

Cape Parrot

Poicephalus robustus

Also known as Brown-necked parrot

Cape parrots are the largest of the *Poicephalus* and have a gangly appearance due to their large head and beak which appear out of proportion to their body. Cape Parrots are dimorphic in an unexpected way. The females are more colorful with a red-orange frontal band or cap depending on the subspecies. Both male and female have an olive grey head and neck. The body coloration is a vivid green with blackish green wing coverts and black flight and tail feathers. Red-orange markings are also found on the bend of the wings and the legs. Beak is horn colored.

Cape parrots have ranges in three separate areas of west, south central and southern Africa. They inhabit mangroves, riverine woodlands, savanna woodlands and montane forests up to 10,000 feet. Diet of wild birds is fruits seeds and palm nuts, preferring seeds, especially of ficus and acacia. May feed on crops including peanuts, pecans, millet and apples but not significant crop pests.

P. r robustus is found in extreme south-east areas of South Africa (Cape province, Natal and Transvaal) – Head and neck greenish to yellowish brown.

P r suahelicus is found in Mozambique and Zimbabwe – Head and neck silvery grey.

P.r. fuscicollis is found in Gambia, Senegal, Ghana and Togo. – Similar to *Suahelicus* but more bluish-green body feathers.

Length 13-14 inches

Weight approximately 200 to 400+ grams, Average in lox 300's.

Life Span – possibly up to approximately 30 years but more likely approximately 15-20 years. Juvenile and adult birds have dark brown to reddish-brown eyes. Age of sexual maturity is 3-5 years.

Personality -. Cape parrots are rather shy birds. They can be affectionate but are not generally demanding of attention. They tend to be independent as they reach sexual maturity. While they are not great talkers, they have some limited mimicking ability. Young Cape parrots should be exposed to many novel situations in order to help calm them to make them stable and adaptable aviary subjects. Due to limited numbers of birds in captivity, breeding of available birds is important.

Activities - Cape are very playful and energetic. Environmental enrichment is important. They should always be provided with toys, wooden blocks that can be chewed, and branches from non-toxic trees. In order to ensure safety, companion birds should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous

items. Young birds should be socialized to many people and exposed to a variety of situations such as new cages, toys, visits to the veterinarian, handling by friends, wing and nail clips, etc to avoid fear of novel situations.

Dietary needs - African greys and to a lesser extent *Poicephalus* appear to utilize calcium differently than other psittacine species. Birds kept as indoor pets especially tend to develop signs of calcium deficiency that can be a serious health threat. Natural or full spectrum light may also be helpful. African parrots should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee manufactures pelleted (extruded diets) suitable to be used as a sole diet which is balanced and complete. Cape parrots should be fed approximately ¼ cup of Kaytee Medium sized pellets daily. Alternatively they can be fed Kaytee small. The diet should be supplemented with approximately ¼ cup fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Treats may be given in small amounts especially as rewards for good behavior. Fresh clean water must be provided every day. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

For birds fed a seed diet, vitamin supplementation is necessary. Vitaminized seeds have vitamins added to the shells that are discarded by the bird when it eats. Preferably vitamins should be added to soft foods rather than water as vitamins and the accompanying sweeteners promote bacterial growth in water.

Poicephalus are very difficult to hand-rear from the egg. Kaytee macaw hand rearing formula can be used but very young chicks need to be fed very frequently (approximately every 1 1/2 to 2 hours during the day). It is preferable to allow some parent feeding if possible.

Grooming - Routine bathing or showering is vital to maintaining good plumage and skin condition. Birds can be misted and allowed to dry in a warm room or in the sun, or dried with a blow drier. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as heavy bodied birds may fall and injure themselves. Clip only enough so the bird will glide to the floor.

Identification - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and assist in maintenance of medical and genealogy records. Many breeders apply closed legs bands when chicks are young. While they present a slight risk of entrapment closed bands are preferable to no identification, especially for breeding birds. Microchips, which can be implanted into the muscle or under the skin, are a reliable means of identification but require electronic readers to verify identification. Tattoos may be used but often fade or become illegible with time. Footprints may have some application in identification.

Sexing - Cape parrots show sexual dimorphism as adults (visual difference between the species) in which females have red-orange markings on the front or crown. For breeding birds, endoscopic examination or laboratory sexing techniques helpful to confirm sex and stage or readiness for reproduction.

Housing - African parrots are very active and should be provided with as large a cage as possible. The cage should have two perches so the birds can move between them. Toy and activities should be provided. Ideally pet birds should have a cage outdoors to allow exposure to sunlight and fresh air in good weather.

Breeding - Cape parrots breed well in captivity. Some prolific birds will breed year round but most breed in the winter and early spring. Clutch size is usually 3-4 eggs.

Nest Box - Cape will use a vertical 10" x 10" x 12" or an L shaped box.

Cage size - Cage size should be at least 4' x 4' x 4' or 3' x 3' x 6'.

Common Diseases

- Respiratory Diseases- Aspergillosis
- Feather picking
- Fearful behavior
- Bacterial, viral, Fungal Diseases
- Calcium deficiency disorder
- Toxicities
- Chlamydiosis (Psittacosis)
- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease
- Feather picking

Many common health problems can be prevented by good diet, nutrition and routine health care. Routine veterinary examination (annually) can help you to keep your pet in excellent health and enhance your relationship with your bird.

Conservation Status – Threatened and uncommon throughout range. South African population is particularly vulnerable due to loss of habitat. – Cape are listed on Appendix II of CITES (Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) because of the listing of almost all parrots. They are fairly common in the market place and increasing in popularity as pets.

