



## Starting out with Lovebirds

All Lovebirds come from the mainland of Africa, with the exception of the tiny Madagascar Lovebird, which comes from the Malagasy Republic (formerly known as Madagascar). All in all there are 9 species of Lovebird, although only eight have been available in captivity. The Black-collared Lovebird, of which there are three sub-species including Swindern's Lovebird and Zenker's Lovebird, have never been successfully kept in captivity because of their specialised diets.

Some Lovebirds are quite rare and expensive in captivity, however it is our opinion that the Peach-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis* is one of the best species for a beginner to keep. They are widely available and relatively inexpensive. That does not mean to say that they are just birds suitable for beginners. They are fascinating little birds which a lot of enthusiasts specialise in. They can make good pets, becoming quite tame, but rarely if ever talk.

Once you get a true pair (sexes are visually similar) they are quite prolific breeders and the vast array of colour varieties make them even more attractive birds to keep. There is no right or wrong way in which to breed Lovebirds and each breeder has their own methods which seem to suit them best. We shall attempt to describe the ways which we use to breed our birds, which over the years have been successful for us.

We selectively breed our Lovebirds in two ways. Some are kept in our birdroom in cages measuring 42" long X 15" high X 14" deep. We also use flights measuring 6 ft high X 6 ft long X 3ft wide built on concrete floors and double wired with ½ " square mesh. All flights have safety porches built onto them to prevent escapes. We only ever have one pair to a flight or a cage, although some breeders are successful with community aviaries. Community aviaries have to be much larger and you may find that not all pairs will breed.

We feed our birds a mixture comprising four parts large Parrakeet mix to one part complete dog food. During the winter months we give additional Sunflower and Safflower seeds. All greenfood and sweet apple given is washed first. Grit and cuttlefish bone is available at all times. Fresh water is supplied daily and once a week we include an supplement to their drinking water. When the birds have young we also give them a proprietary egg biscuit with added hard-boiled egg and some Panicum Millet for the first few days after hatching and also add some probiotics to the drinking water.

The nestboxes we use, are of the horizontal type measuring 8"x6"x6". In this we put a layer of wood shavings, mixed with mite powder, into the nestbox. Some of our Lovebirds make a nest. Lovebirds like to chew so we supply a constant supply of willow branches. They love to strip the bark off. Our Peach-faced Lovebirds lay, on average, between four and seven eggs. The hen begins to incubate when the first egg is laid and the incubation is around 23 days. We only allow them to have a maximum of three clutches or twelve chicks in any one year and then we rest them for three or four months, as we think it pays not to overbreed. We close ring all our birds (size M) as we find it easier to identify the birds especially when keeping a number of the same colour. This also allows you to more easily identify related birds when pairing up. It is wise to buy birds that have also been closed ringed as by doing this you can ascertain their correct age.

Young Lovebirds leave the nest at about five or six weeks. When they are independent of their parents they are removed to a large flight to allow them to moult out. Under normal circumstances the young Lovebirds start moulting into adult plumage at the age of four to six months. Peach-faced Lovebirds are not easy to sex. We find that the most reliable method of sexing is by observing their behaviour, but this involves knowing your birds and cannot be relied on when assessing birds you wish to purchase. The seller can usually give you an indication. Some people can sex Lovebirds by assessing the pelvic bones, but this is only when birds are of breeding age and does take some experience.

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