficult to sex the birds visually. The Naretha Blue-bonnet and the Pale Yellow-Vented Blue-Bonnet are not easily available to breeders in this country so we will only detail the other species.

All birds within the *Psephotus* family like to enjoy mutual preening and can prove to be very aggressive towards their own kind and other species. For this reason it is best to house a pair on their own in a flight. The young birds are best removed from the parents once they become independent.

The *Psephotus* group is thought to be the intermediate link between the smaller *Neophema* grass parakeets and the larger *Platycercus* (Rosella) families. They are slightly heavier in build than the Splendid and Bourke, and are able to use their powerful flight to cover great distances in the Australian outback. Studies over the past 15 years have revealed that the bond that exists between breeding pairs is very strong. So much so, that if one of the pair dies unexpectedly, care should be taken when introducing a new partner. Some breeders recommend

that new birds are housed in an adjacent flight whilst a new pair bond is established.

The **Red-rumped** parakeet is an ideal bird for the beginner. It is relatively cheap and easy to accommodate. Pairs will readily breed in a nest box measuring 7" square and 16-18" high. The entrance hole should be approximately 2½". In the wild they are usually found in the company of Eastern Rosellas; fortunately they are not associated with the destruction of wheat crops, and so are tolerated by the farming community. The wild Red-rumps feed mainly on grass seed heads and from seeds found on weeds and flaxes etc. Eggs are laid every 2 days until a clutch of between 4-7 are laid. Incubation takes about 18-20 days and the chicks are usually in the nest box for a further 30 days. When the young chicks leave the nest they can be very flighty, and may crash into the wire mesh. Care should be taken at this time. Some breeders like to put some ever-green branches at the ends of the flight to give the young birds a point to aim for and settle. Some colour mutations have been bred of the Red-rump. At present these include Blue, Lutino, Yellow, Pied, Opaline, Cinnamon, Blue pied and Platinum.

The **Many-coloured Parakeet**, sometimes referred to as the "Mulga Parakeet" (named after a type of Acacia found in the interior of Australia), is similar to the Red-rump in its size and general housing. They prefer a slightly deeper nest box, but the entrance hole should be the same. In aviaries they are known to go to nest early in the year. The cock birds are very attentive towards their mates and apart from mutual preening, the cock will always ensure that the hen is well fed and will also feed the chicks in the box after the first week. In the wild all Australian parakeets are known to eat charcoal and small grains of sand, especially after a scrub or forest fire. If separated for any length of time they will call endlessly to one another. The Many-coloured lays between 3-6 eggs and incubation takes approximately 20 days. When the young birds leave the nest box they are usually very calm and do not attempt to crash into the ends of the flights.

The **Golden-shouldered Parakeet** and the **Hooded Parakeet** both need a slightly different diet to the above species. In the wild they have been observed feeding on grass seed, nectar and pollen and small insects, which they find amongst the flowers as they search for the pollen. They also like to eat buds from trees, so do not endear themselves to farmers with orchards. Both species are specialist when it comes to nesting. Instead of finding a hollow or cavity in a tree, they like to burrow into termite mounds and make a nesting chamber. They will usually do this during the rainy season, when the mounds are slightly softer to burrow into. Their favourite food when raising young is green grass heads. Long flights are advantageous for these birds, as this will assist when the courtship starts. An entrance tunnel is usually excavated about 15-20 inches in

length, the nesting chamber is about 10 inches square. The hen will lay a clutch of 3-6 eggs which she incubates for about 19-21 days. The major problem when breeding either of these species in captivity is the hen often leaves the nest after the young have hatched. Obviously in our climate the chicks would not last too long, unless they are receiving the warmth from the brooding hen. So breeders have designed insulated double skinned boxes, suitable to retain heat, so that the chicks do not get chilled. These species seem to stimulate each other into breeding, so greater success is likely if more than one pair are kept in close proximity. This should be taken into account when trying to get pairs to nest. When the chicks have hatched the parent birds should have access to soaked and sprouted seed. The one down side when breeding these birds is that they seem to still be on Australian season time. That is, they like to start nesting in our Autumn and Winter. With the advent of better quality and temperature accurate heater pads, this has become less of a problem. These birds are not recommended for the in-experienced bird keeper.

As explained before, the **Yellow-vented Blue-bonnet** and the **Red-Vented Blue-bonnet**, sexes are alike. They are the most aggressive of all of the Australian Parakeets; they are not afraid of birds twice their size, and have been known to kill them. When housing them, care should be taken that they are not housed next to another aggressive species such as the Port Lincoln or Rosella. The diet should consist of a good quality parakeet mixture, seeding grass heads, nuts etc. They are particularly fond of insects and can be offered mealworms, especially when they are rearing youngsters. They are also fond of nectar, blossom and fruit buds on trees.

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