

Pink (Major Mitchell) Cockatoo

FAMILY: *Cacatuidae*

GENUS: *Cacatua*

SPECIES: *leadbeateri*

Description:

Medium sized pink cockatoo with distinct yellow and red bands in crest which is raised in alarm or display. Very slight sexual dimorphism. Females have a (light) reddish-brown iris with males a (dark) brown to black iris. Females also tend to have a wider yellow band in the crest.

Juveniles can be difficult to sex. However, fledgeling males are usually brighter than females - particularly on the chest. Eye colour does not become distinguishable until the birds are about 9 months of age or more.

Length: 320-360mm.

Distribution:

Across the arid interior of mainland Australia. Common and local in occurrence.

Habitat:

Desert scrub, open woodland (mallee, Mulga and callitris) and adjacent agricultural land.

Diet:

Seeds, grains, fruits, tubers and some insects.

Breeding:

July-January.

Usual nesting site is a large hollow limb - often bordering water courses - ranging in height from 3 to 20m. Both sexes involved in nest preparation. Nest material may be chewed wood and bark. Both sexes incubate the eggs and care for the young.

In captivity hollow eucalypt logs are best suited for breeding. The log should be approximately 30-40 cm in internal diameter and about 1m in length. Vertical or inclined logs are acceptable. The preferred nesting material is a mixture of wood shavings and dirt or peat moss.

Courtship Display

Like so many cockatoos, Male Major Mitchells approach females with the body and crest erect. He bobs and flicks his head from side to side excitedly and utters his normal call (also excitedly). Females normally respond to this by ruffling her crest and bobbing the head.

Major Mitchells form strong pair bonds. Birds in a pair mostly enjoy each other's company and sit close together. Mutual preening is practised all year round.

Sexual Maturity

Major Mitchells usually become sexually mature at about 3-4 years of age, although younger birds (2yrs) have been known to breed.

Clutch:

1-3 white oval eggs. Incubation period: 26days. Fledging usually occurs at 56 days.

Mutations and Hybrids:

Hybrids have been recorded with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Little (short-billed) Corella , Galah and the Great White Cockatoo. There are no records for mutations however.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird may be housed in such a cage provided it measures at least 800mm x 600mm x 1200mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage. However, these birds always fare better (and look more spectacular) in larger aviaries. These should be somewhere in the vicinity of 2m wide x 2m high x 5 or 6m long so as to provide amply flight space and to accommodate nesting logs etc.

The wire should be of a heavy duty grade, as cockatoos easily chew holes in lighter grade wire. Similarly, the frame should be constructed of steel to avoid the birds chewing the structure away.

Species Specific Problems

Intestinal worms are a common problem in species which spend considerable time on the ground. Similarly, fungal infections may become a problem. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene.

Another problem encountered in this species is Psittacine beak and feather disease. This is an incurable disease which is transmitted through faeces. Essentially, it results in poor feather growth and feathers which don't replace themselves when they fall out. Similarly, the beak is also affected and becomes fragile and does not repair itself. The bills of birds with this condition have a deep black, glossy appearance rather than the normal chalky grey colour.

It is advisable to test birds suspected to have this condition. The best course of action for affected birds is to destroy them as there is no cure. Infected birds will infect their offspring simply by feeding them as there is always chances of contact with faeces in the nest and during feeding of the young.

Feather plucking is also a common problem. This has a range of causes and can usually be rectified (see our articles in the "Regular Features" section of our website).