

Purple-crowned Lorikeet

FAMILY: *Loriidae*

GENUS: *Glossopsitta*

SPECIES: *porphyrocephala*

OTHER NAMES: Porphyry-crowbnd Lorikeet, Blue-crowned Lorikeet, Purple-capped Lorikeet, Zit Parrot.

Description:

Medium sized Lorikeets with similar sexes. The forehead is orange-red, brighter near the eyes and lores. The crown is purple and ear patches yellow-orange. Rest of the head, nape and upper parts green. Tail green with orange-red marks on outer feathers. Throat, breast and belly pale blue (breast with yellow pathces on side) and flanks, thighs and undertail coverts yellow-green. The eyes are brown, bill black and the legs grey.

Females are generally a duller than males but are otherwise similar. Immatures are duller than adults, with the purple crown being completely absent or only slight.

Purple-crowned Lorikeets are strongly nomadic and gregarious. It is very active, noisy and conspicuous in its habits and is also known to be tame and approachable. Usually moving in small flocks, these birds may also be encountered in large noisy flocks around stands of flowering eucalypts.

Length: 160mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Southern Australia from Perth to Mallacoota region (Vic). It has not been recorded on the Nullarbor Plain and is rare East of Melbourne. Rare vagrants have been recorded in NSW and Qld however.

Habitat:

Open eucalypt woodland, heathland, mallee and basnksia scrub, jarrah and karri forests in the west, suburban parks and gardens.

Diet:

Mainly nectar, supplemented with pollen, fruit and seeds.

Specialised diets have been developed for lorikeets in captivity. These are pollen and nectar substitutes and a number of reputable brands are now available. Essentially, these come in two forms; a wet mix (nectar substitute) and a dry mix (pollen substitute) both of which are essential. Although these diets are designed to provide the essential requirements for lorikeets, they must be substituted with other foods such as fresh fruits (apples and pears, stone-fruits , most citruses, banana, melon etc.) and seed. You will find that certain fruits are preferable to others at particular times of year (eg. citrus is preferred in summer).

Breeding:

August-December.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity or hollow limb in a (living or dead) eucalypt near water. Nesting may be loosely colonial.

Both sexes spend the night in the nest, but it is suspected that only the female incubates the eggs.

In captivity Purple-crowned Lorikeets readily nest in horizontal nest boxes of around 30cm x 15cm x 15cm and an entrance hole of around 5cm at one end. It is best to incline the box slightly so that the eggs collect together at one end of the box. Preferred nest material is wood-dust.

Courtsip Display

A male will approach a female stretched to his full height whilst hopping on the perch and bobbing his head. Pupils may become slightly dilated.

Sexual Maturity:

Purple-crowned Lorikeets are sexually mature at 12 months of age.

Clutch:

3-4 white rounded eggs (21mm x 17mm). Incubation period: 22 days. The young usually fledge at around 21 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Purple-crowned Lorikeets have hybridised with the following species: Rainbow Lorikeets, Musk Lorikeets and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

Purple-crowned Lorikeets may be housed either in suspended cages (around 50cm x 50cm x 60cm) or in a large aviary. In large aviaries, they can be safely housed with finches doves and larger parrots. Best breeding results are obtained with single pairs housed in suspended cages however. There are sometimes problems with birds housed in small cages becoming overweight. A few weeks or months spent flying in a larger aviary trims them back down to breeding condition.

Species Specific Problems:

Because lorikeets have specialised diets (part of which is liquid) and a very short gut-passage rate (and hence produce large volumes of liquid faeces) they are very susceptible indeed to bacterial and fungal infections of the digestive tract. This means that in order to avoid disease a high standard of hygiene is essential. Similarly, aviaries and feeding stations should be constructed in such a way as to minimise the opportunity for birds to foul their foods.

Fungal infections tend to manifest themselves as slimy or cheesy blobs inside the beak, throat and crop although milder cases may not be as easily detected. Bacterial infections, on the other hand, are usually detected by means of examining the faeces. Faeces of an infected bird may have either a (too) large liquid component or (more commonly) is discoloured and tends to be green. In less virulent infections the bird may just seem lethargic and disinterested in foods or toys etc.

Other problems encountered in lorikeets include feather plucking of nestlings by their parents (unavoidable when encountered except by removing chicks for hand rearing) and psittacine beak and feather disease. The latter is an incurable condition which is transmitted through the faeces. The disease prevents proper feather formation and feather loss and causes the beak to

become weak and crumble. Birds carrying this disease are best destroyed as it is debilitating and inevitably leads to death.