



The Alexandrine Parakeet

***Psittacula eupatria* (Linee)**

(Avidata: The Journal of the Avicultural Society of New South Wales)
(Vol. 1 - No. 2 - all rights reserved AUTUMN 1974)

By Stan Sindel

The Alexandrine Parakeet is almost certainly the first species of parrot to have been kept in captivity and is known historically from the time of Alexander the Great - hence ostensibly the name of "Alexandrine" as applied to this bird. An excellent illustration of this bird appears on Page 325 of "Parrots of the World" Forshaw (1973) and a detailed description of the bird appears on page 325 of "Parrots of the World" Forshaw (1973) and a detailed description of the birds is on page 324. Although many people would have this book, it might be just as well to use the description given by Forshaw so that people who may not be familiar with this particular parakeet can get some impression of it.

Description

Length 58cm. MALE general plumage green; occiput and cheeks suffused with greyish-blue; faint blackish stripe from cere to eyes; broad black stripe across lower cheek-patches; wide rose-pink collar encircling hind neck; dark purple-red patch on secondary converts; tail green tipped with yellow, underside yellowish; bill red, tipped paler; iris pale yellow; legs greenish-grey. FEMALE duller than male; no black stripe across cheek-patches; no rose pink collar; shorter central tail feathers. IMMATURES resemble female, but males usually larger; short central tail feathers.

Five races of the Alexandrine are recognised, namely; eupatria the nominate race, found in Ceylon and southern India; nipalensis distributed from eastern Afghanistan through northern and central India, Nepal, Bhutan and east Pakistan to Assam; magnirostris confined to the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal; avenis found in Burma; and siamensis occurring in Thailand and Indochina.

In the wild it is recorded that Alexandrines are usually seen in small flocks inhabiting forest, well wooded country, cultivated farmlands, parks and gardens, coconut plantations, and trees surrounding towns and villages, being a common bird.

This particular ringneck is very well represented in Australian collections, and breeds well. We have four pairs of Alexandrines in the collection at the moment, and the sort of accommodation given them is an eighteen feet (548cm) long, by three feet (91cm) wide by eight feet (244cm) high aviary, roofed at both ends and with a perch at both ends. An open wired section of about six feet (183cm) is in the centre of the roof to admit sunshine and rain, otherwise the front of the aviary is all that is open. Only one pair is kept in such an aviary.

Our first pair of Alexandrines were obtained uncoloured and at that stage we were not sure that they were a pair, although the supposed hen had a slightly smaller beak and legs. They ultimately proved to be a pair. Alexandrines are rather difficult to sex when uncoloured, and it takes two and a half years for the cock to fully colour. Although fully mature at this stage it is found that most Alexandrines don't breed until four or five years of age. Hens have been known to lay at two years - before they would actually be mature.

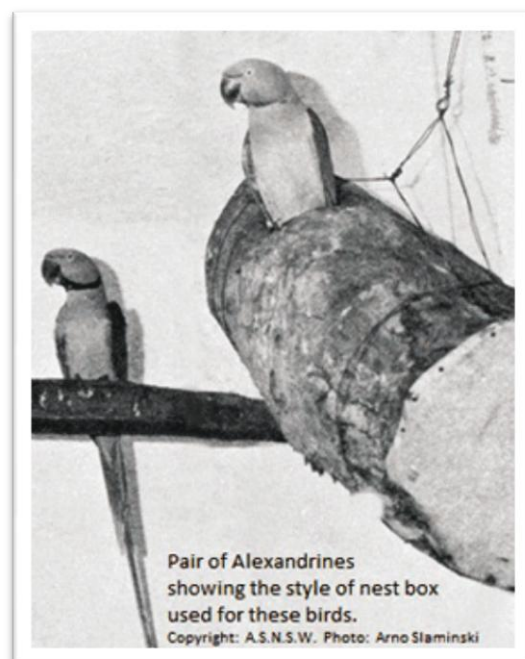


The Alexandrine lays between two and four eggs, although I did know of a pair which reared five young on one occasion, but this is exceptional. The period of incubation is twenty-one days. It is found that incubation does not begin until the last egg is laid, which gives the impression of a far longer incubation period, when in fact they are sitting in the nest without actually incubating. Once the last egg is laid they begin and the chicks all hatch within one day of each other.

The diet is not varied with our Alexandrines, that is, there is no different maintenance and breeding diet. Plain canary seed plus limited amounts of sunflower are given. In addition plenty of apple is supplied and it is found that they love fruit. As regards to green food the Alexandrine seems to be fairly individual in that some will eat greens and others won't. They like orange and pear at times, but do not seem to be a bird that eats a wide variety of foods, unlike the other psittacula. Some pairs will take arrowroot biscuits and brown bread and others not. I might mention that we do not feed peanuts to any of the ringneck group, because I am quite convinced that they are detrimental to their health causing blood clots. Incidentally I don't give peanuts to most other fruit eating parrots such as Eclectus for the same reason.

For the nesting I use logs, approximately 2 1/2 feet (76cm) deep with an inside diameter of about twelve inches (30.5cm), hung in a vertical position with entrance hole at the side. One pair I know of bred in a nest log on a 45 degree angle with a 15 inch (38cm) inside diameter, open at one end, and they did quite well in that. It is quite common for the cock to roost in the nest box with the hen at night when they are nesting.

We found that our Alexandrines tended to eject the young ones from the nest prematurely and if replaced in the nest box they would not continue to feed them. After several times, we decided to hand rear all of our Alexandrines and have found this to be successful. The birds are taken at early pinfeather stage and they are fed four times per day and this is gradually reduced to zero when they are feeding themselves. The hand rearing can be lengthy since Alexandrines leave the nest naturally at an average 7-8 weeks. The hand rearing diet is three parts turkey crumbles; two parts high protein baby cereal, 2 parts ground sunflower kernels, plus vitamin supplements. Also with Alexandrines at 3-4 weeks we give mashed banana as this seems to bring on their feathering quicker. The banana has to be ripe and to half a cup of mix we add about an inch (2.5cm) of banana. My Alexandrines colour at 18 months instead of 2 1/2 years, due to the addition of the turkey crumbles to the rearing diet. This does not mean that the birds are in breeding condition, only that the colouring has been brought on.



The breeding season is in the spring, late August-September. We have had them double brooded when young were taken for hand rearing but this is not generally the case with Alexandrines. On this occasion we got two nests of three by hand rearing, from the one pair.

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