

Crimson Rosella

FAMILY: *Psittacidae*

GENUS: *Platycercus*

SPECIES: *elegans*

OTHER NAMES: Yellow Rosella, Adelaide Rosella, Mountain Lowry, Murrumbidgee Lowry.

Description:

Medium to large sized rosella differing in colour with locality and closely related to the Green Rosella.

Male's head and neck crimson with blue cheeks. Black back with feathers scalloped with crimson. Rump crimson, wings black with blue on inner flight feathers. Shoulders pale blue, inner coverts black. Tail greenish blue with pale-blue edges. Entire underside crimson. Eye brown, bill pale with slatey grey sere. Feet grey.

Females resemble males but are generally smaller, have narrower heads and finer bills. Immature birds are a dull green overall but display the overall plumage pattern of adult birds. The forehead is a dull red and the cheeks a dull blue colour. Adult plumage begins to appear at approximately 12 months of age and is complete at around 15 months.

The Crimson Rosella is normally encountered in pairs or small parties, with immature birds sometimes congregating in large flocks. It feeds rather quietly and unobtrusively on the ground or in trees. It is otherwise rather active and conspicuous and often becomes tame and habituated to humans in parks and gardens where they will readily visit picnic areas etc.

Length: 320-360mm.

Subspecies:

The Crimson Rosella occurs in several populations (formerly regarded as separate species) which are referred to as "red", "yellow" and "orange" populations. The "red" population occurs in the south-eastern forests, whereas the "yellow" is found in the Murray-Darling Basin and the "orange" is centered in the Mount Lofty and Flinders Ranges (SA) and is considered to represent a hybrid swarm between the "red" and "yellow" forms. Many aviculturalists continue to recognise these as sub-species and are named *P. elegans flaveolus* ("yellow") and *P. elegans adalaidae* ("orange" or Adelaide Rosella), with the "red" form being the nominate sub-species. The *P. elegans* complex may in future be extended to include the Green Rosella and the name "Blue-cheeked Rosella" has been proposed to cover it.

Distribution:

Eastern and Southern Australia from Cairns to south-eastern South Australia. It has also been introduced to Norfolk Island and New Zealand.

Habitat:

Eucalypt forest, woodland and adjoining habitats.

Diet:

Seeds of wattles and eucalypts predominate, but it also feeds on blossoms and insects and their larvae. May also feed on cultivated (orchard) fruits.

Breeding:

September-January.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity high in a tall eucalypt (8-30m above ground).

Courtship display:

The male displays on a prominent branch or perch by raising his body to its full height, spreading the tail and ruffling the body feathers. With this he droops the wings and bows in an up-down motion. This is accompanied by a musical chatter.

The female responds to this in a similar fashion but is less animated than the male. This is often followed by courtship feeding (by regurgitation).

Note that the courtship display is not to be confused by similar tail-wagging displays conducted in social groups both during and outside the breeding season.

Sexual Maturity:

Crimson Rosellas are sexually mature and ready to breed at

Clutch:

4-8 cream rounded eggs (29mm x 24mm). Incubation period: 21 days. The female incubates the eggs. The young usually fledge at around 35 days after hatching. Fledged chicks remain with the parents for another month or so before disbanding.

Mutations and Hybrids:

There are no records of mutations in this species although there is some considerable regional variation in plumage details (see above).

Crimson Rosellas are known to have hybridised with the other races (Red, Yellow and Orange populations) as well as Eastern and Western Rosellas, Red-capped Parrots, Mallee Ringnecks and African Ringnecks.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird could be housed in a small cage provided it measures around 600mm x 600mm x 800mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage. Birds kept in such a situation should not be confined to their cage however.

Rosellas usually perform better in aviaries. These need be no larger than around 1.5m wide x 3m long x 1.8m high and lined with a medium grade mesh. Although Crimson Rosellas are quite hardy, the aviary should offer plenty of shelter with part of the roof covered in and the back and sides at least partially covered.

As a general rule, rosellas are not compatible with other birds. They are best kept to themselves.

Species Specific Problems

Crimson Rosellas spend part of their feeding time on the ground and hence are therefore susceptible to intestinal worms and fungal infections. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene