

King Parrot

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Alisterus*

SPECIES: *scapularis*

OTHER NAMES: Southern King Parrot, Australian King Parrot, King Lory, Red Lory.

Description:

Medium to large bright scarlet/orange and green coloured parrot. Males are easily identified. They have a bright scarlet/orange head, neck and underparts with a bright green back and wings. There is a narrow band of blue on the nape, and the rump, lower back and upper tail are also blue. The mandibles are scarlet with black markings, the eyes are yellow and the legs and feet are grey.

Females differ from males in that their heads are dark green, the upper tail is also green and the throat and chest are a dull green with tinges of red on the upper throat. The bill like the feet and legs is grey. Immature birds strongly resemble the adult female.

Often encountered in pairs or small parties, King Parrots feed mainly in trees but also spend time on the ground. These birds are less approachable than other parrots such as rosellas.

Nevertheless, they do frequently visit parks and suburban gardens. In some areas these birds are considered a pest in orchards and crops such as corn.

Length: 400-450mm.

Subspecies:

A north Queensland race is smaller than the nominate form. Not formally recognised as a subspecies or variety, these birds are known as *Alisterus scapularis minor* by aviculturalists.

Distribution:

From Cooktown in northern Queensland southward to Melbourne (Vic).

Habitat:

Forests (including rainforest) and woodland and suburban parks and gardens.

Diet:

Seeds, berries and other fruits, nuts, nectar, blossom and leaf buds.

Breeding:

July-January.

The nest is usually a cavity located high in a tree (mostly large eucalypts). Although the entrance is high above the ground, the floor of the cavity itself may be almost at ground level. The nest lining is usually a layer of decayed wood dust.

The female incubates the eggs but she is attended by the male who will also assist in feeding the young once they are about half grown.

In captivity King Parrots will accept either a nesting box or log. A suitable box should be approximately 45cm x 45cm x 200cm and suspended vertically. Logs should be a little taller and have a similar internal diameter. The preferred nesting material is coarse wood shavings mixed with peat moss.

Courtship Display:

The male stretches to his full height, tightens the body plumage and ruffs the feathers on the head. With this, he shakes or flicks his wings to display the light green barring. In accompaniment, he utters his harsh call and contracts the pupils to accentuate the (yellow) iris. The hen responds in much the same way and bobs her head in addition to solicit food. Courtship feeding (by regurgitation) usually follows.

Sexual Maturity:

As a rule, males do not breed until in their second year, whereas females may breed earlier. Males begin to acquire adult plumage at about 16 months and continue to colour for another 14 months or so. They have on occasion been found to breed in immature plumage however.

Clutch:

3-5 white rounded eggs (33mm x 26mm). Incubation period: 19-20 days. The young usually fledge at around 35 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

King Parrots are known to have hybridised with the Regent Parrot, Crimson-winged Parrot and the Superb Parrot.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single tame bird could be housed in a "small" cage provided it measures around 600mm x 600mm x 800mm (approximately). Birds kept in this way should be provided with the opportunity for exercise every day. However, King parrots do not take well to confined cages and perform much better in aviaries. These need be no larger than around 1.5m wide x 5-6m long x 1.8m high and lined with a medium to heavy 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. For breeding purposes, these birds are best kept to themselves. However, they are quite amicable and can be placed in a colony with other birds such as Superb, Regent, crimson-winged and Eclectus Parrots, Alexandrines and Indian Ringnecks as well as pheasants.

Species Specific Problems

King parrots can be rather clumsy fliers and it is important to give them ample clear flying space in the aviary.