

Scarlet-chested Parrot

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Neophema*

SPECIES: *splendida*

OTHER NAMES: Scarlet-breasted Parrot, Scarlet-chested Grass-parakeet, Splendid Parrot, Splendid Grass-parakeet.

Description:

Small parrot displaying little sexual dimorphism. Male's face brilliant blue, deepening on throat and cheeks. Back and rump green, breast scarlet and underparts yellow. Wings edged with bright blue, black flight feathers edged in green-blue. Central tail feathers green with outer feathers dark blue tipped with yellow. Beak black.

The Scarlet-chested Parrots are very unobtrusive birds, not easily flushed, and spend most of their time on the ground or in low shrubs. They are usually found in isolated pairs or small parties of 10 or less. Often found far from surface water and it is suggested that it obtains water by drinking dew or chewing water storing plants.

Length: 200mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Erratically across the arid interior of southern Australia from far western NSW to the vicinity of Kalgoorlie (WA). Sometimes locally common and subject to local irruptions.

Habitat:

Arid mallee and acacia scrub, especially with *Triodia* ground and a sandy substrate.

Diet:

Seeds of various (native) grasses (especially *Triodia*) and herbaceous plants.

Breeding:

Is often determined by rainfall and food availability, but generally August- January.

The usual nesting site is a small tree cavity at varying heights, most often in acacia or small eucalypt, and nesting is loosely colonial. The hen incubates the eggs but is attended by the male

who also contributes to rearing the young. This species may produce several (3) broods in succession if conditions are favourable.

Courtsip Display:

This consists of the male hopping around the female in an animated and excited manner, taking short flights from time to time. Like the other *Neophemas* male Scarlet-chested Parrots also engage in tail fanning and spreading the wings slightly and, similarly, often conclude the display with courtship feeding.

Sexual Maturity:

These birds mature at 9-12 months of age.

Clutch:

3-6 white rounded white eggs (23mm x 29mm). Incubation period: 18 days. The young usually fledge at around 30 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

The amount of red on the breast of cockbirds varies greatly, and in some individuals this may reach to the lower abdomen. Blue, Fawn and Yellow mutations have been reported.

Hybrids have been bred between this species and the Turquoise, Elegant and Bourke's Parrots.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird could be housed in a small cage provided it measures around 450mm x 450mm x 600mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage or breeding cabinet. However, *Neophema* parrots usually perform better in aviaries. These need be no larger than around 1.5m wide x 2m 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.

It is advisable keep only one pair of *Neophema* parrots per aviary as the cocks often squabble. However, they may be housed with a variety of other species including finches, doves and quail, Princess, Superb and Regent Parrots and even Indian Ringnecks. Scarlet-chested Parrots perform at their best (in terms of breeding) when housed in single pairs without other birds however.

Species Specific Problems

Scarlet-chested Parrots 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.