

Peach faced Lovebirds

Peach faced lovebirds are one of the most common pet birds worldwide and the most popular of the lovebirds. These lovely little birds are known as lovebirds because of the strong pair bond between mates that continually sit together preening, cooing and billing. They are hardy and easy to care for. Natives of Africa, peach faced lovebirds are admired for their beautiful coloration and color varieties, engaging personalities, small size, and ease of maintenance. Many color varieties have been developed through establishing color mutations. Peach faced lovebirds are small bundles of energy, personality and vitality. They are always active, playing with toys, chattering, and interacting with each other or their owners. Peach faced lovebirds are highly domesticated and have been bred for over 100 years. They are readily available worldwide and usually modestly priced.

When buying a Peach face make sure you buy a young bird. Young Peach faced lovebirds can be recognized by a large dark patch on the upper beak and lack of bright pink crown.

The voice of a Peach face is a mixture of energetic chattering and short high-pitched shrieks. Peach faced lovebirds are not easily taught to speak and have a squeaky speaking voice, which is difficult to understand. Adult peach face tend to become nippy especially females. They are most commonly kept in pairs rather than as single birds and are ideal companion birds for people who prefer to watch the antics of a colorful lively pair of birds rather than handle a single bird.

Appearance

Wild type or normal colored Peach faced lovebirds are a beautiful bright green with a peach/pink patch covering the face and extending down the throat. Mature birds have a bright pink/red frontal band over the crown. Peach face lack the white eye-ring found in some other lovebird species. Their beak is horn colored and their eyes are black. They have a beautiful bright blue rump patch. Peach faced lovebirds typically maintain their plumage in good condition and have very sleek feathering.

Through the years many color mutations have been established in captivity and Peach faced lovebirds are now available in a rainbow of colors. Initial color mutations were blues and yellows (lutinos) with further crosses and mutations producing many shades of green, beautiful violets, grays, piers (irregular blotches of lighter colors). All of these colors are now available in a variety of shades. Peach faced lovebirds are truly birds of many colors. Keep in mind however that color mutations are typically not as strong and healthy as the normal green color.

Peach faced lovebirds are the largest lovebirds measuring 6-6.5 inches long and usually weighing 50-65 grams but sometimes up to 70 grams.

These African jewels are sometimes called rosy-faced or rosy-headed lovebird, or by their scientific name *Agapornis roseicollis*. They inhabit dry wooded country in South-western Africa from Angola through Namibia in a belt parallel to the coast and into northern South Africa. They are typically found in flock of 8 to 20 birds by may join into large noisy flocks of several hundred flying in flocks that twist and turn in unison in flight. These congregations occur mostly around ripening fields of grains or water holes. They are typically found in the vicinity of water and drink several times daily. They are often ground feeders eating grass seeds but also feeding on acacia, flowers and crops. In some areas they can be serious crop pests. Unlike most psittacines Peach face build nests weaving a deep cup of grass or bark strips in a rock crevices or masonry. The female cuts the strips of building material then tuck them into her tail feathers to carry them to the nest site. They may also build a nest into a communal nest of weavers (small finches). They usually nest communally. The hen will lay 4-6 eggs and only the female incubates.

Taming and training. Young Peach faced lovebirds are easily tamed but are nicest if hand-reared. Select a young bird (recognizable by the black patch on the upper beak) and clip the wings (Juvenile clip – 6-8 primary feathers) so that he can be handled and tamed but will not be injured if he jumps from your hand. Adult birds will need more extensive clip. Start by teaching the bird to “step-up” on your finger. Carry the bird, cupped in your hands, into a small room, such as a bathroom and sit on the floor. Allow him to climb onto your fore finger as you say “step-up”. If he jumps down pick him up again and repeat this process numerous times. Then practice step up the to the forefinger of the other hand. This practice session should take place daily and will allow you to interact with him in an expected way daily. Lovebirds love to nestle into a shirt pocket or sleep inside your shirt.

Diet and Feeding

Historically Peach faced lovebirds have been fed only seed mixes. While they can survive for an extended period of time on such a diet, eventually they fall into poor health. Lovebirds shell their seeds so vitamins added to the outside will be discarded. It is a common practice to give a Peach face a large bowl of seed (relative to it's size), and to leave it for a few days. The bird will then leave the shells in the feed cup as he eats and the cup full of seeds may appear to be a cup full of seed. This may lead to starvation. Preferably the bird should be given a smaller bowl and just a little bit more seed than he will eat daily. The cup should be emptied every day and replaced with fresh food.

Kaytee manufactures pellets (Extruded diets) made in a small size which provides a complete diet for Peach faced lovebirds and provides balanced nutrition in every bite. These can be substituted for seeds and seeds can be given as treats. Peach faced lovebirds should also be offered small mounts of fresh dark green leafy vegetables, tiny slices of apple, grapes, melons, sprouts, or other fresh foods are relished by Peach faced lovebirds, which have been introduced to them especially at a young age. Boiled eggs or commercial egg food are excellent for young and breeding Peach faced lovebirds but care must be taken in avoiding contamination, leaving moist foods in the cage too long.

Vitamins should also be given and can be provided in the water but the bowl or water bottle must be washed daily to prevent bacterial over-growth. Vitamin supplementation is not necessary if the bird eats a polluted diet.

Contrary to popular belief Peach faced lovebirds do not need grit. They will consume it and if they are in good health it will not harm them but if they don't feel well they may eat too much resulting in an impaction.

Housing

Peach faced lovebirds are small but they are very active and should be given plenty of room to move around their cage. Since lovebirds are typically kept in pairs, keep this in mind when purchasing a cage and make it at least 50% larger than you would think is appropriate for a single lovebird. They should have at least 2 perches far enough apart to jump or fly between. A cage for a single lovebird should be at least 18 inches square and for a pair it should be approximately 24 inches square. If bars are horizontal they can more readily climb around the cage.

The floor of the cage should ideally be lined with paper, newspaper or craft paper. Sheets of paper cut to the size of the cage floor make daily paper changing easy. Make it a habit to look at the stools of your bird every day when changing the paper. This is an excellent way to monitor its health. If your Peach face is eating seeds the feces should look like a small dark round dot (the feces) with a smaller white spot (the urates or solid urine) on top. If he is eating pellets the feces will be slightly more bulky and may contain colors from the pellets, which pass harmlessly through the digestive tract. Some colors may also show up in the urates. If you feed greens or vegetables they can also make the stools more bulky and liquid. Stop feeding these food and the feces should return to the more typical appearance.

The cage should be placed so it is not directly below an air conditioning vent, or in a direct sunlight from a window, which could result in overheating. The cage should be in an area of the home where there is much activity. Peach faced lovebirds are very social and like to be the center of attention. If you keep your bird in the kitchen, always be aware of the dangers of Teflon poisoning, and potential problems with other cleaning chemicals like oven cleaners. (Teflon poisoning occurs when a Teflon pot or pan is overheated, not during normal cooking temperatures).

The cage should have at least 2 perches. Don't use sandpaper perch covers as they are very abrasive on the feet. Place one perch near the food and water to allow easy access. Peach faced lovebirds adore a swing and will spend hours playing on it. A small rope perch is also fun. Toys should be supplied to keep the bird busy and he should be introduced to a variety of toys at a young age so he is not frightened of them. Single birds, also love mirrors and will even court or spare with their image. If the bird is continually sparing with his reflection, the mirror should be removed. Peach faced lovebirds love bells, toys with moving parts, and little plastic fake birds which they also

spare with. They also like toys that they can enter like little snuggle companions, paper bags, boxes, etc.

Grooming

Peach faced lovebirds love baths and small birds baths can be purchased that will fit into the door of a standard cage. This can be filled with luke warm water and all the bird to enter as he chooses. Peach faced lovebirds can also be bathed by misting with a fine mist spray bottle. They should be bathed twice weekly to maintain excellent plumage.

Wing clipping is essential for initial training of the Peach face and will need periodic renewal as the flight feathers are regrown. Many people keep their bird full flighted and a flying Peach face in the home can be delightful. If you do choose to keep your bird flighted however there are safety concerns. Accidents are often associated with ceiling fans, birds falling into open toilets, swimming pools, pots on the stove, etc. Escapes can also happen very quickly when a door is suddenly opened and the bird becomes startled and flies out.

Nails should be kept an appropriate length, as overgrown nails can be a hazard as well. They can be clipped with fingernail clippers watching for the quick (vein) inside the nail. Since a Peach face's nails are white the vein can be seen easily and the nail should be clipped a little bit past the vein. In case a nail bleeds after it is cut, you can stop the bleeding by application of quick stop. If no such product is available you can stick the nail into a bar of soap, apply flour or cornstarch or you can light a match, blow it out and cauterize the nail on the hot head of the match. Because of their small size control of bleeding is important.

Peach faced lovebirds are often identified by a leg band that is put on them by the breeder before fledging. These bands often show the hatch year and code of the breeder. They may also indicate the family of the Peach face. If well fitted they represent negligible risk but may help you to retrieve your bird if it is lost.

Breeding

Peach faced lovebirds are very easily bred and a pair will breed and raise their babies in the home, right in front of the family. Peach faced lovebirds are monomorphic (males and females cannot be distinguished visually). Peach faced lovebirds can breed when they are 1 year old. They can be bred in pair cages or in colony flight cages.

The breeding cage should be larger than a single pet cage. A good size is approximately 24 inches long, 20 inches tall and 24 inches wide. A small wooden box can be mounted at a top corner. The box should be approximately 6" x 6" x 8". Nest boxes are usually available at the local pet store. Pine shavings can be used as nest material however Peach faced lovebirds also love to build a nest inside the box. Many breeders give them woody vines such as honeysuckle or pieces of palm fronds. The hen lays 4-8 eggs, 1-2 days apart and she usually starts to incubate with the second or third egg. This can result in

quite a size difference between the oldest and youngest chicks in the clutch. For that reason some chicks may be lost if they are too small to compete with their siblings. Incubation lasts 21-23 days. Chicks weigh approximately 3 grams at hatching. Chicks fledge at 30-35 days but usually wean at 45-55 days.

Provide plenty of food for the pair to feed their young, especially eggs food and some fresh greens. Both parents share in caring for the young and they are ready to fledge (emerge from the box) when they are 6 weeks old. Babies are clumsy and should not be allowed to fly free initially as they can be easily injured in their clumsy flight attempts.

Breeding pairs are often in a hurry to start another clutch of eggs and may abuse the chicks to force them from the nest. Chicks may be plucked or bitten. Such chicks may need to be removed for hand feeding. Hand feeding newly hatched Peach faced lovebirds, is very challenging due to their small size but if they are left in the nest until 2-4 weeks old they are easily hand-fed and are delightful babies. A standard hand-rearing formula such as Pretty Bird 19/8 or 19/12 is a good formula. It can be fed with an eyedropper or 1 cc syringe. Always follow label instruction for preparation. If you have a gram scale, you can feed 10% of the body weight at each feeding, or fill the crop to the point where it looks and feels full but not overfilled.

Peach faced lovebirds will breed year-round if allowed to which will exhaust the hen. After 3 clutches in a year the nest box should be removed and the birds forced to rest. Reducing the photoperiod (reduce to around 10hours of light daily) will also help to shut them down.

Many breeders produce lovebirds in large colony breeding cages, or in banks of breeding cages. Additionally most cities will have many hobby lovebird breeders. Many people just enjoy keeping a few pairs of the delightful little birds in their home and sell their offspring to local pet shops.

Diseases

Psittacosis or Parrot Fever – Caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci*, this disease can be transmitted to people. Birds should be tested, especially if going into the home of elderly people.

Liver disease – Associated most often with poor nutrition, however can also be associated with many disease processes.

Polyoma virus – First described as “Budgie fledgling disease” this virus causes death of chicks as they emerge from the nest. Lovebirds are often implicated as being asymptomatic carriers of polyoma and may not show symptoms unless they have other problems especially Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease.

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease – causes poor formation of flight and tail feathers (often in combination with polyoma). This viral disease has no treatment and is infectious. Lovebirds are often implicated as being asymptomatic carriers.

Yeast infections – Affected birds are often observed to eat constantly and still lose weight. Yeast infections are especially common after antibiotic therapy.

Avian Gastric Yeast- previously known as “Megabacteria” – Historically called “going light” this "bacteria" is actually a yeast infection and is treated with antifungal drugs. It causes chronic weight loss.

Traumatic accidents and accidental poisonings are common causes of death in Peach faced lovebirds. Don't allow them un-supervised freedom in the home. Pet Peach faced lovebirds are often killed by other family pets (cats & dogs).

Ideally your pet Peach face should have a yearly examination by a veterinarian to help it live to it's potential. Peach faced lovebirds can live up to 18 to 20 years with good nutrition and care.