

Bourke's Parrot

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Neophema*

SPECIES: *bourkii*

OTHER NAMES: Bourke's Grass Parakeet, Pink-bellied Parakeet, Blue-vented Parakeet, Sundown Parrot, Night Parrot.

Description:

Small parrot displaying little sexual dimorphism. Olive-brown above, mantle feathers lightly edged in pale brown and wings brown. Coverts edged with cream and shoulders blue. Throat and breast pink with mottled brown. Chest and abdomen pure pink. Undertail blue, forehead and line above eyes blue and bill brown/black. Females resemble males but the line above the eye is reduced and has no blue on forehead. Immatures resemble adults, but have less pink on the belly. Bourke's Parrot roosts communally and is sometimes encountered in large flocks. However it is usually found in small parties. Congregates at waterholes to drink around dawn or dusk. This species is quiet and unobtrusive in its behaviour.

Length: 190mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Throughout the interior of Australia from Ashburton River and Morawa (WA) east to south-western Qld and Western NSW.

Habitat:

Mulga woodland, mallee and arid scrublands.

Diet:

Mainly seeds, especially those of grasses and species of *Acacia* and *Cassia*.

Breeding:

Mostly occurs from August to November and is often in response to local rainfall.

Usual nesting site is a tree cavity at 1-3m. height and usually in a Casuarina or Acacia tree. The

hen incubates the eggs but is attended by the male who remains near the nesting site to defend it. In captivity Bourke's will readily accept wooden nesting boxes. The ideal size is around 15cm x 10cm x 10cm. Boxes should be suspended at around shoulder height. Preferred nesting material is wood dust.

Courtship Display:

Like other *Neophema* parrots the Orange-bellied Parrot approaches the female with the body fully erect, tail fanned and wings held slightly open. With this, he bobs his head and utters a soft chatter. This is usually followed by courtship feeding.

Sexual Maturity:

These birds become sexually mature at 9-12 months.

Clutch:

3-6 white rounded eggs (20mm x 17mm). Incubation period: 18 days. The young usually fledge at around 28 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Unlike other members of the genus *Neophema*, Bourke's Parrot does not normally produce hybrids within the genus. There is a record of it having been crossed with a scarlet-chested parrot.

Mutations (aviary bred) include: Pink, Rosa, Cream, Blue, Pied and Cinnamon (Fawn).

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird could be housed in a small cage provided it measures around 450mm x 450mm x 600mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage or breeding cabinet. However, *Neophema* parrots usually perform better in aviaries. These need be no larger than around 1.5m wide x 2m long x 1.8m high and lined with a light to medium grade mesh. In addition, the aviary should offer plenty of shelter with part of the roof covered in and the back and sides at least partially covered.

It would be advisable keep only one pair of *Neophema* parrots per aviary as the cocks often squabble. However, they may be housed with a variety of other species including finches, doves and quail, Princess, Superb and Regent Parrots and even Indian Ringnecks.

Some aviculturalists report problems with housing Bourke's in mixed colonies. Some birds have the tendency to fly during the (moonlit) night and may disturb other birds in the aviary. This can be detrimental to nesting and may also lead to injuries among other birds which are startled and blunder into the wire mesh etc.

Species Specific Problems

Bourke's Parrots are mostly terrestrial and intestinal worms are a common problem in species which spend considerable time on the ground. Similarly, fungal infections may become a problem. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene