

Australian Ring necks



This fact sheet gives an overview on keeping Australian Ring necks.

During the 1930's the so-called group of "Australian Ring necks" were incorrectly classified by taxonomists into the group *Platycercus*, along with the Rosellas. After much discussion amongst the learned experts about the difference in skull shape and the clear lack of scaly back markings found in the Rosellas, it was agreed to place the two species and two sub-species that form the family into the group *Barnardius*.

The reference to the "Australian Ring necks" comes from the fact that all members of this genus have a characteristic yellow ring around the nape of the neck. To explain the group fully, the family consists of just two species. The Twenty-eight Parakeet (*Barnardius zonararius semitorquatus*) is in fact the sub-specie of the Port Lincoln (*B. zonararius*), and the Cloncurry (*B. b. macgillivrayi*) is the sub-species of the Barnard Parakeet (*B. b. barnardi*).

As a group of birds they have been bred in the United Kingdom for many years. Unfortunately a lot of the birds that we house in our aviaries are not as big as wild caught specimens. To make things easier for the reader, the four members of this family will be discussed individually.

The **Port Lincoln** comes from central and Western Australia, where it can be found in a wide range of habitats, from open farm land, and dense forest to the interior of the country – the spinifex outback. This species in particular has learnt to adapt very easily and quickly to many varied conditions. It has also learnt to adapt to the towns and cities, and can be found in many back gardens devouring the fruit buds and later in the year the fruit itself. In fact some Australians regard the species as a pest. Cocks and hens are extremely similar in overall appearance. Some breeders say that the head of the hen is a lighter colour (a brownish black) than the cocks, which is black. A good coloured Port Lincoln does not show any red above the beak or on the forehead. A nest box approximately 8" x 8" x 36" is suitable with an entrance hole 3" in diameter. When breeding, a clutch can consist of between 4-7 eggs, with an incubation period of 20-21 days.

A slightly smaller sub-species, (known as the Western Port Lincoln) is recognised within the world of classification. This sub-specie is slightly paler in colour with pale blue cheek patches. It is likely that aviculture has not recognised this fact quickly enough and since we have had these species in the UK we have crossbred them un-intentionally. Port Lincolns like to forage around on the floor of an aviary quite often, so care should be taken to ensure that the birds are wormed regularly. A blue mutation was kept by the late Duke of Bedford and is now becoming more established.

The **Twenty-Eight** is the largest member of the family and is also the most aggressive. In the wild they are not as successful as the Port Lincolns, when colonising areas and taking opportunities. They are found in the coastal regions of southwestern Australia. The Twenty-eight was so named because of its call, which consist of three syllables. The Port Lincoln on the other hand only has a two-syllable call. Twenty-eight's plumage differs from that of the Port Lincoln in that it shows a small red band of colour above its beak, and the belly colour consists of slightly more green. The Twenty-eight will not spend much of its time on the ground. In the wild they prefer to spend more time in the trees. The nest box is similar in size to the one previously mentioned, but the entrance hole should be enlarged to 3.5" in diameter. As with the Port Lincoln 4-7 white eggs are laid and incubated for 20-21 days. The youngsters will fledge at approximately 5-6 weeks old. Cock birds are known to help the hen feed the chicks from an early age. Blue and lutino colour mutations have been bred, with the latter still remaining quite rare.

Also known as the Mallee Ring neck, the **Barnards Parakeet** is to be found in Southern Queensland, New South Wales, Southern Australia and Victoria. The differences between the sexes are very slight; breeders often go by the fact that the hens are duller in overall body colour and also slightly smaller. A good coloured Barnard will have a broad band of red above the beak, the Cloncurry on the other hand should not have any red on it what so ever. In captivity they are known to be quite fussy when selecting a nesting site. Several different nest boxes should be offered and then the unused ones removed once the hen has made her choice. Care should be taken with breeding pairs, as some aggressive hens may chase the cock bird and harass him badly. Nest boxes should have an entrance hole approximately 2.5" in diameter. A clutch of 4-6 white eggs are laid and incubated for 19-20 days. A Lutino colour mutation is known but still remains fairly uncommon.

Cloncurry are fairly common as aviary birds. They are the smallest member of the family, but can still be very aggressive towards other species. They are very tough by nature and can easily be accommodated in UK aviaries. Even with an expert breeder the Cloncurry can prove to be difficult to sex. Like the Rosella family, most people like to use the size of the head and beak as a good indicator. The head of the cock bird is flatter and wider than the hen. The hen's beak is also slightly narrower.

Care should be taken when housing members of this genus, especially Port Lincolns and Twenty-Eight Parakeets, as they are well known for their chewing habits. Any exposed woodwork should be covered with wire mesh. The galvanised wire mesh should be at least 16 gauge, as both species are able to

bend wire and break pieces out. Given the opportunity use 14 gauge 1" x 1" mesh, but this is not always readily available. Barnards and Cloncurrys do not share the same chewing bad habits. A flight of at least 12 feet is suitable for a breeding pair. If possible a longer flight would benefit the health of the birds. Whilst all members of the family are able to winter outside satisfactorily without any special attention, a frost-free shelter should be provided to allow the birds some respite from the winter conditions.

Never house any member of this genus next to another member of the family Barnardius or Platycercus (Rosellas). If you do, the pairs will fight through the wire which could lead to loss of claws, toes etc., and the birds will concentrate on their neighbours and not on the subject of breeding. Ideally pairs can be within calling distance of another pair but should not be in line of sight to that pair.

A basic seed diet similar to that given to Rosellas is suitable as their staple diet. In addition, all species like to eat fresh fruit, vegetables, berries, pulses and even some live food (Mealworms are anxiously awaited and can be fed on a weekly basis). Grit and cuttlefish should be available at all times. As with other "broad-tailed parakeets" they love to bathe, and enjoy a shower from a spray system.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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