

Varied Lorikeet

FAMILY: *Loriidae*

GENUS: *Psitteuteles*

SPECIES: *versicolor*

OTHER NAMES: Red-crowned Lorikeet, Red-capped Lorikeet.

Description:

Small lorikeet with like sexes and striking white "goggles". The forehead, crown and lores are a dark red. The ear coverts bright green-yellow and upper parts and tail green. throat, cheeks and nape dull blue with yellow markings. Upper breast dull mauve-pink with yellow feather shafts. The rest of underparts are yellow-green. A white (naked) periophthalmic ring, yellow eyes, coral coloured bill and green-grey legs. Females are generally duller than males. Immature birds are duller still than adults, with a red band on forehead, dull green crown (with scattered red) and brown eyes. The bill is brown with yellow marks.

Varied Lorikeets are strongly nomadic and gregarious. They are very active, noisy and conspicuous in their feeding habits and usually move in large flocks, especially when feeding.

Length: 190mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Tropical lowlands of northern Australia from Broome to Cape York Peninsula. It is rare east of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Habitat:

Eucalypt and melaleuca woodland.

Diet:

Nectar, pollen and fruit.

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:

April-August.

The usual nesting site is hollow limb in a tree near water, carpeted with wood dust or chewed leaf material.

Only the female incubates the eggs, but both parents feed the young.

In captivity Varied Lorikeets will readily nest in both logs and boxes, but for convenience it is best to use a box. These should be about 30cm x 15cm x 15cm and hung horizontally at a slight inclination such that the eggs collect at one end of the box. Preferred nesting material is wood- dust or shavings. Shavings should not be too coarse so as to prevent the eggs becoming buried in it.

Courtship Display

Similar to that of other lorikeets. The male stretches to full height, arches his neck, bobs his head and hops along the perch. Varied lorikeets do not display quite as flamboyantly as other species of lorikeet.

Sexual Maturity:

Varied Lorikeets become sexually mature at the age of 12 months.

Clutch:

2-4 white eggs (20mm x 24mm). Incubation period: 22 days. The young usually fledge at around 40 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

This species has hybridised with the Red Collared Lorikeet (a sub-species of the Rainbow Lorikeet).

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

Varied Lorikeets may be housed in either a suspended cage or a large aviary. The minimum size for a breeding pair is around 45cm x 45cm x60cm. They may also be safely housed in larger aviaries with other birds such as finches , native pigeons and quail. These birds can be housed with other species such as some of the small parrots etc., but under these circumstances it is unlikely that they will breed. Best breeding results are obtained either when they are housed one pair to a suspended cage, or in a colony situation in a larger aviary.

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

