

Red-bellied Parrot

Poicephalus rufiventris

Also known as orange-bellied parrot, African orange bellied-parrot.

Red-bellied parrots are small stocky parrots, one of the smallest *Poicephalus*. They show obvious dimorphism in that the male has a deep orange belly patch and under-wing patches. The female has a blue green body color. The head neck and upper chest is gray-brown, tail and flight feathers are gray and rump is blue.

Red-bellied parrots are found in eastern Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia). They inhabit semi-arid forests from dry savannah, acacia forests, woodlands and secondary growth. Diet of wild birds is fruits nuts and seeds. Wild birds are generally found in pairs or small groups and are shy and wary.

Length 9.5 - 10 inches

Weight 120-160 grams.

Life Span – possibly up to approximately 30 years but more likely approximately 15-20 years. Juvenile birds have dark gray eyes that become red as adults.

Age of sexual maturity is 2-4 years.

Personality -. Red-bellies are playful outgoing birds that love attention. They can affectionate but are not generally demanding of attention. They tend to become more independent as they reach sexual maturity and adult males may become aggressive during breeding season. While they are not great talkers, they have some limited mimicking ability.

Young red-bellies adapt readily to new surroundings and should be well adapted to many novel experiences at a young age. Adult birds are less adaptable to unfamiliar environments, dietary changes.

Activities - Red-bellied 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 grays 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 health. Kaytee Exact is a complete and balanced diet

for African parrots. Red-bellied should be fed approximately 1 heaping tablespoon of Kaytee Exact daily. Kaytee Exact Medium sized or small can be used. Many birds will waste less if fed small pellets. The diet should be supplemented with approximately the same quantity of 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 and ideally should be parent fed for the first 1-2 weeks of life or they must be fed very often, preferably every 1 ½ to 2 hours when they are very small. Kaytee Exact Macaw handrearing formula is a suitable hand-rearing formula. They will wean or fledge at approximately 7-9 weeks of age.

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 - Red-bellied parrots show definitive sexual dimorphism (visual difference between the species) therefore endoscopic examination or laboratory sexing techniques are needed for accurate sex determination.

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 - Red-bellied 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 - Red-bellies 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
- 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 – Common , Stable – Red-bellied 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 not very common in the market place but are increasing in popularity as pets.