



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW) (Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

The Red-winged parrot ***Aprosmictus erythropterus***

(ASNSW meeting - September 2015)

Presented by Murray Macpherson

Hi everyone. My name is Murray; I have been with the Society for 12 months now. I came along to the Neophema Mini Conference last September and joined up on that occasion and I've been coming along to the meetings ever since.

Paul Henry has asked me to present on one of my favourite parrots, the Red-winged parrot.

Introduction and Brief Description

Most of you will be familiar with the Red-winged parrot or Crimson-winged parrot as they're known. If you're not, they are a similar size bird to the [King parrot \(*Aprosmictus scapularis*\)](#); being about 30-32cm in length and a stockier built parrot. I won't go into a full on description describing every feather, but it is pretty obvious from the photos (below) which is the mature hen and which is the mature cock.



Unfortunately in the photos that I have taken, I haven't been able to capture the bright vivid blue rump that the cock in particular has. The photographs don't seem to do them justice. They are one of those birds that you see in the sunshine and the green just glows and the beautiful blue tinge on the crown.

They are a bird that takes a long time to moult into adult plumage; the young on leaving the nest resemble the adult hen. The only way to tell the young from an adult hen is that the eyes of the young (both sexes) are a solid dark colour rather than the red iris that the adult hens have. The cocks don't acquire their full colour until they are into their third year. They start with just a few black feathers breaking through on their back which are the first tell tale signs. You have got to have them DNA sexed when they are young to see what pairs you have or wait forever to see what you have got.

In the Wild

In the wild the nominate subspecies (*Aprosmictus erythropterus erythropterus*), which is probably 99% of the aviary population these days, inhabits northern New South Wales, north-eastern South Australia and most of Queensland; whereas the subspecies (*Aprosmictus erythropterus coccineopterus*) inhabits northern Australia right across from the Kimberley in Western Australia to Cape York in the east. It is also found in southern New Guinea. It is interesting that Paul Solomon, who is going to be doing a presentation next month on the Golden-shouldered parrot that he has seen breeding in the wild; he was telling me the other day that he did see that subspecies in Cape York. He said that it is a smaller, yellower bird with a greyer back I believe. As far as I am aware, I don't know of anyone who is keeping them in captivity.

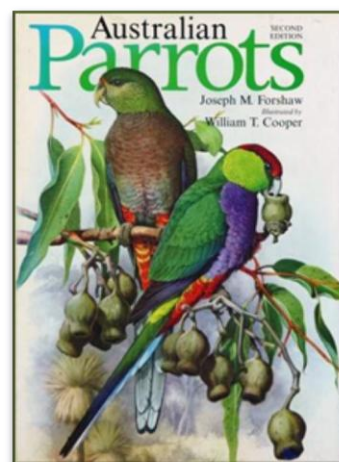
The Red-winged parrots have quite an extensive range and its habitat is very varied including everything from open [Eucalypt](#) forests to the edges of rainforests, [Casuarina](#) groves and also the [mangroves](#) of the north coast. They are generally seen in pairs but occasionally in flocks of up to 20 birds in the non-breeding season if they are searching for a food source that's available in a limited area. They are nomadic in the wild and their diet includes seeds, fruits, berries, nuts, blossoms, nectar and insects. My birds in captivity have never eaten any insects, maybe some aphids on some thistles that I have given them but apparently they do in the wild.

Nesting in the wild takes place in hollow trees close to water and similar to the King parrot they nest in very deep nests, so the entrance to the nest can be several metres off the ground (up to 10m high), with the eggs being laid close to ground level.

In Captivity

Currently the Red-winged parrot is a very popular aviary bird and well established in aviculture both in Australia and overseas. They may have suffered a little bit in recent years with the focus being on foreign birds such as the [Amazons](#) and [Macaws](#) that were imported, but there are still enough people who like them.

I think it is interesting to note the statement in [Joseph M. Forshaw's](#) book "Australian Parrots" Second Edition 1981 that they have a "reputation for being short-lived and a poor breeder". I think that you have to take into consideration that was in 1981 and I am pleased to say that since then just about the only birds available are captive bred birds that are not as stressed as in the 1970s and 80s. I remember going into pet shops as a kid and seeing the [Red-caps](#) that were coming from Western Australia looking stressed, the [Port Lincolns](#) and [28s](#) from South Australia and a shipment from Queensland of Crimson-wings with no tails and their heads tucked into their backs looking like they would last 5 minutes in an aviary. Maybe some illegal trapping still goes on, I don't know why people would bother these days because they are so established in captivity and aviary-bred stock is now widely available and a lot hardier these days. In fact I currently still have the original two cock birds I purchased over 20 years ago, who still breed each year. The original hens died at about 15-16 years old but the cocks are still going strong.



Housing

The Red-winged parrot is suited to both conventional and suspended aviaries. I use conventional aviaries only because they are the same aviaries that I have moved house twice with and I have just sort of put them up again and put the birds in them, but there is no reason why you couldn't have them in suspended aviaries. Being a very arboreal bird in the wild; living and feeding in the tree tops, they don't often go to the ground, so I think a suspended aviary would be just as suitable as the aviaries that I have.

My breeding pairs of Red-winged parrots are housed in aviaries measuring 5m long (3m shelter) x 1m wide x 2m high. I do think that is luxurious for them, I don't think that the aviaries have to be that big. The young when they leave the nest can flap around but in a smaller aviary they may be more settled. I keep 1 pair per aviary as the breeding cocks will fight; although they will tolerate young in the same aviary and I leave the young in the same aviary with them until the next breeding season and the cocks are fine with them.

The photograph (below) is my setup that I have for the red-winged parrots.



The Neophemas are in the suspended aviaries on the left and there are 3 breeding pairs of Red-winged parrots in 6 of those flights. I tend to have a pair of Red-wings and then another species of parrot next to them. I have [Major Mitchells](#) and Red-caps in-between them. I find that when they can see each other and hear each other, but not attack each other through the wire, it tends to stimulate them at breeding time and just at the moment they are flying up and down and looking in the nests and I am sure that if they didn't have any interaction with other pairs a few doors down, they would be quieter and it would make a difference.



It is a fairly simple aviary. That section is just a common old garden shed 6m x 3m on a slab with a 2m flight at the front made out of the old 3/4 inch galvanised water pipe and just an unroofed flight where they can have access to sun and rain as they feel.

Diet

The cock Red-winged parrot in the photograph on the right is one of the 20 year old birds eating some thistle. He eats out of my hand. I was hoping I could get my iPhone to take a photo of him sitting on my hand but he was a bit camera shy.



The basic seed I use is just your average small parrot mix or Peachface mix as it's called with canary seed, hulled oats, white millet, pannicum, safflower, sunflower, etc. Not strictly those particular seeds. It will vary from the commercial brand of seed that I find, but just your normal small parrot mix does me for their staple diet.

They love fruit, they are very fond of apples, peas and corn, carrot, silverbeet, broccoli and celery; the list goes on and on. That's really just off the top of my head. It was what I was feeding them that day.



When they are breeding, soaked and sprouted seed is also appreciated.

I find in the off breeding season that if I don't give quite as much of the fruit or the soaked seed and then coming up to the breeding season if I am stimulating them and bringing them into condition by giving them some more exciting food, they tend to take off and breed better that way.

Seeding grasses are fed as seasonally available and I am fortunate that in my backyard that I can just walk around the perimeter of the yard and the photo of the grasses are just some of the grasses I found the other day.

These include winter grass, panic veldt, Johnson grass and rye grass. They are also very fond of milk thistle, dandelion and [chickweed](#). You find as the seasons change there might be some wild oats there, some dandelions and thistles, etc. They tend to just totally destroy anything like that I put in front of them.

Occasionally they receive a treat of eucalypt blossoms or flowers from native shrubs such as grevillea, callistemon, banksias, etc. The white flower on the far right is a melaleuca. They eat the flowers and the little woody nuts that are on it. I don't know what nutritional value there is in the flowers but they certainly love munching away on them.

It goes without saying that the [cuttlefish bone and shell grit](#) are essentials. They do seem to have a high calcium requirement when they're laying and the hens really go through the cuttlebone. I always ensure that they have cuttlefish and shell grit available including charcoal.

Breeding

I took the photo on the right a few days ago. I was actually taking a photo of the log and I didn't realise the hen was in it. She was scratching around and came out at the right moment.



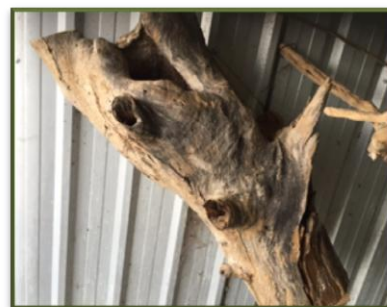
The breeding season in this part of the world is August to December. Mine normally have their nests in September/October.

The cocks can become a little aggressive towards their partners coming into the breeding season but usually settle down. Mine aren't too bad, but I have heard a lot of people have problems with the cocks really attacking the hens and they've needed to clip their wings to slow them down a bit. I find mine sort of boss them around a bit but once they settle down to laying they're not too bad. I must admit they are not the most affectionate birds. They are not like the cockatoos that you will see mutual preening, for example. The cock really "harasses" the hen, for the want of a better word.

The normal clutch is about 3-6 eggs. Mine normally lay about 4-5 eggs and I normally get 3 or 4 chicks per nest. Incubation time is 3 weeks and the young fledge at 5-6 weeks of age. Generally, they have a single brood each year. I have never had a pair have more than one brood, but I have heard of others who have had them have two and that is why I said "generally".

Nest Boxes

The photo on the right shows the typical log that I would use but you can use nesting boxes like the grandfathers clock type box but I find that because I live right next to the bush when I am chopping firewood I can find a nice hollow log and think that would make another good nesting box.



The size that I would typically use is roughly about one metre long with an internal diameter of approx. 20-30cm.

In a lot of the early bird books there was talk of both the Red-wings and the King parrots that you must have this massive log of about 3 metres long and whatever, to replicate what they use in the wild, but I have tried to get away with smaller and smaller logs just for the sake of them not being so heavy and being easy to access and I find that the hens take to them just as easily. Maybe it's just a case of them being a bit more domesticated and more accepting. I think if they want to breed they'll use any box they feel safe in.

Mutations

In recent times there has been a few mutations appear. I know that at least one member of the Society has the Cinnamon mutation. I remember visiting John Albert many years ago before he moved to Queensland and seeing a yellowish bird and I remember him being quite offended when I asked him if it was a mutation or a hybrid. He assured me it was a yellow mutation and not a hybrid (I mistakenly thought it may have been a hybrid with a [Regent parrot](#)).

There is apparently a Grey Green or Olive mutation. Is that correct Joe?

(Response from Joe Habib – There's both. They are two separate mutations.)

There is also a "red" (Opaline) mutation being established in Europe. When I was talking to Neil Ingram after his awesome presentation on the Neophemas last year at the Society's Neophema Conference in September, he mentioned a reddish bird that they are breeding in Europe. So I guess that in the future we will be seeing more and more mutations. Like everything, as they become more and more domesticated, more varieties seem to appear.

In summary



Just to summarise...

They are an absolutely stunning and delightful aviary bird and I think they have a lot going for them. They are one of my favourite birds.

They are not a noisy bird.

They don't chew the woodwork or wire.

I have found them to be fairly easy to maintain in good condition and breed.

Once they are settled into the aviary, they are hardy and long-lived birds.

As I said they are one of my favourite birds and I would recommend them to anyone who wants to have a beautiful, colourful bird in their backyard.

Questions and Discussions

Question

Can you have relationships with them?

Murray Macpherson

I have seen hand raised birds as pets, but they are not really renowned for it as the typical [African Grey](#) or an Amazon would be. You could have one as a pet but in my opinion, they are not really suited to a cage.

Question

Do your birds know you?

Murray Macpherson

Yes. They are not tame or hand-reared, but they certainly know me. When it is feeding time they'll fly to the front of the aviary. As I said before I have one that will sit on my hand. I wouldn't call them tame, but they recognise me, that is for sure.

Graeme Phipps

Their name "*Aprosmictus erythropterus*" means "*doesn't mix*". So it must mean that right from the start they were viewed as being rather aggressively little birds or whatever.

I was interested in how you had them separated by other birds and that you said that they do better when they can see each other but not actually have any contact with each other.

Murray Macpherson

Yes. To be able to hear each other and see each other but not be able to physically get to each other. I have actually bred them side by side in single wire aviaries without them biting each other's toes off. However the cocks spend a lot of time fighting and bickering with each other but if they are in separate aviaries they will still fly up and down and it seems to sort of stimulate them.

Graeme Phipps

In 1980 when I was at an avicultural conference in Hollywood, there was a presenter there, Bernie Teunisson, who colony bred them. I just couldn't believe such a thing because they weren't really a bird that you could colony breed I would have thought. Anyway I went and saw his aviaries in Tucson in Arizona. He had this aviary which was as big as this whole hall, it was just a junk aviary; and he had one of everything. He had 1 Victoria pigeon, 1 Crown pigeon, 1 whatever, etc. He had chaparral hanging from chains in the roof, it was a most untidy aviary; bits of car bodies, everything all over the place. He had this colony of Red-winged parrots and all along one side he had nest boxes with baffles coming out and the females were almost constantly nesting. He said that the males need to fight otherwise they are no good; but it didn't amount to anything because there was quite a few of them and there were different feeding sites and they couldn't see the whole aviary. The idea was that you put up all these visual things everywhere in the aviary and out of it he produced so many Red-winged parrots!

Murray Macpherson

One thing that I didn't mention was that the first pair that I bought, I had them for about 12 months, the cock had only just fully coloured; and then a friend of my had a pair that he'd had for a few years and he said "*they've never bred and I don't want them anymore, did I want them?*" So I bought them off him because I liked the pair that I had so much. I always suspected that mine were related. So anyway, rather than keep the pairs separate I split them up. I put his hen with my cock and his cock with my hen and it was like "*love at first sight*" – both of them nested straight away and the two cocks I have still got to this day. So it is just funny how you can never say what is going to happen until you experiment.

Graeme Phipps

Lastly, with the hybrids, there is a hybrid illustrated in one of [John Gould](#) publications.

Murray Macpherson

Yes, he saw the naturally occurring hybrid with the King Parrot and mistakenly described it as a separate species.

Graeme Phipps

However it turned out that it was a naturally occurring hybrid between the Red-winged parrot (Crimson-winged parrot) and a King Parrot at the edge of their range where they overlap. He named it *Aprosmictus insignissimus* ([Beautiful King Parrot](#)) but then they worked out that it was actually a hybrid.

(Graeme thanked Murray saying "*good on you mate, that was such a nice presentation*" and was responded to by applause from our members and friends present at the meeting.)

Other articles on this site relating to the Red-winged (Crimson-wing) parrot and King Parrot:

[Red-winged Parrot \(*Aprosmictus erythropterus*\)](#). Article supplied by Des Dowling (1999).

[Crimson Wing Parrot \(*Aprosmictus Erythropterus*\)](#) by Geoff Girvan (1985).

[King Parrot \(*Aprosmictus scapularis*\)](#). Article supplied by Des Dowling (1999).

[King Parrot \(*Aprosmictus scapularis*\)](#) - Why buy a pair of King Parrots? By E J Fulton (1999).

[King Parrots \(*Alisterus scapularis*\)](#). Joe Habib interviewed by Sarah Evett (2013).

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