

Bluebonnet

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Northiella*

SPECIES: *haematogaster*

OTHER NAMES: Bulloak Parrot, Red-bellied Bluebonnet, Yellow-vented Bluebonnet, Naretha Parrot, Little Bluebonnet, Red-vented Bluebonnet, Pallid Bluebonnet.

Description:

Medium sized gregarious parrot which forms permanent pairs but often congregates in small social or feeding flocks of up to 30 individuals. Male's forehead and face and cheeks dark blue, breast and upper parts grey-brown. Abdomen yellow with red patch in centre. Wings olive, blue on the bend of the wing. Flight feathers black, edged with blue. Rump olive-brown. Central tail feathers bronze-green, outer tail feathers dark blue with white tips.

The female resembles the male, but has a dull olive-green crown and a light stripe underneath the wings. Immature birds resemble adults but are duller in colour overall and have less red on the underbelly than do the adults (this is true for all races). Fledgelings have a yellow beak and gain their adult plumage at the first post-fledging moult (3-4 months of age).

The Bluebonnet is mostly terrestrial in its foraging habits, but roosts and shelters in trees. It drinks mainly at dawn and dusk.

Length: 280-340mm.

Subspecies:

There are three other rather distinct forms of the Blue Bonnet. although not formally recognised as distinct species, these birds are regarded as a distinct species by some authorities and many aviculturalists. They include: *N. h. narethae* (Naretha Bluebonnet) a population which occupies the Nullarbor Plain, are distinctly smaller than birds in the east and differ distinctly in plumage details (A); *N. h. haematorrhous* (Red-vented Bluebonnet) occurs through northern inland NSW to the southern inland plains of Qld. (B); and *N. h. pallescens* (Pallid Bluebonnet) which is confined to the Lake Eyre basin (C).

Distribution:

Erratically distributed across much of interior south-eastern and southern Australia.

Habitat:

Arid and semiarid scrub and cropland, mulga scrub, mallee and dry open woodland.

Diet:

Seeds of various (native) grasses and herbaceous plants, but also nectar, flowers and fruit.

Breeding:

Is strongly influenced by rainfall and food availability, but generally peaks between August and January.

The usual nesting site is a very small tree cavity, often close to the ground, lined with woodchip and rotten wood dust. The hen incubates the eggs but is attended by the male who also contributes to rearing the young.

Courtship Display:

Males display by drawing their bodies to their full height and opening and vibrating their wings and fanning and shaking their tail feathers in a side to side motion. In addition, they raise their vestigial crest (feathers on the forehead) and bob the head. This is usually followed by courtship feeding.

Unlike many other parrots, Bluebonnets do not engage in mutual preening at any time.

Sexual Maturity:

These birds mature at 9-12 months of age.

Clutch:

4-7 rounded white eggs (23mm x 19mm). Incubation period: 22 days. The young usually fledge at around 30 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Mutations for this species have been recorded for the nominate form. These include: Cinnamon, Lutino (sex-linked), Yellow (sighting), Pied, Dilute (recessive).

Hybrids have been bred with this species and the Eastern Rosella, Pale-headed Rosella, Mulga Parrot, Hooded Parrot and the Naretha Bluebonnet.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird could be housed in a small cage provided it measures around 600mm x 600mm x 800mm (approximately). However these parrots usually perform better in aviaries. These need be no larger than around 1.5m wide x 3m long x 1.8m high and lined with a light to medium grade mesh. In addition, the aviary should offer plenty of shelter with part of the roof covered in and the back and sides at least partially covered.

Species Specific Problems

Bluebonnets are mostly terrestrial and intestinal worms are a common problem in species which spend considerable time on the ground. Similarly, fungal infections may become a problem. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene