

Neophemas



This fact sheet gives an overview on keeping Neophemas.

Beginners often ask what are the best parakeets to keep and breed when they

start in the hobby. Without any prompting, most people would say the grass parakeets of the genus *Neophema*. This small group of 7 species have no sub-species, and are amongst the most popularly kept and bred of all of the Australian Parakeets. They have very few vices that can cause problems for the beginner, and newly acquired stock readily accepts their new surroundings and feed.

The genus of seven species of grass parakeets can easily be split into three sub-groups.

- (i) Bourke's Grass Parakeet (*N. boukii*).
- (ii) Splendid Grass Parakeet (*N. splendida*)
Turquoise Grass Parakeet (*N. pulchella*),
- (iii) Blue-Winged Grass Parakeet (*N. chrysostoma*)
Elegant Grass Parakeet (*N. elegans*)
Rock Grass Parakeet (*N. petrophila*)
Orange-bellied Grass Parakeet (*N. chrysogaster*)

Unfortunately only the first five species of the above groups are easily available. The Rock Parakeet and the Orange-Bellied Parakeet although classified as "at risk" in their natural habitat, have not been established within aviculture to the extent that they would be readily available. Many breeders in different countries are making every effort to establish both species, so eventually they will be presented for re-sale.

The recommended size of flight for a single pair of birds can be as small as 6' x 6' x 3', obviously larger flights should be made available if the budget can extend to it. Some years ago, when purchasing stock, extra care was needed because birds were susceptible to the damp and cold weather. Careful breeding over the years has now ensured that few birds succumb to this fact. However, when housing any member of this family, a frost-free shelter should be available at all times. This will ensure that the few birds who decide to roost inside can do so. A nest box measuring 12" x 6" x 6" should be adequate for all of the family, an entrance hole about 2¼" allows for the hen to gnaw the hole to a preferred size. Best breeding results are achieved with one pair to a flight.

The **Bourke's Parakeet** is the most unusual of the genus as it is totally different in colouration. In the wild it is usually confined to the dry interior plains of Australia. Bourke's can be bred when kept in colonies. Care should be taken to ensure that the same number of cocks and hens are available. Nest boxes should be regularly checked, as the Bourke is not the cleanest of parakeets in the nest. Sometimes before the second clutch is to be raised, the nest box may need to be cleaned. The sexes should be visually easy to tell

apart. The cock bird usually has a brighter blue stripe above the beak than the hen. However, with the different colour mutations that are becoming established, the blue stripe may be slightly duller in both sexes. The Rosa Bourke mutation is amongst the most popular, several other mutations exist including a Yellow, Isabel (similar to the Yellow but with more pink plumage, the eyes are also red) and the Fallow.

Because the Bourke is a rather placid member of the genus, some breeders use them as foster parents. They do exceptionally well when rearing other *Neophemas*. Bourke's and other members of the family have been known to suffer from different forms of eye disease, so a careful watch should be maintained for birds with watery eyes, or birds constantly wiping their eyes on perches. All perches should be washed regularly.

The **Splendid Parakeet** (sometimes called the Scarlet-chested Parakeet) is amongst the most popular of all species kept by breeders, probably due to their almost gaudy colouration. The cock bird shows a bright red chest and blue head. The hen shows none of this colouration. Young birds take approximately 10-12 months to fully colour up. They are classed as free breeders and many pairs have two or even three clutches of eggs per year. The clutch of between 4-8 eggs is incubated for 18 days, and the young fledge after approximately another 30 days. Many colour mutations are available including pied, cinnamon, white breasted, cobalt, sea-green, pastel blue and yellow.

Turquoise Grass Parakeets (sometimes shortened to "Turk") are not as colourful as the Splendid. The Cock bird has a blue face and blue wing coverts and shows a red bar of colour on the wing. The hen of the Turquoise is similar in appearance to the Splendid hen, however the blue colour on the wing is brighter in the Turquoise hen. The hen Turquoise also has a small white patch between the eyes and the beak. The hen Splendid does not have this white patch, and the face is nearly all blue. For this reason, care should be taken when purchasing new stock so that cross breeding between Turquoise's and Splendid's is avoided. Some adult cock birds are known to become very aggressive towards young fledgling cocks, so care should be taken to remove the young birds when they become fully independent. If an aviary is large enough this behaviour is not usually observed.

The **Blue-winged Parakeet** is generally olive-green in overall body colour, with the head showing small a small patch of yellow above the nostrils, which extends around the eye. The cock bird has a deep blue stripe across the forehead, which stops at the eyes. The hen shows the same general markings but the blue stripe is duller. Some hens also appear to be physically smaller. Both sexes show a broad deep blue colour on the wing coverts or shoulders. Their diet should be monitored closely, as they are fairly inactive birds, and can

quickly become overweight if given the wrong diet. No colour mutations have become established in the UK at present.

The **Elegant Parakeet** is similar in appearance and general body colour to the Blue-Winged Parakeet. The easiest way to tell the difference between the two species is the eye-stripe. In the Elegant the eye-stripe goes through the eye, and no yellow is visible above or behind the eye. The Blue-Winged Parakeet's blue eye stripe stops at the front of the eye and yellow markings can be seen above or around the eye. Obviously this helps to ensure that cocks and hens from different species are not purchased and bred from. Several colour mutations are available including Lutino (the blue colour of the normal has been replaced with white), Pied and Cinnamon.

The dietary requirements of the Neophema family are fairly easy for the beginner to cope with. A good quality small parakeet mix, containing mixed millets, white millet, safflower, buckwheat, and small striped sunflower form the basic diet. Smaller quantities of hemp and crushed nuts are also accepted. Millet sprays, cuttlefish and grit should also be available. Neophemas like to bathe regularly, so a dish of water should be placed on the floor of the aviary and changed daily. A single pair of Neophemas can be mixed with other birds. If mixed with finches they have also been known to steal any live food offered to the smaller birds. Vegetables and fruit should be offered daily. Egg food may also assist the breeding birds when feeding any youngsters.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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