



GRASS PARAKEETS - THEIR CARE AND BREEDING

The Grass Parakeets are a group of seven species of small parakeets originating from Australia. They are the Bourkes, Splendid, Turquoise, Elegant, Bluewing, Rock and Orange-bellied. Of these seven species, five have been bred in the U.K. for many generations. However, the Rock and Orange-bellied are rare in captivity and are not available in the U.K.

They are all small parakeets approximately 8 to 9 inches in length. The natural colours of these species vary quite considerably between them, but all are beautifully marked. Due to selective breeding, there are now a large number of additional colour variants to choose from, particularly in the Splendids and Turquoisines.

They are all quiet birds and their calls are unlikely to annoy close neighbours, this coupled with their small size make them ideal for keepers with restricted space. Their bite is not that strong, so they are unlikely to seriously damage the woodwork of your aviary or cage.

They can be kept and bred in aviaries or large cages. A minimum size for a breeding cage should not be smaller than 3 feet long by 15 inches square. An aviary of 6 ft by 3 feet is ideal for one pair. Nest boxes for all species should be approximately 7 inches by 7 inches square by 9 to 10 inches high with an entrance hole of 2" - 2 1/2" situated around 3 inches from the top. The birds are not fussy and will not object to small differences in the size of their nest box, they can be made of plywood or even a natural log. The top of the box should be removable to enable ease of inspection and access to the chicks for ringing.

Inside the nest box there should be a quantity of peat or wood chippings for the birds to lay their eggs on, this should be around 1 1/2" to 2 inches deep.

In the aviary the birds should be supplied with natural perches where possible (Willow is favourite), with the variation in thickness of the branches, their feet are kept exercised. Nest boxes should be placed fairly high in the aviary and should be protected from the weather by placing a cover on top of the aviary.

Depending on where you live, pairs can be put out around the end of March in the South and mid April in the North. Four to six white eggs are laid and take around 20 - 21 days to hatch. All young birds should be ringed at around 8 days old with size L rings. This helps to check, which parents they are from and of course their age.

When the young leave the nest they should stay with their parents for at least two weeks or until they are seen to be feeding themselves, this is usually when they are 8 weeks old. The young should, if possible, be transferred to a large indoor flight or outside aviary, this helps them to develop and build up their muscles. The parents may go to nest again. The young birds will be mature enough to breed from about 9 months of age, but will benefit from a little more time before they are allowed to nest for the first time.

Food for all the species is very similar. Nowadays one can purchase excellent mixtures from pet stores, or, as most people do, they make their own mix with a basis of Canary seed, mixed millets, to which are added groats, sunflower hearts, hemp and Niger in smaller amounts. Sunflower seed (small) can be given in separate dish, millet sprays are a great favourite and carrot, apple broccoli, various fruits and greenfood (especially chickweed) is eagerly picked over. An egg biscuit, moistened a little may be taken when there are chicks in the nest. Clean water and a supply of oystershell grit is essential at all times. You may wish to add a soluble Calcium supplement to the drinking water.

In winter they do not need heated quarters, but should be kept out of damp and draughts.

The Grass Parakeets are closely related to the Budgerigar and will make good household pets. They will become tame and rarely bite unless handled roughly. Unfortunately, they are unlikely to "speak", but some will learn to whistle a few tunes.