

Rainbow Lorikeet

Trichoglossus haematodus

What do they look like?

Rainbow Lorikeets are a common colourful sight in Sydney parks and gardens. They are approximately 30 cm in length and weigh around 155 grams. The males and females are similar but the female is smaller and has a shorter bill. Immature birds have duller plumage than adults and also have a shorter bill, body and wing span.



Where do they live?



Rainbow Lorikeets are found in northern and eastern Australia in forests, woodlands, heath, and rural and urban areas.

What do they eat?

Rainbow Lorikeets feed throughout the day and 70% of their time is spent feeding in order to satisfy their daily requirements.

Lorikeets travel in small, swift flocks that attract attention with their piercing calls. The birds locate the blossom by sight and by calls of other birds already feeding. Rainbow Lorikeets feed mostly on nectar and pollen from a variety of plants, often gathering in large noisy groups in blossom-bearing trees. They also feed of fruits, berries, seeds and occasionally insects (beetles, wasps, thrips, ants, weevils) and larvae (fly maggots, weevil larvae, moth larvae).

The tip of lorikeet's tongue holds a brush-like appendage, enabling the bird to feed on pollen, nectar and fruits. Rainbow Lorikeets extract nectar with their brush-tipped tongue after first crushing the flowers with their bill; tiny hair-like projections (papillae) on the end of the tongue are extended while feeding to soak up nectar and gather pollen from blossoms.



Rainbow Lorikeets will take food offered by humans including fruit and can become quite tame. This type of feeding often results in nutritional problems and is not advisable.

Breeding and Lifecycle

Most small parrots' breed between August and January – the time of year when most food is available and usually nest in tree hollows.

The Rainbow Lorikeet is thought to mate for life. Pairs preen and nibble each other during rest periods.

The dangers of feeding lorikeets

Many people have taken to encouraging lorikeets into their gardens by giving them a variety of alluring foods. These foods are usually based on sugar, honey or jam, which ensure regular visits to the garden by these colourful birds. However, it is this very act of 'kindness' that can cause the death of lorikeets at an unnaturally early age.

After an outbreak of lorikeets dying in large numbers, autopsies were carried out by NSW agriculture. Together with other investigations, these autopsies established that the lorikeets were dying from a disease called necrotizing enteritis, and a bacteria, clostridia, was isolated as the organism responsible.

Necrotizing enteritis is associated with poor hygiene and an inadequate diet, and it was found that the disease is not normally associated with lorikeets living a natural way of life. The scientists were able to directly relate the lorikeets' deaths to inadequate artificial diets, and to the unsanitary condition of trays and other containers from which they were being fed.

How you can prevent lorikeet deaths

The best solution to this problem is to stop feeding the birds' altogether. The only feeding method recommended by the NPWS is to plant a variety of flowering native shrubs, such as grevilleas, callistemon (bottlebrushes) and banksias, around your garden. These plants not only look good; they also provide safe, healthy food for blossom-feeding birds such as lorikeets.

