

## Bourke's Parakeet – That Aussie Sparkle

**Learn more about the Bourke's parakeet, the grass parakeet native to Australia.**

*By Diane Grindol*

Because of their tame nature and minimal vocalizations, Bourke's parakeets can make great pets for children, seniors and people with roommates.

If you are used to owning pet birds, you know that sunset is quiet time and you can count on your birds settling down at dark. Not so with Bourke's parakeets! These birds are most active at sunrise and sunset. They continue flying and vocalizing after the sun has set.

As you can imagine, that can be disruptive to other species housed with a Bourke's parakeet. I understand that they can get used to it, which is good because Bourke's parakeets don't change their ways.

Bourke's parakeets are part of a family of Australian grass parakeets, the Neophemas. Bourke's parakeets are attractive and unique, with a natural pinkish coloring.

The wild Bourke's parakeets appear in shades of pink, blue, cream and brown. Mature males of the natural color show a blue band of feathers over their ceres.

The rosy Bourke's parakeet mutation (opaline) is generally bright pink. It is common and sought-after mutation because it is so stunning. In the rosy mutation, there is no difference in coloring between the sexes, so DNA-sexing or behavior traits are relied upon to determine sex. Other Bourke's parakeet mutations occur as well, all with the pink, yellow, cream, blue and brown shades.

Bourke's parakeets can be sweet and tame, but they usually aren't kept indoors in cages. They love to fly and do best in a flight or aviary.

When hand-fed, these birds continue to interact with their owners. Mavis Metcalf, who writes about birds at BellaOnline.com, has owned a hand-fed Bourke's parakeet named Jerry for eight years. He lives in an aviary with other birds. When Metcalf enters the aviary, he lands on her and sits quietly on her head or shoulders.

Bourke's parakeets are not "action" parakeets. Metcalf does not see Jerry play with toys or interact with other birds. Likewise, Bourke's parakeets are not known for their vocalizations. Their calls are low whistles, with little to no talking; there's nothing extroverted about them.

Molly Colegrove has kept and bred pet Bourke's parakeets. She said these sweet birds can be considered for a child's first pet as long as there is sufficient parental supervision. Colegrove's mother has owned a Bourke's parakeet companion for four years. As hand-fed pets, a Bourke's parakeet could be a great apartment-mate or provide company for a senior.

Paul Lewis of Birds Unlimited in Penfield, N.Y., said Bourke's parakeets make great pets for many of his customers. "It's just a great bird for kids," he said, "probably even as good as a hand-fed cockatiel ... I wish I had a source to be able to have them continually, as they work out so well for people." Lewis noted that one young customer had a Bourke's parakeet that spoke fairly well, too.

### Bourke's Parakeet Care

Like other members of the parakeet family, Bourke's parakeets should eat a formulated diet supplemented with a variety of vegetables and occasional fruit. You also need to offer cuttlebone for calcium. If you feed seeds rather than a nutritionally-balanced pellet, also offer avian vitamins. Keep fresh water available and the cage or aviary clean. Bourke's parakeets are avid flyers and should get the chance to fly in a large cage or aviary.

Bourke's parakeets can breed at 1 year of age although it's advisable to wait longer. Each pair should have its own cage and a choice of nest boxes. Bourke's parakeets will use parakeet nest boxes or occasionally cockatiel boxes. They lay up to six eggs in a clutch and two to three clutches a year. The young mature in five to six weeks.

Except for that matter of twittering in the dark, Bourke's parakeets are quiet, sweet and humble. If that's what you're looking for, perhaps a hand-fed Bourke's parakeet is right for you.