

Little Lorikeet

FAMILY: *Loriidae*

GENUS: *Glossopsitta*

SPECIES: *pusilla*

OTHER NAMES: Little Keet, Green Keet, Green Parakeet, Green Leek, Jerryang.

Description:

Small Lorikeet with similar sexes. General body plumage is bright green with a yellow tinge on underparts. Face is red. Nape and upper mantle bronze-brown tint over green. Tail is green with outer tail feathers bearing red markings. Underwing coverts yellow-green. eyes orange-yellow, bill black and legs green-grey.

Females resemble males but are generally a little duller. Immatures are duller than the adults, especially in the face, with a dark olive-brown bill.

Little Lorikeets are strongly arboreal and is difficult to spot because of its size. However it is gregarious in its activities (except breeding) and is usually encountered in small parties which may become quite fearless when feeding. These birds may also congregate into large flocks at groves of profusely flowering eucalypts.

Length: 150-155mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Distribution:

Eastern Australia from about Carins (Qld) to western Victoria and (formerly) the Mount Lofty Ranges (SA). It has also been recorded as a rare vagrant in Tasmania.

Habitat:

dry open woodlands and forests, also heath and banksia scrub and riverine woodland.

Diet:

Mainly nectar, supplemented with pollen, fruit and seeds.

Specialised diets have been developed for lorikeets in captivity. These are pollen and nectar substitutes and a number of reputable brands are now available. Essentially, these come in two forms; a wet mix (nectar substitute) and a dry mix (pollen substitute) both of which are essential. Although these diets are designed to provide the essential requirements for lorikeets, they must be substituted with other foods such as fresh fruits (apples and pears, stone-fruits, most citruses, banana, melon etc.) and seed. You will find that certain fruits are preferable to others at particular times of year (eg. citrus is preferred in summer).

Breeding:

August-January.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity at a height of around 10m, preferably in a living eucalypt near water. The nest lining is a layer of wood dust.

Only the female incubates the eggs, but both sexes feed and rear the young.

In captivity Little Lorikeets will readily nest in both logs and boxes, but for convenience it is

best to use a box. These should be about 30cm x 15cm x 15cm and hung horizontally at a slight inclination such that the eggs collect at one end of the box. Preferred nesting material is wood-dust or shavings. Shavings should not be too coarse so as to prevent the eggs becoming buried in it.

Courtship Display

Courting males approach females stretched to their full height, but without the arching of the neck as seen in the *Trichoglossus*. As he approaches, the male hops and bobs his head, meanwhile frequently wiping his bill along the perch. There is some dilation of the pupils and a soft whistling has also been recorded during this process.

Sexual Maturity:

Become fully adult and capable of breeding at 12 months of age.

Clutch:

4 white rounded eggs (20mm x 17mm). Incubation period: 22 days. The young usually fledge at around 30 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Fertile hybrids have been recorded with the Musk Lorikeet.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

Little Lorikeets may be housed in either a suspended cage or a large aviary. The minimum size for a breeding pair is around 45cm x 35cm x 60cm. They may also be safely housed in larger aviaries with other birds such as finches, native pigeons and quail. These birds can be housed with other species such as some of the small parrots etc., but under these circumstances it is unlikely that they will breed. Best breeding results are obtained either when they are housed one pair to a suspended cage, or in a colony situation in a larger aviary.

Species Specific Problems:

Because lorikeets have specialised diets (part of which is liquid) and a very short gut-passage rate (and hence produce large volumes of liquid faeces) they are very susceptible indeed to bacterial and fungal infections of the digestive tract. This means that in order to avoid disease a high standard of hygiene is essential. Similarly, aviaries and feeding stations should be constructed in such a way as to minimise the opportunity for birds to foul their foods.

Fungal infections tend to manifest themselves as slimy or cheesy blobs inside the beak, throat and crop although milder cases may not be as easily detected. Bacterial infections, on the other hand, are usually detected by means of examining the faeces. Faeces of an infected bird may have either a (too) large liquid component or (more commonly) is discoloured and tends to be green. In less virulent infections the bird may just seem lethargic and disinterested in foods or toys etc.

Other problems encountered in lorikeets include feather plucking of nestlings by their parents (unavoidable when encountered except by removing chicks for hand rearing) and psittacine beak and feather disease. The latter is an incurable condition which is transmitted through the faeces. The disease prevents proper feather formation and feather loss and causes the beak to become weak and crumble. Birds carrying this disease are best destroyed as it is debilitating and inevitably leads to death.