

Glossy Black Cockatoo

FAMILY: *Cacatuidae*
GENUS: *Calyptorhynchus*
SPECIES: *lathami*

Description:

Medium to large cockatoo, often mistaken for Red-tailed Black Cocatoos. Black body feathers and large, heavy beak. Adult males are entirely black with the exception of a bright red bar across the tail. Immatures and adult females have irregular yellow patches on the head (varies from individual to individual - occasionally females are encountered with full yellow heads) and a tail bar which ranges in colour from pale red to orange then to yellow and is often barred (black). Immatures are usually have varying amounts of yellow spotting on the back and yellow barring on the chest (not unlike Red-tailed Blacks) which moults out by about 18 months of age.

Strictly arboreal, this bird is usually encountered in family parties.

Length: 400-500mm.

Distribution:

Rockhampton (Qld) south to Victoria and westward to Cobar and Griffith (NSW). Isolated population on Kangaroo Island in South Australia. Has become extinct on mainland South Australia since the arrival of Europeans.

Habitat:

Casuarina forest and woodland.

Diet:

Almost exclusively seeds of casuarinas, occasionally insects and seeds of eucalypts, angophoras, hakeas and acacias.

Breeding:

From March to August.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity in a eucalypt at heights ranging from 10 to 20m above ground. Both the male and female prepare the nest by chewing at the walls and dropping the resulting chips into it. The female incubates the eggs and cares for the young, however the male regularly feeds the female during the incubation process.

In captivity Glossy Blacks seem to prefer nesting logs of about 1.5m in height with an internal diameter of about 40cm and an entrance of at least 20cm diameter. Entrances should be at the top or on the side near the top. Logs should be suspended vertically or may be placed (upright) on the aviary floor. The preferred nesting material is a mixture of wood shavings and dirt or peat moss.

Courtship Display

Bonded birds of this species often engage in mutual preening and males often display to their mates throughout the year. However this becomes more of a regular occurrence as the breeding season approaches. Similarly, you will see the birds feeding one another as this time draws near.

The display involves the male ruffing not only his crest, but also all the other feathers on his

head and fanning his tail. He thus approaches the female whilst bobbing the head and bowing and uttering a quiet whistle.

Sexually mature:

These birds are sexually mature at about 4-5 years. Younger birds have been known to breed successfully however.

Clutch:

1 white oval egg. Incubation period: about 29 days. Fledging usually occurs at about 60 days. Once fledged, the young remains dependant on the parents for an indefinite period.

Mutations and Hybrids:

No records.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird may be housed in such a cage provided it measures at least 800mm x 600mm x 1200mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage. However, these birds always fare better (and look more spectacular) in larger aviaries. These should be somewhere in the vicinity of 2m wide x 2m high x 5 or 6m long so as to provide amply flight space and to accommodate nesting logs etc.

The wire should be of a heavy duty grade, as cockatoos easily chew holes in lighter grade wire. Similarly, the frame should be constructed of steel to avoid the birds chewing the structure away.

Species Specific Problems

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.

Another problem encountered in this species is Psittacine beak and feather disease. This is an incurable disease which is transmitted through faeces. Essentially, it results in poor feather growth and feathers which don't replace themselves when they fall out. Similarly, the beak is also affected and becomes fragile and does not repair itself. The bills of birds with this condition have a deep black, glossy appearance rather than the normal chalky grey colour.

It is advisable to test birds suspected to have this condition. The best course of action for affected birds is to destroy them as there is no cure. Infected birds will infect their offspring simply by feeding them as there is always chances of contact with faeces in the nest and during feeding of the young.

Feather plucking may also occur in this species