



# *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

## **King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*)**

*(ASNSW Meeting - December 2013)*

### **Joe Habib interviewed by Sarah Evett**

**Sarah Evett** Hello everyone again. If you didn't meet me at the last meeting my name is Sarah Evett, I'm a new member and I haven't met Joe before.

*(Sarah is the Species Co-ordinator for the Koala at [Featherdale Wildlife Park](#). Sarah also has quite an interest in learning about bird species and other species as well. Featherdale Wildlife Park at Blacktown has the largest collection of Australian Animals in the world and a fair amount of that is made up of birds.)*

**Hi Joe, I'm Sarah.**

Joe Habib Hi Sarah.

*(Joe is a past President of the Society and currently holds the position of Vice President. Joe is a long time member having grown up with birds and the Society from a very early age.)*

**Sarah Evett** Well now that we have the formalities out of the way, let's talk birds!

**How long have you been keeping birds Joe?**

Joe Habib Pretty much my whole life, about 34 years. Mostly Australian natives and a few exotics along the way.

**Sarah Evett** I hear you are a bit of a fan of the King Parrot Joe. Is this the main species that you have been keeping?

Joe Habib No, it is a species that I have been keeping for the last four years.

**Sarah Evett** What is your particular interest in keeping King Parrots?

Joe Habib Mutations.

It is a beautiful looking bird in its normal state, especially the cock bird.



King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*). Hen bird (left) & Cock bird (right). Both photos taken of wild King Parrots.

Their distribution in the wild is along the east coast of Australia. There is a smaller sub species up the top near the coast.

Australian King Parrot range  
(red: all-year resident)



(File Courtesy of [Wikipedia](#))

**Sarah Evett** In your collection at the moment do you just have King Parrots or do you keep other birds as well?

Joe Habib No. I keep all the Australian Lorikeets, most of the Black Cockatoos, Rosellas up until last week, Conures...

**Sarah Evett** **Conures... do you have any problems with your neighbours?**

Joe Habib No, I don't have any problems with my neighbours.

**Sarah Evett** **How do you house your King Parrots?**

Joe Habib I had them in these larger aviaries in the photo (below) on the left but now they are all in these smaller aviaries in the photo on the right.



**Sarah Evett** **Does that still allow them some flight?**

Joe Habib Yes. I find that I have had more success breeding them in the smaller aviaries than I have in the larger aviaries. The smaller aviaries are 2.4 metres long x 1,200mm x 850mm wide while the larger aviaries are 3 metres long x 1,200mm x 1,200mm.

**Sarah Evett**      **What sort of nest boxes do you use for them?**

Joe Habib      The nest boxes that I am currently using for my King Parrots is the nest box in the photo (below) on the right; a Z-style nest box. Other people say you need to use the nest box style in the photo on the left; the longer grandfather clock style nest box, but I prefer to use the Z-style box.



**Sarah Evett**      **In the wild do they tend to find huge tree trunks but nest down the bottom of a hollow?**

Joe Habib      Yes.

**Sarah Evett**      **Have you ever found them to nest on the ground?**

**Last month we had Nick Atchison mention his experience with a pair of Macaws that nested on the ground with no cover. (See article from our November 2013 meeting: [St Maarten Zoo in the Caribbean presented by Nick Atchison.](#))**

Joe Habib      No. I've never had them nesting on the bottom of the cages but all my birds are kept in suspended aviaries, except for a couple of pairs of blacks.

**Sarah Evett**      **Are they housed just as pairs?**

Joe Habib      Yes.

**Sarah Evett**      **So you don't keep mixed species in your aviaries?**

Joe Habib      No.

**Sarah Evett**      **Are King Parrots monogamous? Do they have just one mate for life?**

Joe Habib      No. You can swap mates. There are no problems with that especially if you keep mutations. I haven't been keeping mutations but friends of mine have and they swap them with different partners to get different colours, etc.

**Sarah Evett**      **That was going to be one of my questions - mutations and hybrids, etc. Is that at dollar thing, are they more expensive?**

Joe Habib      Yes they are. They are a lot more expensive. The cheapest mutation that you would probably get on the market at the moment is the Grey/Green which you would pay for at about \$5,000 per bird. For a Blue, which is probably the top of the line at the moment, you would pay about \$20,000.

**Sarah Evett**      **What do you cross breed them with?**

Joe Habib      You would put them with another Normal breeding bird, the Grey/Green is a dominant mutation which would breed Grey/Green mutations and Normal birds. Other mutations like the Cinnamon which is a sex link, depending on the male that you have, if you put him with a normal female they will breed all Cinnamon hens and all the cock birds will be splits.

**Sarah Evett**      **Are you hoping to breed mutations?**

Joe Habib      Yes. I am saving up for that.

- Sarah Evett**      **In preparation for breeding do you change anything, like their diet for instance?**
- Joe Habib      All year round, along with dry seed, I feed them [sprouting seeds](#), [endives](#) and apples. Coming up to the breeding season I give them more calcium and multivitamins, I use a powder which I add to the sprout mix and veggie mix.
- Sarah Evett**      **Do you get them any branches from the wild vegetation such as the Wattles (genus [Accacias](#)), the native fruits and nuts and things like that?**
- Joe Habib      Luckily enough on the property we do have a fair few [gum trees](#) and [Casuarinas](#) and other native trees, etc., so every few weeks we cut branches and put them in the aviaries for them. It is extra nutrition which is good for them.
- Sarah Evett**      **Are you finding that with King Parrots their parenting is pretty good or are you having to hand rear any of them?**
- Joe Habib      I have hand reared them. They can get a little bit funny sometimes and come off the eggs. Hand rearing, they are probably the funniest bird I have ever hand reared. The way they throw their heads around and carry on, it is pretty funny. It is pretty heavy going.
- Sarah Evett**      **So the parents are looking after them themselves?**
- Joe Habib      Yes.
- Sarah Evett**      **Do you have any problems with them overeating? I suppose that some people who keep them sitting in a cocky cage might have problems with them overeating but is that problem that you have with your birds?**
- Joe Habib      Feeding them too much dried [sunflower seed](#) in their diet can cause a bit of obesity especially if they are not getting enough flight. With the diet that I feed them I limit the sunflower seed so they have a balanced diet every day.
- Sarah Evett**      **Do you have much of a problem with wild King Parrots coming around your aviaries?**
- Joe Habib      In my area luckily enough no, I don't have any problems like that.
- Sarah Evett**      **Some people who have King Parrots have wild birds coming down to their birds in the aviary. Do you have any health concerns with any other wild species coming down to your aviaries?**
- Joe Habib      Sometimes the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos come down and the birds get a little bit ratty with them.
- Sarah Evett**      **Do you quarantine any new birds that you bring in Joe?**
- Joe Habib      All birds are quarantined. I've got a separate area to keep any new birds away from the rest of my birds for about a month. Sometimes I have been a bit slack when I've got a bird off a mate and I know he is good with his birds, that does happen from time to time, but I try to keep them away from my birds to start with.
- Sarah Evett**      **What preventions do you take to your birds from becoming infested with parasites and worms?**
- Joe Habib      In my suspended aviaries I used to worm my birds once a month but now I worm them once a year. I set the date to worm them as the June long weekend and keep to that. In the suspended aviaries they don't have access to the floor and their droppings so in my opinion I think that it is not necessary to worm them any more than that and they seem to be okay.
- Sarah Evett**      **Would you encourage people who keep King Parrots to worm them?**
- Joe Habib      Yes. King Parrots are pretty prone to worms if they are in a conventional aviary.

**Sarah Evett**      **If someone was looking to buy a King Parrot as a pet bird would you encourage them to do that?**

Joe Habib      It depends on the person. I haven't met too many people who have them as pet birds because they don't talk and most people who keep pet birds like them to talk back to them.

*(Sarah invited others to ask Joe any questions that they may have about King Parrots.)*

**Question**      **Do they spend much time on the ground?**

Joe Habib      If they are in a conventional aviary they would. They like to forage on the ground if there are leaves or anything else on the floor.

**Question**      **Have you ever kept them with other parrots?**

Joe Habib      No. Most of my birds I keep in pairs on their own. At the moment I have a couple of young birds in a mixed aviary together, some Conures and a couple of Eclectus. They are alright; there hasn't been any problem with fighting or anything else with them.

**Question**      **Joe a lot of King Parrots that you see in the wild have yellow feathers scattered over their back, have you seen that with any of your stock?**

Joe Habib      I have seen some of that. One odd feather here and there or a few together. I have seen birds in the wild with large patches, like pied markings. It could be Psittacine beak and feather disease (Pbfd), I'm not sure. The last bird that saw like that was when I went up to an AVES Convention (not last year, but two years ago), an aviculturist I went to see his collection and there was one flying around in his backyard.

**Sarah Evett**      **Joe if you look at them under ultra violet light do the feathers look almost yellow?**

Joe Habib      I don't know.

I've got a couple more slides.

In the photo on the right, that is a view of one of my nest boxes and that is a clutch that I have at the moment. That is a clutch of five now.



**Sarah Evett**      **How many days apart to they lay?**

Joe Habib      Two days apart.

That is my older breeding pair.

**Sarah Evett**      **What age are they?**

Joe Habib      To be honest I don't know. I bought them as mature birds.

I have the log and feeders and water bowl in there.



Joe had a few more slides of King Parrot mutations which he showed and commented on at the meeting. These were photos taken of birds belonging to other aviculturists that keep Australian King Parrot mutations or from the internet.

They included:

- the Blue;
- a couple of Cinnamons (there are a couple of different shades in the Cinnamon);
- a few variations of the Pied (one of the Pies had the large patches of yellow feathers mentioned previously and Joe advised that before purchasing a bird with these markings it would be advisable to test for Psittacine beak and feather disease just to make sure);

- the Dilute mutation which is available in different colour phases as well;
- a Cock Lutino (this is not an established mutation as yet but apparently there are a couple more birds that have been bred in Queensland so that would be good if this mutation can be established).
- a pair of Grey Greens;
- a Cock Melanistic (this bird has been bred in New Zealand - its feathers are almost black); and
- a bird that Joe picked up in a pet shop. It was supposed to be a Blue and the guy wanted \$5,000.00 for it. It was a Normal and after a good diet its feather's returned to normal. It turned out to be a gorgeous looking bird having the nice bright band in his wings, so Joe decided to keep him anyway.

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