



FEATURE ARTICLE...

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KEEPING Senegal Parrots

... at BIMBIMBI BIRDS

It was 25 or so years ago when I saw my first Senegal Parrots whilst on an aviary visit in country Victoria.

I was immediately captivated by their tidy compact appearance and that wicked almost raptor look in their eye.

Upon returning home I immediately began researching this species, which included any information I could find on housing, feeding and breeding in captivity. Senegal's were now on my list of species I wanted and I thought maybe one day I'd be lucky enough to own some.

As time went by I found that although we had Senegal's in Australia, they were not that common and only a handful if any were being bred each year. This obviously meant they were quite expensive and would be a species to dream about for a few more years.

Late in the 1980's there was talk that the ban on live importation of psittacines was going to be lifted and I was invited to be part of a syndicate to apply for this opportunity. This syndicate to be known as the "Judd Syndicate" (it was put together by the late David Judd) was subsequently accepted and we set about planning to legally import birds for the first time in over 40 years.

After much deliberation a list of species to import was put together (one of these being Senegal Parrots) and applications were submitted to the authorities. Only species that were already in Australia at the time were to be suggested and as Senegal's were here we arranged for our buyer in England to begin purchasing the stock to fill our requirements.

I had three pairs purchased and put into quarantine along with a number of other species to await shipment, but alas it didn't happen. In their wisdom the Australian authorities decided for whatever reasons that only the large macaws would be allowed and all the other species applied for would not be approved.

This was not a particularly good outcome for those in the syndicate, as a considerable amount of money had been outlaid to acquire these birds at inflated prices and now they had to be resold at deflated prices, plus there were all the associated quarantine, feed and broker fees lost as well.

I guess at this point I may have sat back and thought what may have been and simply looked at the video footage of our birds in quarantine in England every now and then to remind me.

BUT, I had decided Senegal's were to be in my collection and it was

now some 10 years or more since seeing those first birds in Victoria, so the numbers available should have improved a little. I purchased our first pair in the early 1990's then a second pair a couple years later and now have them reasonably well established in our aviaries and usually breed from them each year.

Origin & Appearance

Senegal Parrots (*Poicephalus senegalus*) occur in 3 subspecies in a narrow range extending quite a distance inland from the west coast of South Africa. All are similar in size and appearance, the major difference being the nominate race (*Poicephalus senegalus senegalus*) is yellow on the underside, whereas the others are orange. A comprehensive description of their distribution and appearance may be found in *Parrots of the World* by Joseph M. Forshaw.



The majority of Senegal's in Australian aviaries are of the nominate race, however there are a few of the orange coloured subspecies, which I would assume are the more common *Poicephalus senegalus mesotypus*. These are a striking looking bird and I saw my first birds of this type in an Adelaide Bird Dealers shop in the early 1990's.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH OUR COVER SPECIES



Housing

During the first few years our Senegal's were housed in conventional aviaries that measured 3 metres long by .9 metres wide and 2.4 metres high. The sides and backs were fully enclosed with only the front and half the roof covered in 25 by 12 millimetre weld mesh and access via a door at the rear. These worked quite well, however the birds were generally not happy each week

when we encroached on their space to attend to the weekly feed and water cleaning. This was even more of a problem when checking the nest box that was hung on an inside wall. Daily feeds were undertaken without entering the aviary.

Since completing our new breeding complex the Senegal's have been moved into there and have settled very well. Their aviaries are now

suspended and measure 2.4 metres by .9 metres and 1.2 metres high. The nest box is hung on the outside at the back and all feeding and water bowl cleaning is done from outside. I believe it has made a great deal of difference to the birds by not entering their territory one or two times a week.



*The same bird 6 months apart
(beginning of summer and end of summer).*



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(beginning of summer and end of summer).*

Feeding

Up until now we have continued to feed a dry seed mix consisting of 2 parts budgie diet, 2 parts canary seed, 2 parts white millet, 2 parts hulled oats, 2 parts grey sunflower, 1 part safflower (equates to small parrot or lovebird mix). This is provided weekly, so if they eat all the "lollies" in the first two days, there is none left for the rest of the week. I am however seriously looking at changing to a combination of seed and pellets with a view to cycling the food types according to the season.

Fresh water is of course available at all times, provided by a computerised watering system which also controls a sprinkler system and watering the gardens in front of the aviaries.

Each morning a fruit, vegetable and soaked seed mix is fed. Frozen peas

and corn kernels are thawed with hot water and fed together with diced apple, carrot, celery, capsicum and a soaked seed mix. The soaked seed consists of: 1 part pigeon mix, 1 part large parrot mix, 1 part lupins, 1 part whole maize, 1 part grey sunflower seed. The amount required is put into a container at least twice the



size of the amount to be soaked and boiling water is poured over the mix to the top of the container and left to stand overnight before rinsing thoroughly and feeding the next morning. After rinsing the seed, the frozen peas and corn kernels

(thawed) are added, then the diced apple, carrot, celery, and capsicum added and all mixed together. The quantity fed is adjusted according to how much can be consumed before the warmer part of the day. Corn on the cob is also fed, being cut into slices then quarters and fed with the above. Calcivet and Tracemin are sprayed over this food on alternate days every couple days.

Sprouted seed may also be fed and consists of the above soaked seed mix with the addition of mung beans. Silverbeet and seeding grasses are fed when available (not daily), usually every few days.

Senegal's are generally good eaters and readily consume most foods provided, however care should be taken to ensure they don't become overweight as this may have a detrimental affect on breeding results.



Senegal chicks are delightful little birds to hand rear and become very affectionate at an early age.

The same bird 6 months apart (beginning of summer and end of summer).

Breeding

Reproductive maturity is not attained until at least three to four years of age and we have not experienced a female laying before then. If and when the weather begins to improve in July is when the males begin to display and start preparing the nest box. They actually do more of the nest scratching and chewing than does the female.

We usually have eggs being laid mid to late August and into September, but this again depends on the weather and status of the pairs relationship. Some pairs appear very close while others aloof and keep at a distance. Our clutch sizes are usually 2 – 3 eggs with most producing two chicks, however others have recorded nest of 4 and 5, but I would say this is not normal.

The females tend to incubate quite well and the decision whether to allow them to sit right through or remove the eggs for artificial incubation depends on the circumstances at the time. We have incubated and reared chicks from the egg and we have allowed them to be parent hatched and fed for

the first few days before removing for hand rearing. By doing this you increase the probability of a second clutch being laid, however if left for parent rearing to fledging this is highly unlikely.

The nest box is made of 20 millimetre solid pine and measures roughly 200 mm square by 500 mm deep with an 80 mm entrance hole and a wire ladder down the side, not the front. A faceplate is attached on the inside of the back wall and with screws through the wall this is what holds the nest box on the outside.

A substrate of equal parts course red gum splinters ex a sawmill, pine shavings ex a cabinetmaker and course washed river sand ex the local concrete manufacturer, is used to a depth of 150 mm. Small blocks of pine are liquid nailed around the inside at the base to give the birds something to chew on while preparing the nest and during incubation.

Senegal chicks are delightful little birds to hand rear and become very affectionate at an early age. I believe they make very good pets, but we really need more

breeding in Australia to increase our numbers before we look at them for companion birds.

Conclusions

Senegal Parrots are great aviary subjects, very suited to housing in suburbia, as they are not at all noisy and don't require large aviaries or if you're lucky enough to live on acreage, that's even better as they will welcome the room to move.

They are not difficult to cater for and don't require specialist housing or food, plus "that wicked look" you get nine times out of ten, makes them just that little bit more interesting. **PSOA**

