

Breeding the DUSKY LORY in Australia

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History

In 1995 we were fortunate to be part of a syndicate that imported a number of birds from England. One of the species was the Dusky Lory *Pseudeos fuscata* and we each acquired two pairs which finally arrived home at our respective properties early in November after some 22 weeks of intense quarantine.

Unfortunately, many of the lories were in poor feather condition due to their extremely confined quarantine housing and lack of bathing facilities. They were covered from head to toe with wet mix due to head shaking by both their own partner and neighbouring pairs while feeding. Soon after release into their aviaries all the birds went into a very heavy moult which we assume was part of their acclimatisation process, but within three months they all looked absolutely immaculate.

Description

The Dusky Lory is the only species in the genus *Pseudeos* and although being closely related to the genus *Eos* there is no sight of the vivid reds of this family, the tail is shorter and there is bare skin around the lower mandible.

Dusky Lories are widespread across most of New Guinea and a couple of adjoining islands. Measuring approximately 25cm in length they come in two colour phases; yellow and red (or more correctly orange). One could say their colouring is basically brown with silver on the rump, with wide yellow or red (orange) bands across the abdomen and chest, although some birds show this colouring as a pale orange-yellow. To say their appearance is different is an understatement, as most people who've seen them comment initially on their



Pair of Dusky Lories.

appearance, then on their nature and antics.

While lories in general are renowned for their boisterous nature, we feel the Dusky must be the clown of them all. They become extremely friendly toward their owners, often awaiting the arrival of their food (be it fruit or wet mix) with great enthusiasm, running around and jumping up and down on the spot with a flap of the wings each time. And be warned, if you're more than a couple of minutes late with this food you'll receive a severe telling off.

Housing

Of the four pairs, two pairs were established in aviaries in country New South Wales and two pairs in South Australia. Those in New South Wales were housed in conventional aviaries measuring 3.3 metres long x 1.2 metres wide x 2 metres high with an external feed station on the undercover half of the aviary. Water is available at the other end of the aviary fixed to the wire approximately 1.7 metres off the ground, a small jump from the

back perch.

Halfway along the length of the aviary is welded a 7.5cm piece of galvanised pipe approximately 1 metre from the floor in which a good sized branch is placed. Kurrajong has been found to be ideal as it tends to last much longer than any eucalypt. The lories absolutely love climbing through these branches and spend a great deal of time chewing on the leaves and in particular the bark.

A nestbox measuring 45cm deep x 25cm square was hung on the outside of the aviary in the undercover section and after a couple of months both pairs began sleeping in their boxes at night and have continued to do so to this day.

The two pairs in SA were housed in a complex of suspended aviaries with other lories. These measured 3 metres long x 0.9 metres wide and high and were 1.2 metres above the concrete floor with an access walkway down the back.

As the Dusky Lories love to be kept occupied probably 110% of the time, they are provided with



Fertile Dusky Lory eggs.



Dusky Lory chicks, seven and eight days old.



Dusky Lory chicks, four and a half weeks old.

small eucalypt branches complete with flowers, simply thrown in on the wire floor. This works much the same as for the conventional aviaries, however further play things are also left on the wire floor. These include a small, hard plastic 'cat ball' complete with bell inside, a couple of 25cm long x 2.5cm thick lengths of green blackbox branches and a couple 10cm long x 1.5cm thick pieces of wood dowel. Many a time when going into the complex for whatever reason we have been shocked to find one or two Dusky Lories flat on their backs with feet in the air - balancing either a cat ball or piece of dowel.

As the walkway down the back is only 0.9 metres wide it was decided to hang the nextboxes on the back wall, the measurements being 50cm deep x 20cm square.

Feeding

Whilst in quarantine the lories were fed only fruit and wet mix. So when dry mix was introduced it took a while for them to accept this as part of their daily diet. It was found by having the water at the opposite end of the aviary it wasn't contaminated with dry mix.

Unfortunately, Dusky Lories as with most lories have a bad habit of running back and forth between the dry mix and water bowls with beaks full of mix, always leaving some behind in the water.

The wet and dry feeds provided for the birds housed in NSW are



Dusky Lory chicks, seven weeks old.

close to those used by Stan Sindel and are as follows.

Wet Mix

1 box of high protein baby cereal
1 cup of raw sugar
1/2 cup of powdered milk
1/4 cup of malt powder
1/4 cup of glucose
1/2 teaspoon of brewers vitamins
HeinzTM baby food mixed vegetables

Dry Mix

2 cups of HeinzTM rice cereal
2 cups of rice cereal
2 cups of canary egg and biscuit food
1 teaspoon of multi vitamin and mineral powder

The dry mix is available basically all the time being topped up in the late afternoon when the wet mix is fed. Each morning fresh fruit and occasionally Madeira cake is fed. The fruit supplied is either apple, pear, orange, banana or grapes, depending on the time of the year and availability.

The feed routine and diet for the pairs in SA is basically the same, although rather than sourcing all the different ingredients and mixing the wet and dry mixes at home, it was found easier and almost as cost effective to purchase commercially available mixes that have basically the same recipes. The wet and dry mixes are provided in 125mm stainless steel bowls in twin rotating feeders which makes feeding simple and hygiene easy, as the bowls cannot be moved by the birds but can be taken in daily and washed. Water is supplied in 30cm glazed earthenware bowls and their fruit



is simply thrown in on the wire floor each morning.

Breeding

In March of 1996, one of the pairs in SA began working their nestbox extensively and although they had only been out of quarantine about five months we crossed our fingers in anticipation of fertile eggs and maybe young. Late in March the hen began spending all her time in the nestbox and although we had decided not to interfere, the temptation was too great and one day while she was out of the box a quick look revealed two eggs that appeared to be very fertile. Mid April the amount of food being consumed increased all of a sudden and we assumed the day had arrived, but as the hen couldn't be tempted off the nest we left her alone. Late in April the hen began spending time off the nest so we had our first look and found two extremely rounded, plump and dark coloured chicks.

By mid April the chicks were growing well and beginning to show pin-feathers, but unfortunately our weather was turning very cold and wintry with frosty nights eminent. What do we do? Leave things alone and run the risk of losing the first ex UK bred progeny in Australia or remove and handrear them. We were not too concerned about handrearing as we'd had considerable experience with the many other species in our collections, so we 'chickened' out and pulled them.

Our handrearing mix consists of two commercially available mixes combined together 50/50, with the addition of HeinzTM strained apples or mixed vegetable and smooth, no added salt or sugar peanut butter. This worked extremely well for the young Dusksies and they continued to

grow and feather up beautifully. As weaning time approached they were moved out into the weaning shed and slowly converted over from the handrearing mix to both wet and dry foods as well as fruit.

The parents of these chicks must have still been working on the European breeding cycle but with the arrival of the winter weather no further attempt was made to breed at that time. This pair laid again at the end of 1996 as did the second pair and both pairs have bred in the '97 and '98 seasons.

Of the two pairs in NSW, one pair laid in the 1996 breeding season in October, both eggs proving fertile and being taken for artificial incubation. These were incubated in an incubator with automatic turning, however, the eggs were also turned manually three to five times per day. Both chicks hatched at 24 days and proved to be strong and healthy, feeding from the small spoon used with no problems at all.

After hatching they were left for a period of time to absorb the remainder of the yolk-sac, then were fed a re-hydration formula over the next 12 hours, then the complete handrearing mix was used. This consisted of two commercial mixes and the consistency began to be thickened as the chicks digestive systems were now able to cope adequately.

The chicks brooding temperature was slowly lowered from 37.5°C in the hatcher for five days to 27°C in a human humidity crib until around day 60, then they spent their time in open ice-cream containers at room temperature (approx 25°C).

Weaning went smoothly and within about five days they were eating entirely on their own, but because of their nature they continued

Dusky Lories with their fruit and play branches.


to want to be fed. It was almost impossible to change their food as all they wanted was to be out flying around the room or climbing on their owners. They possess the most endearing personality of any bird we have handreared to date.

The parents of these chicks went on to lay a second clutch of two eggs which were left with them. Both eggs subsequently hatched and were reared by the parents until early February '97 when, at 3-4 weeks old, they were taken for handrearing. This pair bred again during the '97 breeding season as did the second pair for the first time, with both pairs having bred in the '98 season.

The second pair, a yellow cock and a red hen produced both yellow and red colour phase chicks. The other three pairs are all of the red colour phase and all their young have been red phase, however we understand from overseas experience it is possible to breed red birds when both the parents are of the yellow colour phase.

It's been found possible to house all the young lories in one large flight aviary and has proven an ideal way to view them, see them socialise and keep them fit and healthy.

Conclusion

What can we say, Dusky Lories are a pleasure to keep, they are as hardy as a Rainbow Lorikeet when housed and fed well, have proven to be reliable breeders and keep their owners completely enthused with their unusually beautiful colours, inherent friendliness and clown-like antics. We believe, a must for every lory enthusiast. 



Dusky Lory pair at their nestbox.