

BIRD CARE AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

LORIKEETS

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE BRUSH TONGUED PARROTS

PURPLE CROWNED LORIKEETS

MUSK LORIKEETS

RAINBOW LORIKEETS

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Three species of lorikeets are common in and around Adelaide and are frequently brought to members of B.C.C.S. following accident and illness. Unlike all other parrots, the lorikeets **ARE NOT SEED EATERS**. Their diet consists of nectar and pollen from flowering native trees and, until the introduction of the honey-bee, they were the main pollinators of the eucalypt forests. These three species are

RAINBOW LORIKEETS — very brightly coloured birds belonging to the genus *Trichoglossus*. The red beak in adult birds is specific and can be used to identify the species. Young birds have dark beaks and eyes. Wild birds will not eat seeds so nectar **MUST** always be given. A Rescue Permit is required to keep rescued birds in captivity.

MUSK LORIKEETS — the most common species of lorikeet in the Adelaide area. This bird is frequently described by rescuers as a 'parakeet' or 'grass parrot', and also on occasion as an Adelaide Rosella. If unable to see the bird, identification can be made by the colour of the beak (dark in young birds with red/orange appearing with age) and by the yellow feathers on the body where the wings touch. Musk Lorikeets belong to the genus *Glossopsitta*. A Rescue Permit is required to keep rescued birds in captivity.

PURPLE CROWNED LORIKEETS — less commonly found than the previous two species, the Purple-crowned Lorikeet is becoming more numerous, particularly in the suburbs with larger native trees. They are quite distinctive because of their colouring and size, being much smaller than the other species. The purple crown develops with age and is absent from the immature birds. The beak is chocolate-brown in the young birds, changing to black in the adults. They also belong to the genus *Glossopsitta* and require a Rescue Permit to keep in captivity. A Fauna Permit from National Parks and Wildlife SA is also required if more than one bird is held.

It is necessary to supply all lorikeets with nectar when in captivity. Because of their parrot-like appearance, these birds are most likely to be incorrectly fed when found by members of the public. If you are contacted by a rescuer and there is likely to be a delay before you receive the bird, if identification is doubtful, suggest they give honey-water or water sweetened with sugar or glucose which could be thickened slightly with crushed sweet biscuit. Apple may also be given or any other soft fruit such as pears or grapes. Unless a young hand-reared lorikeet is imprinted on to a human carer, a companion bird should be sought for a lorikeet in captivity.

FOOD IN CAPTIVITY: Unlike other species which I like to settle down before feeding, I always offer a lorikeet nectar on admission as it is usually some time since the bird has fed and it should not be deprived of nectar for any length_of time.

Wombaroo make a nectar substitute specifically for the honey eaters and lorikeets and this may be given as per instructions on the pack. I make up my own nectar as follows: 260 g sugar (half white, half raw) made up to 1 litre with boiling water. When cool, I add 1 whole beaten egg and two scoops of Ornithon or other vitamin supplement. Pour into ice block trays and freeze, defrosting enough for each day's supply.

I add Heinz Hi-protein baby cereal to this mix to take the place of the pollen when feeding Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeets. Use enough to make the mix of runny-cream consistency. I add wheatgerm in the proportion of four parts baby cereal to one part wheatgerm to the nectar mix for Rainbow Lorikeets. I also offer sunflower seed to **Rainbows** only.

In addition to fruit, corn on the cob, greens and blossoms, a dry mix can be provided consisting of 2 cups of Heinz baby rice cereal, 2 cups of rice flour, 2 cups of canary egg biscuit, 1 cup of glucose powder and 1 teaspoon of Ornithon. Water for drinking as well as bathing must be provided if feeding the dry food.

Because of the liquid nature of the food eaten by Lorikeets, it is quite normal for the droppings to be very runny. Food containers should not be put on the floor of the cage. A D cup hung at the end of the perch is the best method to avoid food becoming spoiled.

RAISING AN UNWEANED NESTLING: Unless very small, three feeds a day should be sufficient. It is better to under- than over-feed. NEVER FEED A COLD BIRD AND NEVER FEED IF **THERE, IS UNDIGESTED FOOD IN THE CROP.** If this means missing out on the last feed of the day, do not be too concerned - leave the baby until the morning, making sure that it does not get cold, as it needs warmth to digest its food.

Nestling baby lorikeets need their food to be quite warm and will refuse cool or cold food or even to feed from a cold spoon. Keep the food warm by placing the food bowl in another of hot water and keep a spare spoon in this water. Healthy baby lorikeets rarely refuse to eat if the food is warm and quickly fill their crop, so do not allow them to over-eat. I feed my normal lorikeet nectar mixture thickened with the Heinz Hi-protein baby cereal with the addition of a pinch of calcium at each feed and an occasional addition of Wombaroo insectivore mix. The mixture should be thicker than that given to adults. Keep the baby warm at all times, particularly if you have only one and wean when fully feathered.

INJURIES COMMONLY ENCOUNTERED WITH LORIKEETS: Broken beak, concussion and or **swollen chest.** Because these birds fly very fast and are frequently hit by cars or fly into windows, many present with these problems. Little can be done for a **broken beak**, but, because of the liquid nature of the food, they can be successfully kept in captivity. In time they may release but make sure the bird has enough beak to preen and that its feathers are water-proof. **Concussion** responds to the usual treatment of rest and quiet but sometimes these birds never fly again, for no apparent reason. A **swollen chest** is usually caused by an internal haemorrhage and care must be taken with handling and feeding. If, when fed from a spoon, the liquid can be seen appearing from the nostrils, cease feeding. and, holding. the bird upright, slowly trickle food into the lower beak with a syringe. Make sure the bird stays erect and does not lie on its chest - this impedes the breathing and presses on the crop.

Broken wings, broken legs. A **broken wing** is treated as for any other bird, however because these birds must be able to fly very fast for long distances, a bird that has a broken wing is almost always unreleasable. If the **break in the leg** is a simple fracture (no skin broken with bone visible) I keep the bird in a very small cage with a perch just far enough above the floor to allow the bird to perch without its tail touching. Keep a D cup of nectar at the end of the perch and cover almost all of the cage with a thick cloth. Keep in this cage for at least two weeks. I do not attempt to splint the leg, as the bird will pull at the plaster and do more harm than good. Very often this treatment is very successful. Compound fractures, however, need to be plastered and I use masking. tape for this.

Cat/dog attack is almost always a secondary problem, so look for a reason for the bird to have come to ground. Lorikeets are totally arboreal and are only found on the ground after accident or if they are ill.

PBFD (Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease) is considered to be caused by a virus. Lorikeets suffering from this disease first lose their wing feathers, thus the birds are unable to fly and come to ground where they slowly starve or are caught by cats or dogs. It is common in newly fledged Rainbows and these birds may regrow feathers but very often lose them again. Birds with this disease live quite happily in captivity, sometimes for years, provided they are kept in a controlled environment avoiding extremes of heat or cold.

Granulomatous mite — dry, cream-coloured wart-like growths are found on the head, wings and back of lorikeets attacked by this mite. It is a highly infectious condition and causes distress to the birds through the irritation of the parasite in the feather follicle. Seek advice for birds with this condition.

Rigid legs/clenched feet — this is a reasonably common problem with all lorikeets. The bird is unable to perch or stand and therefore cannot fly. I have not been able to discover the cause of this condition but feel it is a secondary problem caused by kidney infection. This is purely supposition, but in the absence of other explanations I treat in the following way.

Firstly, it is important, as in the treatment of a swollen chest, that the bird is kept erect and not allowed to lie on its chest. It will require hand feeding and a course of antibiotics to counter the infection. I massage the stiff legs and gently open the feet, letting them close around my finger. I then am able to stretch the legs and bend them at the joints. When this physiotherapy is showing signs of success I place the bird in a cage with narrow bars laid on its side to give a 'ladder' for the bird to climb and thus exercise the legs. Improvement can be slow but I have released birds that have recovered from this condition. If, however, after three days there is still no sign of movement in the legs or feet, the condition is unlikely to respond-to treatment.

RELEASE AFTER REHABILITATION: When the bird has recovered from its injuries it should be given flight time in an aviary. Because of their habits, lorikeets must have recovered totally before returning to the wild. Check that they are able to fly up and not merely level and that there is no laboured breathing after flight.

I do not let a single bird go alone unless it is an adult and has been captive for a short time. I try to pair a young bird with an older one so that, when released, the older one can teach the young how to cope. Release should be early in the day after the birds have fed. Do not release if the weather forecast is for heatwave, strong winds or heavy rain. Always release birds into a feeding flock of the same species, not return them to where they were found - the food source there will have gone and the birds will have moved away.

THE MOST CRITICAL ASPECT OF KEEPING LORIKEETS SUCCESSFULLY IN CAPTIVITY IS THE FEEDING — All food fed to lorikeets **must be fresh**. Do not top up the food dishes. Fresh food must be given daily. Do not allow fermented fruit to remain in the aviary as, if eaten, this leads to the birds developing fungal -growths in the crop which are fatal unless treated without delay.

Margaret Fuller

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