

Dusky Pionus

Pionus fuscus South America

Also known as the Dusky Parrot, Violet Parrot.

Dusky Pionus are medium sized, stocky brown parrots. They are mainly dull and dark in color with streaky pale patches on the throat and sides of the neck. They have the typical bright red under-tail coverts which are found in all Pionus parrots but the tail feathers are also red below with a blue band. The breast is barred with vinaceous color. Primary and secondary flight feathers and tail feathers are blue with blue wing coverts below. The upper beak is horn colored with a black stripe down the center. Lower beak is grey-black.

Dusky Pionus are widespread parrots in Northern South America (Venezuela and Guianas) and also range widely in the Amazon Basin. Found primarily in lowland humid and rain tropical forests ranging up to 4000 feet elevation. Also found occasionally near settlements in clearings with trees and secondary growth. Generally gregarious when not breeding and often found in large gatherings especially when roosting. They nest in tree cavities and feed in the forest canopy.

Length is 10.5 to 11 inches. Weight is approximately 200-230 grams. Most juveniles have less obvious patches on the cheeks compared to adults and may have some red on the forehead. The eyes of both juveniles and adults are dark brown.

Dusky Pionus can probably live up to 35-45 years or more. Little is known about their life span in captivity. Breeding age is approximately 3-5 years.

Personality - Dusky Pionus make good pets but are typically not very popular due to their relatively drab coloration. They typically don't speak well. They are intelligent, inquisitive birds but are sometimes shy. Mature

birds, especially males may become bonded to one person and aggressively protect that person from other people including other family members. They are relatively common in captivity but captive bred birds are not frequently available. They are active by nature and may become overweight if closely confined.

Activities – Dusky Pionus should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew. In order to ensure safety companion Pionus parrots should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young Pionus parrots 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. They need to have some space for exercise.

Dietary needs - Pionus parrots should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee Exact is an excellent staple diet for Pionus parrots. They should be fed approximately 2 heaping tablespoons to ¼ cup of pellets. They will tend to waste less food if fed small sized pellets. The diet should be supplemented with the same volume of fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Monitor food intake. Overfeeding leads to pickiness, selective feeding and wasteful throwing of food. Pionus parrots should be fed little to no sunflower or safflower seeds or seeds should only be given as treats. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

Birds, which are fed only seeds, will need vitamin and mineral supplementation to prevent deficiency diseases. Preferably vitamins should be added to soft food rather than putting in the water as this dilutes the vitamins, water soluble vitamins break down rapidly and water with sweetened and vitamins is a good growth medium for bacteria. Vitamin added to the outside of seeds is usually lost when the bird shells the seeds.

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 gently dried with a blow drier. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as Pionus parrots often fall and injure themselves. Clip only the primary flight feathers and only enough

so the bird will glide to the floor. Dusky Pionus are heavy bodied and care must be taken not to cut too many feathers. Excessive wing clipping can result in injuries from falling.

Identification - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and assist in maintenance of medical and genealogical 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 Dusky Pionus are monomorphic (sexes are not visually distinct). Surgical sexing or DNA sexing must be used to confirm sex of breeders. Males are generally larger and have deeper and more extensive blue than females and have larger heads and beaks.

Housing - Dusky Pionus are very active and should be provided the largest cage that space and budget allows. Ideally the cage should provide room for flight. Durable cage construction is not as critical as it is for macaws and cockatoos. Locks or escape proof latches may be necessary on cages. Ideally the bird will have an outdoor cage as well to allow playtime in the fresh-air and sunlight.

Breeding – Dusky Pionus are moderately difficult to breed in captivity. In North America Dusky Pionus breed predominantly in the spring and have a limited breeding season typically from February or March to June or July. Clutch size is typically 3 to 4 eggs. One inch by one inch by 14 gauge welded wire, or 1” X ½ “ welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 6 to 8 feet long suspended 4 feet above the ground or floor.

Nest Box - Grandfather style wooden boxes can be used. Size should be approximately 10” x 10” x 18-24”.

Incubation period is approximately 24-26 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 8 to 10 weeks of age. Dusky Pionus are difficult to hand-

rear from the egg. For best results they should be initially fed by the parents or fed very often in the first week. Kaytee Exact Macaw hand rearing formula is a good choice. Pionus can take a long time to wean. Patience is important.

Aggression

Male Dusky's are occasionally aggressive toward their mates. Clipping the wings of the male prior to the breeding season may be necessary in aggressive individuals to help the female to escape in case the male becomes aggressive. Males in breeding condition can be very aggressive to keepers. They will often approach the keeper and flare the tail in an aggressive posture.

Dusky's are moderately noisy when in breeding season. When breeding Pionus parrots, noise and proximity to neighbors must be considered.

Common diseases and disorders

- Pox virus infection (Primary disease of imported birds)
- Proventricular dilation disease
- Feather-picking
- Aspergillosis
- Vitamin A deficiency
- Psittacosis
- Poor eating habits
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Toe necrosis

Conservation Status –Common, stable- Dusky Pionus are listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Wild populations are generally large and locally common but are vulnerable to habitat destruction and have declined in some areas due to capture for export and use for pets locally in other areas. In the past very large numbers were traded and used locally for pets. Dusky Pionus were not imported in large numbers into the United States and are not commonly bred.

