

Rose-breasted cockatoo

Eolophus roseicapillus Australia

Also known as Galah or roseate cockatoo.

Rose-breasted cockatoos are small, beautiful, medium sized pink cockatoos. They have a short pale pink, recumbent crest. The crest feathers lie flat on the top of the head and do not become fully erect. The under parts are rose pink and the upper parts (back and wings) are gray.

Rose-breasted cockatoos are widespread and abundant throughout Australia. They prefer open arid lands and have increased in numbers due to the proliferation of artificial drinking pools and abundant food (crops). They occur in a variety of habitats including woodland, scrubland, urban areas and pastures. They feed on the ground primarily on the seeds of grasses and weeds. They inflict considerable damage on crops and are considered crop pests in many areas. They are frequently found co-existing and occasionally hybridize with Major Mitchell's cockatoos, and bare-eyed cockatoos. They are most active in early morning and late afternoon. They are very social and in the non-breeding season are often found in flocks of up to 1000 birds.

Length is 12 to 15 inches. Weight is 280-400 grams. Males are generally larger than females and have larger heads and beaks.

Rose-breasted cockatoos can live up to 40 years. Precise data on life span of the average Rose-breasted cockatoo is poorly documented. Many succumb to dietary problems especially obesity.

Rose-breasted breed well in dry climates such as California but are more difficult to breed in the eastern United States. Breeding age can be as young as 2 years (usually 3-5). Breeding life span is not precisely known but is possibly up to 25+ years. Wild pairs supposedly mate for life.

There are three subspecies:

E. r. roseicapillus – Northern Australia – Dark gray-red eye-ring, white crest.

E. r. albiceps – Eastern Australia – Warty red eye ring and whitish crest.

E. r. assimilis – Western Australia – gray white eye ring and pink crest.

The subspecies with dark pink-red eye rings have a tendency to become obese and the diet must be carefully monitored.

Personality - Rose-breasted cockatoos are active, high-energy birds. They are gentle and playful, but tend to be shy and may be psychologically traumatized if handled roughly. While Rose-breasted don't often speak, they along with Gang-gangs are the quietest of the cockatoos.

Activities – Rose-breasted cockatoos are inquisitive and love to chew objects in their surroundings but are not as destructive as other cockatoos. They should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew. In order to ensure safety companion cockatoos should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young cockatoos 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 - Cockatoos should be fed a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. Kaytee Exact is an excellent choice for their staple diet. The pink eye ring subspecies should be fed a restricted diet to prevent obesity. The diet should be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Feed approximately 1/4 cup of Kaytee Pellets and 1/4 cup of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. Monitor food intake and weight in order to prevent obesity. Overfeeding leads to obesity, pickiness, wastage and throwing food. Low fat seeds, such as millet, especially spray millet is a good treat food. High fat seeds should not be fed.

Special requirements - Rose-breasted cockatoos are exceptionally efficient in utilization of calories. Juvenile cockatoos are notoriously picky eaters and don't seem to need much food to maintain themselves while adults easily gain too much weight. Try to ensure that the food that they eat is nutritious

and avoid high fat seeds such as sunflower and safflower. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet.

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 cockatoos often fall and injure themselves. Clip only the primary flight feathers and only enough so the bird will glide to the floor. Rose-breasted are excellent flyers. Heavy birds should have minimal wing clips.

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 leg 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 Rose-breasted can be sexed by eye color when mature but the color is often unreliable. The eyes of a mature female are red while the eyes of the male are dark brown or black. Juveniles of both sexes will have brown eyes. Sex of breeders should be confirmed by surgical sexing or DNA sexing.

Housing - Rose-breasted cockatoos 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 critical as Rose-breasted are not such strong chewers. Many are adept at opening cage latches. Locks or escape proof latches may be necessary on cages. The cage should be as large as possible but must allow at least enough room to fully spread the wings. Ideally the bird will have an outdoor cage as well to allow playtime in the fresh-air and sunlight.

Breeding – Rose-breasted cockatoos breed well in arid climates and can be quite prolific. In North America Rose-breasted cockatoos breed

predominantly in the winter and spring. Clutch size is typically 2 to 3 eggs. The breeding cage should be large enough to allow flight between perches to help prevent obesity. One inch by one inch 12 gauge welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. A suggested size is 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 10 feet long suspended 4 feet above the ground or floor or a large flight cage.

Nest Box - Double entrance boxes are often used to reduce the chance of the male trapping the female in the box. Grandfather style wooden boxes can be used. Size should be approximately 10" x 10" x 24".

Incubation period is approximately 19-23 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 8 to 10 weeks of age. Rose-breasted cockatoos can be difficult to hand-rear. They grow rapidly and must be fed frequently and if not they become stunted. Most hand rearing formulas can be used successfully if fed frequently. Kaytee Exact regular handrearing diet is a good choice.

Aggression

Male cockatoos frequently become aggressive toward their mates. Fatal attacks are not as common in Rose-breasted cockatoos as in the white cockatoos, but can occur. Cage construction and management should take into consideration techniques to reduce mate aggression. Clipping the wings of the male prior to the breeding season will help the female to escape in case the male becomes aggressive. Aggressive behavior may occur in compatible breeding pairs.

When breeding cockatoos, noise and proximity to neighbors must be considered. If housed outdoors cockatoos often call at night especially during a full moon. In southern states outdoor caging must be protected from opossums to prevent exposure to the parasite *Sarcocystis falcatula* which can result in a fatal lung infection.

Common diseases and disorders

- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (Common in the wild population)
- Obesity, fatty liver syndrome
- Lipomas (fatty tumors)

- Feather-picking
- Poor eating habits – over-eat
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Sarcocystis
- Mate aggression
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Fearful behavior
- Chlamydia (Chlamydia) infections (psittacosis or parrot fever)

Conservation Status - Rose-breasted cockatoos are listed on Appendix II on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species but only because of the listing of almost all Parrot species. Their wild population is stable and growing. They are killed as crop pests in some areas. Australia does not permit the export of native wildlife. Rose-breasted cockatoos are relatively uncommon in the United States.