



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

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

### Kākārikis (Cyanoramphus) and Their Allies

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By Graeme Phipps and Stan Sindel

The genus name *Cyanoramphus* which means blue beak alludes to the grey/blue colour of the upper beak and was named by [Prince Charles Lucien Bonapart](#) in 1842, who based his description on the now extinct [Black-fronted Parrot](#) of [Tahiti](#). There are four species within the genus, the [Red-fronted Kakariki](#), the [Yellow-fronted](#), the [Orange-fronted](#) and the all-green [Antipodes Island Kākārikis](#).

There is a group of birds which are closely related to Kākārikis, one of these is the [Horned Parrot](#) of [New Caledonia](#) *Eunymphicus*, a very rare bird and is seen in two forms, the main variation from Kākārikis being a non-erectile crest of a few feathers. Joe Mattinson obtained 10 pairs from New Caledonia and housed them with Mr Postema in [Holland](#) and they have bred successfully. Another group similar to the Kākārikis are the [Fijian Shining Parrots](#) or Tabuan Parrots *Prosopiea*. Previously they were closely linked with the [King Parrots](#) but ornithologists now place them closer to the Kākārikis a fact accepted by Joe Forshall in his latest edition of [Parrots of the World](#).



Kākārikis (Cyanoramphus)  
File Courtesy [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The two types of Kākārikis most common in [Australian](#) aviaries are the Yellow-fronted and Red-fronted. The Yellow-fronted appears to be diminishing in numbers in Australian aviaries. The Red-fronted consists of eight races and ranged from New Caledonia in the north to [Macquarie Island](#) in the south. The birds in Australian aviaries are the [New Zealand](#) form and it appears that frequent crossing with the Yellow-fronted occurred and good quality Red-fronteds are difficult to obtain. Even in New Zealand aviaries a large proportion are crosses.

Graeme then called upon Stan Sindel to give the aviculturist's viewpoint on Kākārikis. Stan some time ago kept many of them in various aviaries from 40 feet to 6 feet and bred them in planted aviaries and shed type aviaries and found them to be ready breeders once they settle down, but they can be slow to do so. Possibly the best results would be one pair to a 4m x 1m x 2m aviary. Kākārikis are not prone to overweight in aviaries and can take an oily high protein diet, such as [Sunflower seed](#), possibly due to a high [insectivorous](#) diet in the wild. They love [green feed](#), fruit, soaked brown bread, [Arrowroot biscuits](#) and are very tolerant to all types of food.

Kākārikis can lay large clutches up to 8 or 9 eggs and raise that number although 5-6 would be closer to the average. They are very tight feathered which can cause trouble on hot days. Substantial losses of nestlings can be expected over 90°F unless steps are taken to correct the problem. Stan has had success by placing the young on the floor of the aviary where the parents will continue to feed them.

The Yellow-fronted and Red-fronted appear to be the same in all their requirements but in hybridising the Red-fronted is dominant which keeps the Yellow-fronteds pure but produces a lot of undetected Red-fronted hybrids.

The nesting requirements are usually a fairly large box 30cm x 22cm x 22cm with an entrance like a [Budgie](#) box. They will breed successfully in logs but require a larger than normal nest for their large clutches.

An interesting feature of the Kākārikis is a noticeable white spot on the back of the head at the early pin feather stage which has been seen in [Rosellas](#) and [Western Kings](#) but not as distinct. Kākārikis will breed very early, in fact at 5-6 months and contrary to some literature which classes them as early breeders with a short life span, Stan has had them last to quite a reasonable age and would expect a reasonable life span to be 15-20 years. Of course they don't all fulfil this expectation. They are a resilient bird and survive in open aviaries where most parrots would not, no doubt due to the cooler climate of their origin. Another feature is their tolerant nature and usually they are quite passive in a mixed collection of parrots and are usually very good parents. Unfortunately they will breed late and encounter the hot conditions around Christmas time which presents a lot of problems keeping the young alive.

Stan concluded his lecture and was thanked by Graeme who added one comment relating to the short life span mentioned in some literature. This being that the hens seemed to be most susceptible and this could relate to insufficient protein levels placing too great a strain on the hen at an early age. The literature states they will feed off dead birds and animals and forage for grubs and insects. Therefore a more soft-bill orientated diet could be worth trying to see if this could successfully prevent early losses.

Editor's Note (Ken Parsons): I think the introductory remarks in [Bates and Busenbark's "Parrots and Related Birds"](#) is worth repeating.

*New Zealand Parakeets*

*Genus: Cyanoramphus*

*This group of beautiful small parakeets has the native name of Kākāriki in its habitat of New Zealand and neighbouring islands. Three members are already extinct and others are believed to be extinct. Nearly all face extinction, their numbers being greatly reduced by farmers who protect their crops from flocks of these birds.*

*An alternative to the almost certain extinction of the entire genus... is to breed them in captivity.*

[New Zealand Government document, Conservation of the endangered Orange-fronted Kākāriki Parakeet. Can Operation Ark Save the Orange-fronted Kākāriki \(Text and Pictures by Rosemary Low\)?](#)

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