

Red-tailed black cockatoo

Calyptorhynchus banksii Australia

Also known as Red-tailed cockatoo, banksian cockatoo.

The Red-tailed black cockatoo is a unique and magnificent species. They are large black cockatoos with recumbent crests. They are dimorphic by plumage color. The male is solid black except for broad red panels on the lateral tail feathers. The central tail feathers are totally black.

The female's undersides are barred with red/orange scallops on the coverts. The back and upper wings are speckled. The tail has patches of yellow-orange with black bars. Immature birds resemble females.

Red-tailed black cockatoos are common in north and central Australia. A separate population is found in south-western Australia. They inhabit eucalyptus forests especially along rivers. They are very nomadic and move about in search of food in flocks of up to 2000 birds. They feed primarily in trees on Eucalyptus and Casuarina as well as other species.

Very few birds are in captivity except in zoos and specialized private collections.

Length is 20 to 22 inches. Weight is 550-750 grams. Males are generally larger than females and have larger heads and beaks. Red-tailed black cockatoos and other cockatoo species can be very long lived (probably around 50 years) but precise life span is unknown.

Breeding age is not known and breeding life span is not known. Hand-reared males may be problematic breeders and preferably should be parent reared to avoid imprinting.

Personality - Red-tailed black cockatoos are lean lanky birds. They are relatively quiet. Their rarity outside of Australia makes it unlikely they will be available for pets.

Activities – Red-tailed black cockatoos are inquisitive love to chew objects in their surroundings. Their beak was designed for chewing trees and they are very powerful chewers. They are very destructive if allowed to perch on furniture. They should always be provided with toys, blocks of wood or branches that they can chew.

Dietary needs - Red-tailed black cockatoos are efficient in utilization of calories as the white and pink cockatoos although they are not likely to become obese. Red-tailed black 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 diet should be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Feed approximately 1/3 cup of Kaytee Exact and 1/3 cup of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. They should also be offered 2-3 large nuts daily. The best choices are walnuts, pecans, macadamia nuts, almonds or filberts. If peanuts are fed they should be shelled first and inspected for fungal growth. Red-tailed black cockatoos are usually lean by nature and not likely to become overweight. Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet. Provide fresh branches for additional chewing.

Sexing Red-tailed black cockatoos are dimorphic as adults. Immature birds of both sexes resemble females until 1-2 years old.

Breeding – Red-tailed black cockatoos are difficult to breed in captivity. They require a roomy flight with privacy. Clutch size is typically 1-2 eggs. One inch by one inch by 12 gauge welded wire is a good choice for cage construction. For birds that are destructive of wire, chain link is the most durable caging material. A full flight (to the ground, is recommended. A suggested size is 5 feet wide by 8 feet tall by 12 feet long.

Nest Box – The nest box should be open on top, 24” x 24” by 48” vertical. The act of chewing a wooden nest box may stimulate reproductive behavior. The should be provided with branches which they may used to line their nest.

Incubation period is approximately 27-30 days. Chicks will usually fledge at approximately 10 to 12 weeks of age. Red-tailed black cockatoos can be difficult to hand-rear and should only be attempted by very experienced hand-feeders. Ideally chicks should be parent reared to avoid imprinting. Imprinted males may not be good candidates for breeding stock. Kaytee Exact Regular handrearing formula is a good choice for hand feeding.

Aggression

Male cockatoos frequently become aggressive toward their mates. While such attacks have occurred with red-tailed black cockatoos this behavior is uncommon. Because of large flights needed for this species, the male should not be clipped as in other cockatoo species.

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 (Occurs in the wild population but is now uncommon in captive palm cockatoos)
- Proventricular dilation disease
- Feather-picking
- Aspergillosis
- Poor eating habits - picky eaters
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Sarcocystis
- Mate aggression – uncommon
- Toxicity, ingestion of metals
- Chlamydia infections (psittacosis or parrot fever)

Conservation Status - Stable, increasing - Red-tailed black 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. Australia does not allow export of their native wildlife. Red-tailed black cockatoos are uncommon in captivity and generally limited to zoos and specialized private collections.