

## THE LOCATION OF PALE GREEN FEATHERS ON THE WING OF MALE KING PARROTS *Alisterus scapularis*

W. T. COOPER<sup>1</sup> and C. B. FRITH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>P.O. Box 314, Malanda, North Queensland 4885    <sup>2</sup>P.O. Box 581, Malanda, North Queensland 4885

Received 24 September 1993

The King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis* lives in rainforests and denser woodlands of the eastern coastal zone of continental Australia and is a well known species commonly kept by aviculturalists worldwide. Adult males are bright scarlet-red about the head and on the underparts, save a blackish undertail, contrasting with a dark blue nape collar and rump, blue-green upper tail and rich dark green back and wings. The latter are relieved by a conspicuously contrasting line of 'milky' bright pale-green feathers. This obvious wing marking of paler feathers brought about the scientific specific name of the species, *scapularis*, which alludes to the pale 'shoulder' marking. Unfortunately the specific latin name appears to have long caused an erroneous assumption by and considerable confusion to authors, resulting in an error being often repeated in both standard and popular ornithological literature.

Whilst we see no point in an exhaustive literature review of the topic herein we do list the following selected references and quote the

authors' words used to describe exactly where the pale wing feathers of male King Parrots are thought to occur:

Gould	1865	along the scapularies
Slater	1970	scapulars
Lendon	1973	inner series of upper wing-coverts
Macdonald	1973	scapulars
Schodde and Tidemann	1988	stripe on wing coverts
Forshaw	1989	scapulars
Forshaw	1991	scapulars
Crome and Sheilds	1992	innermost secondary coverts

Figure 1 shows the actual typical location of the pale upper wing feathers on male King Parrots. It can be seen that these in fact form a line involving the innermost wing feathers of the inner lesser coverts, two or three median (of middle) coverts and the outer vanes of the innermost two secondary (or greater) coverts (Lowe 1989). Thus, of the above quoted descriptions only that of Lendon (1973) and of Schodde and Tidemann (1988) could be described as truly accurate and that of the latter authors only because of its inherent vagueness.

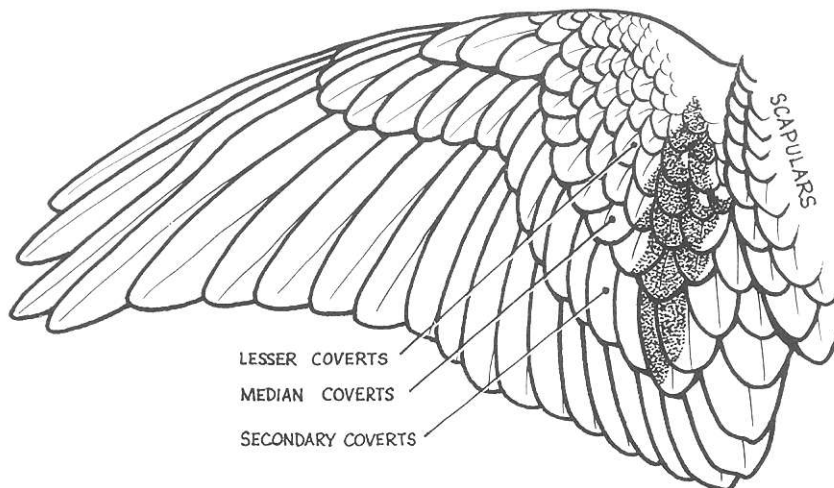


Figure 1. Drawing of upper left wing of an adult male King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis* showing the location of the various coverts, the scapulars and the pale green marking (stippled).

Contrary to the implication of its specific name *scapularis*, the pale upper wing feathers of the male King Parrot do not involve the scapulars at all (Fig. 1).

### REFERENCES

- Crome, F. and Shields, J. (1992). 'Parrots and Pigeons of Australia'. (Angus and Robertson: Sydney.)  
 Forshaw, J. M. (1989). 'Parrots of the World', 3rd revised ed. (Lansdowne: Sydney.)  
 Forshaw, J. M. (1991). 'Australian Parrots', 2nd revised ed. (Ure Smith: Sydney.)  
 Gould, J. (1865). 'Handbook to the Birds of Australia'. (The author: London.)  
 Lendon, A. H. (1973). 'Australian Parrots in Field and Aviary'. (Angus and Robertson: Sydney.)  
 Lowe, K. W. (1989). 'The Australian Bird Bander's Manual'. (ABBBS/ANPWS: Canberra.)  
 Macdonald, J. D. (1973). 'Birds of Australia'. (Witherby: London.)  
 Schodde R. and Tidemann, S. C. (1988). 'Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds'. (Reader's Digest: Sydney.)  
 Slater, P. (1970). 'A Field Guide to Australian Birds', vol. 1. (Rigby: Adelaide.)

### NESTING OF THE EASTERN ROSELLA *Platycercus eximius*

At Moonee near Coffs Harbour, New South Wales small numbers of Eastern Rosellas occur throughout the year. During the winter of 1985, I erected two vertical nest logs in our property as nesting hollows appeared to be scarce. However, it was not until September 1987 that a male Eastern Rosella was seen investigating one of the hollows.

Since then, the hollow has been used by the birds each breeding season with five young being raised in 1987 and 1988, four in 1989 and six in 1990. A second pair of birds caused some disturbance in 1989, attempting to investigate the hollow while the other pair were feeding young. There were a number of confrontations but the pair in occupation managed to drive off the other pair each time. The second pair eventually lost interest in the site.

Other birding interests caused my absence from Moonee for about a month, co-inciding with the breeding season of the rosellas, except in 1990. In each of the other years I had returned before the young fledged and each brood was banded.

In 1987, I kept some notes on the breeding activity and more detailed notes in 1990. These follow:

#### *Breeding Season 1987*

- 1.9.87 — Male seen investigating hollow.  
 2.9.87 — Both birds seen at hollow.  
 3.9.87 — Male seen on top, female at entrance.  
 4.9.87–19.9.87 — One or both birds seen at nesting hollow on most days but no eggs were present.  
 20.9.87–20.10.87 — Absent from Moonee.  
 20.10.87 — Small young about two days old.  
 5.11.87 — Five nestlings banded.  
 17.11.87 — Nestlings almost ready to fly.  
 19.11.87 — Nest empty.

#### *Breeding Season 1990 (Eastern Daylight times)*

- 1.9.90–14.9.90 — One or both birds seen at hollow most days; no eggs.  
 15.9.90 — Male seen on top of log about 1200 h, sitting quietly. At 1230 h he had departed and on checking, nest contained one egg.  
 16.9.90 — Nest checked about 1230 h — one egg.  
 17.9.90 — Male on top of log about 1200 h. Female presumed to be laying, nest checked at 1245 h — two eggs.

- 18.9.90 — Nest checked about 1300 h — two eggs.  
 19.9.90 — Nest checked about 1300 h — two eggs.  
 20.9.90 — Male on top at 1200 h. Nest checked about 1245 h (male not present) — three eggs.  
 21.9.90 — Male on top about 1200 h; nest checked about 1245 h after he (or they) had left — four eggs.  
 22.9.90 — Bird/s not seen at nest; nest checked about 1245 h — four eggs (cold).  
 23.9.90 — Female brooding when nest inspected at 0900 h — did not disturb.  
 12.10.90 — Nest inspected about 1000 h; female brooding — did not disturb.  
 13.10.90 — Female seen leaving the nest about 0900 h. Nest checked — two eggs and two chicks\*.  
 14.10.90 — Female seen leaving nest about 1530 h; nest checked — four chicks\*.  
 20.10.90–31.10.90 — Nest checked by removing one or two chicks to see stage of progress.  
 5.11.90 — Banded six chicks!  
 14.11.90 — Young still in nest.  
 15.11.90 — Left Moonee; no further observations.

**Comments:** To avoid disturbing the birds, only essential checks were made. Apparently the fifth and sixth eggs were laid after the female commenced brooding.

The 1990 season was particularly dry for some months before and during the nesting period, and it was presumed, that when the female commenced brooding, that four eggs formed the clutch.

No artificial feeding occurred during the period. However, earlier in the year, neighbours moved on to a 10 acre timbered property opposite, with a horse and a donkey which were being hand fed. This may have provided some supplementary food for the birds.

The nestlings were banded on 5 November 1987, 2 November 1988, 6 November 1989 and 5 November 1990 — at about the same age of development — roughly three weeks after hatching.

S. G. LANE

Lot 6 Fairview Road, Moonee via Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450.

*Received 11 February 1991*

\*The nest was checked by climbing an extension ladder, holding on with one hand and reaching, somewhat precariously, into the nest with the other. Neither eggs nor chicks were removed from the nest during these checks and determination was by feel only. Hence the mistake in the contents on 13 and 14 October 1990.